

Publication	Financial Times
Date	9 th March 2010
Circulation	480,000



Business diary

Dino Lalvani

Binatone, the global consumer electronics company, was set up by its current chief executive's father and uncle in 1958 after they moved to London from India. Mr Lalvani is based in Hong Kong.



I wake up in my house in Knightsbridge, but it could equally well be one of many places round the world. I am constantly away from my permanent home in Hong Kong, where my father moved the headquarters from London in 1999.

I have a flat in Paris for business trips and I'm buying a house in New Delhi as a base for visiting our software development hub in Bangalore.

There is nowhere I feel like a foreigner. I was born and educated in the UK, went to university in the US and now live in south-east Asia.

I get in the car for a day of seeing friends, meetings, liaising with the rest of the business and visiting stores. Between these, I follow up meetings I had last week with suppliers in Hong Kong by e-mail or phone. I use three BlackBerrys, one US, one HK and one UK. With offices round the world there is always one open, so my working day never really ends. I keep close tabs on sales trends, inventory and financial data wherever I am.

I like to speak directly to employees, suppliers and customers. This can be challenging with the time differences, but technology simplifies life a bit.

As I'm getting in the car, my assistant hands over travel details for my upcoming visit to my father at his home in Phuket en route to Hong Kong. We are the best of friends and he advises me on business matters whenever I need it.

I usually prefer to drive myself between meetings and store visits. I get the best ideas while driving and listening to music.

Stop off in Oxford Street to visit stores as a "mystery shopper" to see how our products are displayed and how consumers react. I ask a member of staff to explain the pros and cons of the product ranges. I do this wherever I am to get an

authentic view of consumer behaviour and an understanding of what people in different cultures want and how to adjust products accordingly.

Back in the car, I set up meetings for my next visit to the US using my hands-free headset. After opening our first sales office there in 2008, we became an official global distribution partner for Motorola, partly through approaching at the right time and with the right proposition.

Before arriving in London, I flew to New York from New Delhi. India is quickly becoming our fastest-growing operation. In Bangalore, I discussed product developments in English with the engineers. Both my parents are of Indian origin, although my mother grew up in the US, so I consider myself Indian although I speak none of the country's languages.

I also pause to plan my next visit to our factories in southern China. We now allow retailers to buy products direct from China so that we can reduce the costs in our supply chain. This development may mean moving production to China or moving our headquarters to China and changing our business models.

The UK still feels like our "home market" to me because that is where we started, but a lot has changed. The US is now our biggest market and Germany and Russia have nearly caught up. Last week, I was in Hanover for CeBIT, the digital industry trade show, to talk about the upcoming Binatone iHome, which uses Google's Android technology.

I should be arriving at my father's place in Thailand in a few days after a quick stopover in Paris to see friends - I'll make sure I fit in a "mystery visit" or two to stores as well.

As told to Jonathan Moules