

OnLine Case 9.4 Pilgrim Jewellery

Pilgrim costume jewellery is widely available but the company has emerged from humble beginnings in Denmark. It is not the story of an entrepreneur with a vision; nor is there clear evidence of detailed planning.

Thomas Adamsen described himself as a 'hippy figure' when he was a young man, and someone with very little direction in life. His business began by chance. Thomas was walking through the marketplace in Aarhus, where he lived, when a stallholder asked him if he would mind watching his stall whilst he went off to do a couple of errands. The stallholder was selling low price jewellery. Adamsen turned out to be a natural salesman and decided on the spot this was something he would like to try for himself. Joined by his girlfriend, Anne, later his wife, he started buying products from other traders and elsewhere and selling them on the market. He was very quick to realise what would sell, and at what price, and set out to acquire the appropriate products to ensure a rapid and profitable turnover.

His brother (an accountant) and his sister (a designer) joined his venture and allowed him to focus on selling. He decided to source his own jewellery, rather than buy from others, and set off to travel around India and the Far East to find people who would manufacture gold jewellery for him. Having started with the trading name of Yin and Yan – only to find this was already registered – he and Anne settled for Pilgrim, which they thought was symbolic of exotic voyages.

The business was successful and Thomas soon had to move from the basement of the family home and find proper premises. There are now well over 200 employees. All the design work is carried out in Denmark, but products are sourced globally. The company sells extensively on line, but its products are available through High Street stores in the UK, including Debenhams, and many other countries in Europe. The range includes necklaces, bracelets, rings and earrings and they are no longer the 'cheap' costume jewellery that was in evidence at the start. Distinctive, and targeted at fashion-conscious buyers, the products feature, amongst other things, Austrian crystal and freshwater pearls. Everything is hand-made. The basic metal is tin or zinc alloy coated with either copper or palladium and then gilded with 22ct gold or sterling silver. The actress Liv Tyler has been used for some of the company advertising.

Perhaps in keeping with his roots, Thomas Adamsen has started the Pilgrim Foundation to ensure the company 'gives back more than it receives'.