It’s been 10 years since BBH launched the “Keep Walking” Johnnie Walker campaign for Diageo. Sales are overflowing. Johnnie Walker ranked highest in volume and sales in the whiskey/scotch category and 3rd in overall spirit sales. (source)

How are they doing it? Subpar advertisements for alcohol seem to saturate the market, how does Johnnie Walker “think differently?”

**The Brand**

Originally a grocery store in Ayrshire, Scotland, Johnnie Walker grew to be the number 1 distributor of blended Scotch Whisky. Always a family business with big dreams, BBH channeled that in their campaign.

Sex sells. Expensive toys sell. Drama sells. Even stronger is the desire to be better; to overcome obstacles and succeed; to reach for the stars and never quit – that sold 18 million 9l cases in 2013 or 1.5 billion dollars.

**Keep Walking Campaign**

Born in 1820, after an illustrator drew a simple caricature, the underlying aspirational theme went on hiatus until Bartle Bogle and Hegarty resurrected it in 2000.

[insert Striding man image and “born 1820…” quote]

BBH took this basic concept and created an award winning, sales producing campaign. Awards won include:

- The Grand Prix, a Gold Award and a special prize of Best International Multimarket (for market growth in Brazil, Lebanon and China.)
- Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity
- British Arrows Agency of the Year, Creative Reviews Agency of the Year, The Webby’s Agency of the Year
- CLIO Awards
- Grand Prix de la Publicité Presse Magazine
- Advertising Creative Circle Awards

You get the idea.

“The "Keep Walking" campaign has run in more than 120 markets over eight years, with more than 50 TV adverts and more than 150 print ads, with Johnnie Walker racking up incremental sales of $2.21bn (£1.4bn) over the period.” – the Guardian

**Image**

Males are JW’s main target demographic. Most women do not drink Whisky. A man surrounded by women, wealth, or adventure has, traditionally, been the norm for alcohol brands.
Johnnie Walker is the same, but different. The focus on self-improvement and aspiration gives room for creativity.

This Ad took 40 shots to take a 6 minute video of non-stop content. Actor Robert Carlyle killed it. Somebody get this man a Johnnie Walker.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnSlp76CvUI

Ads with the Keep Walking theme can be found online.

Walk With Giants

Continuing with the aspirational theme of progress, BBH developed International TV spots as part of the Walk With Giants Campaign. They feature videos from famous actors, Paralympic athletes, Architects, Film makers, and people that have pursued big dreams and not given up.

Learn more from great men from all around the world at the Walk With Giants campaign page.

International Reach of Johnnie Walker

China

JW is focusing heavily on Chinese markets; the large population and increase in standard of living has created immense opportunity for premium spirits.

For an in-depth explanation of the strategic thinking behind the JW China campaign, click here.

In summary: the aspirational brand has been, in China, merged with the idea of group progress and collective support—a theme common in a collective culture. This was a challenge because the Johnnie Walker brand- in Western culture- is commonly associated with one man, alone, and thinking deeply about success and growth. In China that image brings forth loneliness and lack of group support- which means less likelihood of survival; an uncomfortable idea, especially in China where most still live on the verge of poverty.

The medium: TV and the Web. The result: over 7 million unique visitors to the website.

Brazil

Brazil is currently Johnnie Walker’s fastest growing market- with 30 % annual increase in sales volume. Even the Facebook page is already at 1.7 Million. Total population of Brazil? 196.7 Million. There’s room to grow and JW is growing in Brazil by tying into National Pride and the progress of a sleeping giant.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=RTtcNP7lmUo
Brazil, Spain, Thailand, Bulgaria, Thailand, Vietnam, and Lebanon

Diageo and their advertisers- which include BBH, Independents United, Edelman, and AKQA - put together a campaign based on the Johnnie Walker perpetually permeating concept of progress.

The Keep Walking project is there to connect communities and make a positive impact on society. It’s done through three groundbreaking initiatives in technology, business, and the arts. The people of each place vote on which initiative they went installed in their country:

1. Using Pavegen’s paving slabs that convert kinetic energy into reusable energy. Pavegen received over 40 million votes asking for this renewable energy source to be installed in the capitals of Bulgaria, Spain, Greece, and many others. Click to learn more about the Keep Walking / Pavegen initiative (in Spanish.)

2. In markets where Ze Frank earns the most steps (votes), the innovative artist will unveil a “pop-up” public artwork that shows the local communities vision of progress for their country or city.

3. Hub Culture is a pop-up place where people can develop business ideas and trade virtual currency; which allows access to member only videos, articles, one-on-one advice sessions with entrepreneurs, and other resources.

The concepts with the most steps / votes were installed in spring of 2012.

Instagram and Facebook

In September of 2012, Johnnie Walker decided to take a big gulp of the Instagram medium, and they came out with a splash.

First, Edelman -the Advertising Company behind the idea- decided to create a cover photo that constantly updated with pictures from Johnnie Walker’s Instagram account. Next, key Instagrammers were contacted and given full freedom to post what they would like through the account (and in connection with their already existing portals.)

The players:

- @ChrisOzer – documented his trip to the distillery in Scotland, to the tune of over 300,000 followers.
- @philgonzalez – granted full access to a formula 1 race sponsored by JW, again to over 300,000 of his own followers.
- @awnoon – Graphic Designer in Asia, that logged some of JW’s journey into the Asian market. He now has over 300,000 followers.

Not only did Johnnie Walker’s advertisers leverage Facebook and Instagram for more followers; exposure; and brand engagement, they even leveraged close to 1,000,000 already existing followers of top Instagrammers.

Whatever they are drinking, I’ll take 2 please.

What Is Next for Johnnie Walker?
For one, the Green Label is getting chopped off the whisky block; it’s always been the lowest seller and Johnnie Walker is making changes in the middle of the line products - the black and red labels and the blue label will remain.

[Insert simple images of continuing whiskys here, source]

You can expect a lot of initiatives to move into emerging markets, on the higher-end side of the market.

**Where Flavour is King**

In September of 2012, a new campaign by the UK Agency, LOVE, launched in Africa, Australia, Brazil, Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, and in the global travel sector. European markets will roll out in 2013.

The idea behind it is that television and print spots will showcase the details in the various Johnnie Walker blends by creating “unique images” that highlight flavors in each blend.

“‘The new campaign, ‘Where Flavour Is King’, will open consumers’ eyes to the depth and variety of flavour that exists across the Johnnie Walker whisky taste spectrum.”- Source

- Reb Label – spices and fruit
- Black Lael- rich fruits and vanilla, with smoke finish
- Gold Label Reserve – sweet vanilla, honey, earthy smoke, wood spice
- Platinum 18 Year Old – creamy vanilla, almonds, orange and notes of caramel
- Blue Label – smooth, strong spicy entry, honey, rounded by oak

http://vimeo.com/49364247 [video of Flavor is King displays]

**Conclusion**

Of course, it couldn’t possibly have anything to do with the marketing, but I could for a Johnnie Walker right now.