

Audio Clips: Aer Rianta International North America talks recovery plan

By **Jas Ryat** on June, 3 2020 | Retailers



Jackie McDonagh, ARI General Manager North America discusses triumphs, both personal and professional

As travel retail tries to navigate the continuously morphing landscape during COVID-19, Jackie McDonagh, ARI General Manager North America, sheds lights on how ARI's recovery plan has transitioned to full gear. At the time of speaking with McDonagh, ARI North American locations are closed, as they fall under the non-essential business designation. The 320-person team stays united via Zoom calls to connect both professionally and personally.

"Personally it's been a roller coaster period," said McDonagh. "It's been very different. We've had to adapt to our thinking so drastically because what may work one day doesn't always work the next day." She goes on to stress the key take away from this lockdown should be the power of human connection.

She continues, "The lockdown measures have been extended, although we are beginning to see progress and ease in restriction. Our key focus has been keeping our people safe for return to work and keeping our passengers safe so we can welcome them back to business."

Implementing safety measures

McDonagh's team is working closely with all five North American locations to discuss and implement safety measures to ensure a safe environment for both staff and travelers. Most recently, Air Canada has announced that it will start vacation bookings as of June 2020.

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McDonagh explains the safety precautions ARI North America is taking to ensure travelers and staff feel safe at all locations

At the moment, the main concern is to enforce social distancing and the sanitizing of fixtures and stock while deploying staff in a safe manner to work in store locations.

"We also have excellent relationships with our partners, and that is very important at times like this. 1

We are keeping close connections with our airports to ensure a safe and comfortable environment for our customers and staff to return,” states McDonagh.

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The retailer is looking for opportunities to "innovate" and "reinvent"



ARI North America team recently recognized as 2019 Americas Travel Retailer of the Year

Fuelled by positive momentum

The ARI North America team recently won Americas Travel Retailer of the Year at the DFNI Awards. It came as a definite boost when the team needed it the most.

“This has been an absolute honor to win this accolade. The team here in Canada is truly exceptional and dedicated to making the customer journey. [We] received a major boost and it serves as a reminder to us to continue to always be the best we can be.”

She goes on to explain that the team collectively has a lot of natural momentum, with the ability to adapt to different challenges with a laser focus on recovery time. Says McDonagh: “That is the key planning we are doing at the moment. We are focusing on reassuring our customers, making it a safe place to shop and ensuring safety measures are in place.”

ARI North America is planning for a new website launch in July. This website will serve to enhance customers’ experience, allowing them to bypass the line and save time at the airports and offering shoppers an additional channel to purchase duty free items. The site will work in conjunction with

duty free shops, but is not meant to replace the traditional in-store experience.

“We have to extend some incredible offers across all categories to welcome our passengers back to duty free shopping; we do anticipate pronounced change with passengers shopping online pre-travel. So that’s where our website will give our customer the opportunity to do to shop and save time,” said McDonagh.

Road to recovery

Restrictions are slowly being lifted and recovery will be uneven. With phased introductions, ARI North America’s recovery plan will reflect this. McDonagh stresses the importance of staying flexible.

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ARI North America is in the process to "reassure customers that it is safe to fly and safe to get customers back in the air," explains McDonagh

McDonagh acknowledges the customer journey and how it will change in regards to tastings and testings. Although the team had voluntarily removed all skin and beauty testers prior to the lockdown, they did continue to offer spray testers at the ARI North American locations. Brand partners have been very responsive and both partners are looking to implement changes to adhere to the new guidelines.

“There will be a change or shift in how people shop and test. Tasting is a great experiential way in an airport to discover what one may not have bought before, for themselves or for gifting,” explained McDonagh.

McDonagh and her team are looking at every avenue to ensure they are ready to provide shoppers with a safe and fulfilling duty free experience. Adapting to the new normal only further underscores the team’s commitment to be prepared when restrictions are lifted.