

Shopping China sees great sales, eyes post-pandemic times



Shopping China CEO Felipe Cogorno says a surprisingly successful reopening has the company preparing for post-pandemic times

Amidst the difficult news arriving from duty free operators around the world there are few exceptions, but Shopping China in Paraguay is one of them. After closing its stores from March to October of 2020, management has been pleasantly surprised by the sales results upon reopening, even in stores on the Brazil border. “We expected that sales would grow gradually,” CEO Felipe Cogorno tells *Americas Duty Free*, adding that they assumed it would be a fairly lengthy process as customers began to gradually feel safe. “We have been surprised to find that we have received more customers than we expected. Now the challenge is to meet their expectations in the post-pandemic era.” He states the company had very good sales at Christmas, New Years and Three Kings’ Day.

Loyal customers

Helping create this positive outcome, Shopping China’s customers are loyal, says Cogorno. Upon reopening, the numbers of customers crossing the doors were virtually the same as before the pandemic hit. Managing these numbers requires effort on the part of the retailer and retail staff to ensure safety. “As a responsible company we apply all the necessary health protocols for a safe visit to the shopping center,” says Cogorno. “We constantly train our collaborators so they can offer complete care. We have seen opportunities to improve in all aspects during this pandemic, and we are working on them.”

All Shopping China stores are open and following strict sanitary protocols. “This gives security to our clients and collaborators,” says Cogorno. “We firmly believe that we must continue working, since many people depend on the business group to bring daily sustenance to their homes.”

The best use of the shutdown

During the shutdown from March to October of 2020, the Shopping China board of directors decided to carry out a restructuring in terms of the company's mechanics, says Cogorno. “This included setting commercial objectives, solving issues involving imports and supplying our warehouse to be filled in due course with stock for our customers. Since 1933 Shopping China has not stopped in terms of growth and diversity, adapting to the needs of customers and also to the needs of the market,” he adds. The shutdown last year allowed the operator’s senior management the time to organize internally.

The company also used this quiet period to grow in its technology, allowing it to officially launch its ecommerce platform. “This allows us to reach the entire Paraguayan territory,” says Cogorno. “From the new ecommerce platform we offer exclusive benefits and partnerships with credit cards in addition to shipping insurance. We currently offer more than 20,000 products from premium brands.”

Making up for lost time

Given the year that 2020 was, Shopping China did not have enough in-store time to implement several ideas and promotions that had been planned. Cogorno says they will definitely be carried out this year. “We believe that this new year will be much more flexible in terms of events and activations,” he says. “We intend to surprise our customers with exclusive benefits that you will find only in our stores.”

Already the retailer has had a more positive few months than many, and Cogorno says he is “quite optimistic” about the future market. “Taking into account that we are already prepared with and following the health protocols, and then we will also have the vaccine to help, we anticipate a significant increase in visitors from more remote cities who have not come to the borders until now. 2

Vaccinations against COVID-19 have already begun in Brazil.” This is a point in favor of border trade, notes Cogorno, adding that it will have a positive impact on the flow of Brazilian visitors.

The best service and variety

Now that protocols are underway and traffic is good, speaking with Cogorno feels like normal times are back again, with the focus strongly on business as opposed to dealing with the pandemic. He says, “Our purpose has always been to provide a good service and a good variety to customers. We are going to focus on having everything they are looking for at the best price and with the security they need. And then we will continue to enhance our ecommerce, taking into account that it is a safe platform to buy products of high quality. In addition, we will continue adding other brands in the stores and thus cover the needs of all our clientele.”