

CircleSquare asks travel retail to urgently adopt extended journey approach in “defining moment” for the channel

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When it comes to learning about how brands engage with their customers, Stéphane Zermatten, Managing Partner of CircleSquare, says the travel retail industry should look to the local markets

Describing today’s global climate as a “defining moment” for the channel, CircleSquare, the leading experiential marketing, brand activation and consumer engagement specialist, has called on the travel retail industry to challenge the status quo of customer engagement & consider a new extended customer journey approach.

The agency says that the COVID-19 crisis is accelerating a digital transformation that travel retail was “bound to go through” to stay relevant. Considering predictions, with pax numbers likely to be depressed for some time (according to the International Air Transport Association until 2023), the company notes this means that the relative numbers of a small customer base are becomingly increasingly important and a new approach is urgently needed.

“We can’t rely on the airport’s natural traffic anymore; we need to think differently. We need to come up with a new customer engagement model that allows us to increase footfall, dwell time and

engagement with our customers – a model that even takes the conversation away from the prices,” explains Stéphane Zermatten, Managing Partner, CircleSquare.

With offices in London, Hong Kong, Singapore, Shanghai, Dubai and Taipei, the agency is known as a pioneer in experiential marketing. Ten years ago, when CircleSquare introduced Hendrick’s Gin in the channel, it broke the mould in travel retail.

Zermatten believes that the industry can learn from local markets about how brands engage with their customers and follow that lead. “There is no more online and offline engagement, but a complete channel agnosticism. Customers expect to be engaged with a consistent and relevant message delivered seamlessly across all touch-points of their journey.

Obviously for travel retail this implies a collaboration between all stakeholders, and I’m glad to see these discussions are getting traction in the industry. Brands need to consider collaborating with their local markets counterparts in order to succeed in communicating seamlessly along our customer’s entire journey,” he adds.

He cites the example of the work CircleSquare completed last summer with Luxottica. The team targeted consumers across social media channels with personalized messages before their trip, which increased awareness of the campaign and created footfall to the physical activation at Hamburg Airport. The result: a single campaign across digital media and physical retail space.

Zermatten says that the new approach should go even further – to include advocacy and repeat purchase. It’s important that shoppers take a small piece of their in-store experience with them to share online or pass along to their family and friends.

Elaborating on this theme, he points out that physical retail isn’t completely dead. “Touching, smelling and physically experiencing products will come back in time, but the role of the shops needs to change. It has to be defined by the experiences that cannot be delivered on a mobile phone. It has to become less transactional and more experiential.”

From booking to destination, those in the industry need to examine the entire travel journey of the customer, challenge ways of working together and deliver a seamless shopping experience that spans across digital and physical touchpoints.