

With the start of reopening and recovery, Happy Socks is all smiles

For those committed to the travel retail channel, Buddenbohm believes that it's not a matter of if, but when, the industry will get back on track and return to the level of 2019

After having been closed for a couple of months, Happy Socks (and its headquarters) is in the process of reopening, with members of the team gradually heading back to the office. According to the company's Global Travel Retail Manager, Björn Buddenbohm, more and more employees are returning to their desks every week. Although COVID-19 has significantly impacted its global business, Happy Socks has been fortunate to experience an increase in e-commerce sales. The boost in online activity has contributed to almost half of its global business and compensated for closings within the retail, wholesale and travel retail market. With the reopening of doors and restocking of shelves, the company's subsidiaries in the USA, Sweden and Germany are getting back on track.

Despite the fact that Sweden took a "looser" approach to responding to the pandemic in comparison to other European countries, Happy Socks was quick to respond by prioritizing the health and safety of its employees and closing its office. On a weekly basis, the team has continued to receive an update from management regarding the current status of operation and an up-to-date plan for the coming weeks. Next on the calendar: summer break, which notably the people of Sweden "take quite seriously." After soaking up the sun, depending on the day-to-day cases, measures and guidelines, Buddenbohm expects the Stockholm-based office to fully reopen.



Happy Socks®

Est. 2008 Sweden

Growing relationships

Buddenbohm, who joined the company two years ago and “started from scratch,” says the company is still in the developing stage. While Happy Socks is listed in major retailers across the globe, there is still room for growth. With the channel at a standstill, the opportunity to expand, promote and build relationships by attending events and exhibitions has been eliminated. As all of the major retailers are busy trying to survive, in-person meetings have become a thing of the past – for the time being.

Describing in-person interaction as the essence of the travel retail business, Buddenbohm notes most members of the travel retail family have been involved with the industry for 30+ years, and formed lasting relationships because of this aspect of the business. Expanding audience reach and engagement is difficult when forced to rely on e-mail and phone, especially without those same long-term relationships.



HAPPY SOCKS Promotion Munich Airport Terminal 2
10th October 2019 – 9th January 2020

Exclusive collaborations

With the tagline Always Walk with Pride, Happy Socks has collaborated with The Phluid Project, a gender-free brand dedicated to empowering individuals to be themselves, to create a colorful limited-edition for Pride 2020. Since the message of acceptance, diversity and fluidity align with the values of Happy Socks and exclusive packs and limited-edition collections play a central role in the company's travel retail strategy, the partnership is a natural match. Pairing up for the first time last year, the collaboration is the responsibility of the company headquarters.

Responsible and sustainable

During COVID, as part of its CSR program, Happy Socks has worked with local contacts to deliver packages of socks to frontline workers. Following the global pandemic, there will be a change in consumer behavior and an increase in social responsibility. When asked if this way of life will translate to the need for more sustainable products and practices within the industry, Björn responded, "Definitely."

He says it's not a matter of if, but when. "Honestly, while attending Cannes last year, a lot of buyers and representatives approached me in regards to sustainability and what Happy Socks is doing to become a brand that is using recycled materials and fabrics".

With this in mind, the attendee returned to his team, who had a shared understanding of the significance, and asked when the brand would be ready to create such products and follow such practices. After initiating conversations with people from sourcing and packaging, sustainability has become one of the leading topics within the company. Although availability and profit margin are

necessary concerns, Happy Socks promises to do whatever it can to meet the consumer's expectations. However, embracing and tackling social responsibility and sustainability takes time. Björn admits such changes can't happen overnight.

Virtual interaction

During this challenging time, Happy Socks team members have been trying to identify every opportunity to stay in touch with those in the industry. As a result, the company is excited about Travel Retail Marketplace (TRMarketplace) and The Moodie Davitt Virtual Travel Retail Expo. Recognizing that reliance on virtual interaction will be a learning curve for both the organizers and attendees, Buddenbohm says both events are worth attending and he's interested to observe, explore and participate in the experience. "I really believe in meeting people in-person so it's a completely different experience. And I think we can all agree on that.

Building a business relationship is also about building a relationship with the individuals themselves. It's more than just talking numbers and negotiating contracts. I have no doubt we're getting back to it after all of this. Virtual events will never replace the in-person events, but they could be a nice add-on," he notes.

Buddenbohm believes that individuals will restart and remain traveling in the future and the potential exists for the global passenger traffic to increase in the long term. Whether it's 2023 or 2024, he doesn't know, but it's just a matter of time until the industry returns to the state of 2019. Because of his love of the industry, he's committed to the comeback of the travel retail channel.

Describing the new virtual reality as a big learning curve for both organizers and attendees, Buddenbohm is interested to see the shape of this year's Travel Retail Marketplace and The Moodie Davitt Virtual Travel Retail Expo