

# Marcus Hudson at Mars ITR on the travel retail ecosystem and category potential



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Marcus Hudson, Global Sales Director at Mars ITR

In celebration of Chocolate Day (July 7), *Global Travel Retail Magazine (GTR Magazine)* sat down with Marcus Hudson, Global Sales Director at Mars International Travel Retail (Mars ITR). The one-on-one interview provided insight into how brands are finding innovative ways to engage an increasingly demanding and sophisticated traveling consumer.

As pointed out by Hudson, Mars Wrigley's (Mars) brand portfolio boasts some of the largest brands in the world including M&M's, Snickers and Twix and the purpose of its Mars Snacking division is to inspire moments of everyday happiness on a global scale. With Gen Z consumers wanting to try something new, have fun and invest in experiences - especially when traveling - Hudson said the company is working to deliver these kinds of experiences on the shop floor with the intention of driving them into purchases.

"When we talk about attracting Gen Z, how I love to look at it is not what can we do in the channel, but how can the channel be part of a bigger ecosystem that generates excitement around our brands. To put this into context, Mars has less than 100 people working hard in travel retail, but it has 140,000+ people working around the world growing its brands. It's about viewing the channel as part of something bigger and playing a role within that; if we treat travel retail as a separate entity, we'll never grow to the scale that is possible," he explained.

Earlier this year, m1nd-set reported that Gen Z represents "the opportunity of a lifetime," specifically as those in the segment age and acknowledge their purchasing power. When asked how Mars ITR plans to stay relevant and adopt the right tone to tap into this potential, Hudson noted there is an untapped conversion opportunity for Mars ITR at airports across China that needs to be acted on. The company is striving to figure out how it can translate its success in the domestic market in China to travel retail.

According to Hudson, the average airport traveler in Europe purchases 12/13x more vs. when traveling out of China. The company is on a journey to understand this better and show greater commitment to the region. Since the confectionery category is undervalued in China, he said it is the responsibility of Mars ITR to help retailers recognize its potential. Category selling points include a high margin, low maintenance and the fact that it is incremental.

"We need to understand exactly what it is that we need to understand. The team spoke with distribution partners and retailers at the show to find out their perspective - and at a certain point we'll pull everything together and figure out how to move forward [beyond awareness]. As a global organization, Mars is excited about this opportunity," he shared.

With a strong activation portfolio across Europe and the Middle East, Mars ITR also spent time at the show brainstorming how it can act to link the M&M's brand to an activation on the shop floor in Hainan, which would be a first for the company.



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### **Category engagement & collaboration**

Along with brand portfolio, confectionery success in travel retail is tied to category engagement; this is agreed to be lacking compared to domestic markets. To implement change and improve engagement, brands need to collaborate on a category level in order to elevate confectionery.

Discussing Mars' belief in a category approach driven by consumption moments at the point of sale, Hudson added that with 70% of growth coming from the category itself both Mars ITR and its competitors need to do better when it comes to helping consumers navigate the category in-store and make choices on a category level.

"As an impulse-driven category, consumers make confectionery purchases with a specific moment in mind. What we have now are beautiful shops that are very hard to navigate with that moment in mind," he said.

### **Mars' impact at a glance**

Beyond shop floors, brand names and category improvements, we spoke about how consumers are becoming increasingly well informed about sustainability practices and ingredient sourcing. Hudson told *GTR Magazine* between 2017 - 2027 Mars will be investing US\$1B in sustainability programs globally and another US\$1B in sustainable cocoa initiatives. As of 2023, 100% of the cocoa used in Mars' production across Europe is responsibly sourced.

"The impact that Mars has on the world is big; therefore, our responsibility when it comes to sustainability is great. Our responsibility goes well beyond the travel retail channel; everything that we do from a sustainability standpoint needs to be global, scalable and it needs to have an impact," said Hudson.