

Phil Restall at Beam Suntory GTR talks digital revolution



Phil Restall, General Manager of Travel Retail, Beam Suntory GTR

Following Beam Suntory Global Travel Retail's recent appointment of Phil Restall as General Manager of Travel Retail, *Duty Free & Travel Retailing Magazine* reached out to Beam Suntory to learn more. The company described the appointment as the next step in the transformation of its global operating model, helping to ensure the successful implementation of an innovative pipeline.

Although COVID-19 has led to a challenging set of circumstances across the travel, retail and hospitality industries, Restall says uniting the team to navigate the pandemic has been a valuable learning experience. Pointing out the resilience and tenacity of not only his team but also the overall industry, he notes that Beam Suntory GTR is looking ahead to the resuming of normality and working hard with its customer partners to plan its recovery. According to him, the company has some

“exciting times and extraordinary launches” planned for the future.

“Our new and transformed operating model will support the company’s ambition to become the recognized industry leader for showcasing brands, building strong customer partnerships and driving sustainable category growth during the COVID-19 recovery period and beyond.

We are also investing heavily in the premiumization of our GTR portfolio through a rich and exciting innovation pipeline. Great examples of this include the launch of the first-ever world blended whisky, Suntory World Whisky “Ao” last October. Blended using whisky from five of the most renowned distilleries in Japan, Scotland, Ireland, Canada and the US, the liquid was the first innovative whisky launch in global travel retail since the start of the pandemic.

Last month, we also saw the launch of two new additions to the Bowmore Timeless Series, Bowmore 31-year-old as a GTR exclusive — a unique and premium single malt, which was launched in tandem with the Bowmore Timeless 27-year-old in domestic markets,” explains Restall.



Bowmore Timeless Series, Bowmore 31-YO, GTR exclusive



A centralized marketing model

Beam Suntory's GTR team is now aligned into three operating groups: Global Accounts, Emerging Markets and a centralized Marketing team. Providing a distinct customer focus that will showcase a shopper-centric approach and offer enhanced support to travel retail partners, this global operating model will promote growth opportunities across key geographies and channels and improve utilization of resource. Restall says this centralized marketing model will deliver industry-leading customer experiences around the world.

When asked about the company's media, marketing and engagement plan for 2021, Restall comments it's important to ensure every dollar of brand investment promises a return for all parties, with a clear focus on projected PAX return and priority locations.

"We use multiple data sources, industry experts and insight from our customer partners to best project where faster recovering geographies and channels are likely to occur. This has resulted in an ongoing, iterative planning cycle to continually build the strongest, most sustainable plan for our categories and our customers as we collectively recover," he adds.

A digital revolution

During the Q&A, the General Manager elaborates on current hot topics within the industry such as digitalization, diversification and consumer behavior. He believes that the path to recovery includes a digital revolution and continued learning.

Duty Free & Travel Retailing: How has Beam Suntory GTR been impacted by COVID-19?

Phil Restall: The pandemic has accelerated the growth of online alcohol sales in many markets worldwide and travel retail operators have evolved and introduced new online retail services

facilitating home delivery of travel retail exclusive and duty-absorbed products.

As for any challenges in the future, as a direct result of COVID, traveling shoppers' buying habits will continue to shift away from what we have historically known. In fact, many aspects of this new shopper behavior, including e-commerce penetration and the increasing importance of digital as a key medium on the path to purchase, will likely become the "new normal" so it's critical we understand and adapt to these new opportunities.

DF&TR: How important is the embracing and leveraging of innovation and digitalization to the recovery of Beam Suntory GTR?

PR: We have been building new capabilities and massively accelerating efforts in key areas to ensure we are in the right place to lead the recovery. The business has been focusing its efforts not just in GTR, but across the entire organization - on upweighting digital capability to ensure we still engage and connect with priority shoppers who have new shopping habits.

We are working closely with our retailers to integrate digital as part of the shopper journey. This will mean partnering through various digital platforms to enable a smoother experience and reducing physical interaction where it is desired or indeed required due to COVID safety measures.

DF&TR: When it comes to digital marketing and engagement, how is the company separating itself from competitors?

PR: As part of this digital revolution, we have optimized the imagery and copy of all our brands that retailers can use for improved consumer navigation. It is important that we continue to invest in digital services such as click-and-collect and online loyalty programs to meet the expectations of new shopper behaviour and future-proof our business.

There are a number of great examples of platform interaction that we have seen coming from some Asian markets in particular; for example, where social media has been integrated as part of e-commerce. We are definitely learning all of the time.