

Coping with lockdown: a look at mental health across the industry



From teambuilding exercises to mental health services, companies in the travel retail channel are re-thinking health, safety and wellbeing

For better or worse, COVID-19 has brought mental health and wellness to the forefront of social conversation. The shared experience on a global scale has offered insight into the day-to-day and long-term struggles of isolation and depression. With a greater understanding brought on by their own challenges, mental health is no longer a taboo topic of discussion among friends and colleagues.

Depending on the circumstances, work-from-home life is still a reality. These days, with limited ways to distinguish personal and professional hours, it's up to the workplace to help employees find a work-life balance. From teambuilding exercises and educational workshops to mental health services, companies are re-thinking the design of their support system.

With this in mind, *Americas Duty Free* reached out to a handful of companies to find out how people working in travel retail are coping with lockdown. Distell International, Brown-Forman Corporation and Maui Jim are taking the implementation of health and safety protocols to the next level.



Luke Maga, Managing Director, Global Travel Retail, Distell International

In fall 2020, Distell International launched its wellbeing initiative, DistWell, which aims to lift employees' spirits and boost company morale through a variety of fun activities. According to Luke Maga, Managing Director, Global Travel Retail, Distell International, the initiative includes a DistWell Champions Group consisting of volunteers from each department and site who have an interest in shaping wellbeing. Those involved encourage networking across the company and enable "Champions" to voice their opinions on policies and campaigns at monthly meetings.

"The group focuses on at least one key topic per month from the National Health Service Campaign Calendar, with additional topics covering the four key pillars of the wellbeing strategy throughout the year: Emotional, Financial, Inclusivity and Physical. DistWell follows the 'Health Working Lives' framework to work toward achieving a Bronze Award recognition," says Maga.

To date, the group has organized a dance challenge and a mocktail making competition.



Aude Bourdier, Vice President Managing Director, Global Travel Retail, Brown-Forman

Although the health, safety and wellbeing of its staff members has always been a priority of Brown-Forman, Aude Bourdier, Vice President, Managing Director, Global Travel Retail, Brown-Forman, states that the focus has grown exponentially during the pandemic including attention to mental health.

“The company has been forthright in developing initiatives focused on interaction and communication, key assets in promoting sound mental health. We initiated team ‘Mental Health Huddles’ where senior leadership and other professionals discuss ways to cope with the strain of working remotely and share their own experiences and struggles. These huddles are part of a larger ‘BeWell@B-F’ initiative that offers training and communication sessions in Brown-Forman markets around the world,” says Bourdier.

Along with health and wellness, diversity and inclusion are embedded in the Brown-Forman corporate vision. On the global travel retail side, the company interacts virtually through more formal monthly town hall meetings and less formal #GTR coffee, tea or cocktail hours. Bourdier adds that both types of get-togethers place heavy emphasis on interaction and communication and provide a forum to stay connected and engaged while working remotely.



Ben Tilly, Global Benefits & Compensation Manager, Maui Jim

During the pandemic, Maui Jim has aimed to protect its employees' health and safety and ensure business continuity and exceptional service for its customers. Ben Tilly, Global Benefits & Compensation Manager, Maui Jim, says that within a matter of days at the start of lockdown, the company developed remote working policies and made significant changes to its workplace environments.

At the top of the list: implementing COVID-specific safety policies, modifying workstations to maximize social distancing and supplying hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes and disposable PPE throughout its global offices. Additionally, Maui Jim established practices in connection to case management and contact tracing in order to provide a sense of comfort across all departments and levels.

"To further ease the mental impact of COVID-19, we promoted our Employee Assistance Platform, providing free confidential mental, physical and financial health and counseling services to our global 'Ohana (family) in over 20 countries. Senior leadership also promoted and supported flexibility by initiating open conversations with employees about childcare, homeschooling and work schedules.

The uncertainty of the pandemic has been challenging for everyone. We took this approach to communicate regularly and transparently with all of our team members and asked for patience when we didn't have the answers. Hopefully, 2020 will never repeat; however, there have been positive outcomes that will shape the future of our company," concludes Tilly.