

Experiential company CircleSquare suggests being prepared for ‘massive opportunity’ as world reopens post-COVID-19

In recent months as the travel retail world has been forced into shutdown mode with closed airports, exceptionally little travel, workers staying home and an uncertain timeline of reopening, it has been easy to fall into a habit of waiting as opposed to preparing.



Bailey's Strawberries & Cream, sampling experience and photo opportunity setting at LHR T5

Philip Handley, Executive Creative Director and Founder of leading experiential marketing, brand activation and consumer engagement firm CircleSquare, challenges brands and retailers to spend this time preparing to hit the ground running. "If brands and retailers spend this enforced downtime developing ideas and plans for an eye-catching comeback when traffic starts moving again, they will be the early winners post-COVID," he says. "There are going to be a lot of people who are not going to be ready to start that race and, from what I understand, it will be a race like no other. More agile brands could make huge gains over competitors by acting now and preparing properly."



Philip Handley, Executive Creative Director and Founder of CircleSquare

Potential for ‘revenge spending’

Early signs in China point to a rebound of consumer spending. As domestic markets are beginning to reopen and discussions are in place for a gradual resumption of a modified return to “normal,” travelers are likely to follow the trend appearing in Asia Pacific, where shoppers have demonstrated what’s termed as “revenge consumption.” This is when shoppers leap on the opportunity to shop again once they are able, possibly buying more than they normally would.



Johnnie Walker Game of Thrones, Global Launch of one of the most successful GTR campaigns ever initiated

Capture attention

Handley says companies will need to create activations that capture the attention of cautious, safety-conscious air travellers as the industry resumes. “Most of the best retail experiences we create for brands take between three and six months to execute, from strategic planning and conceptualisation to fabrication and installation in store. That means brands and retailers need to start briefing their creative agencies now to be ready on time.



Cadbury Joyville Activation, fun engagement, photo opportunity with social media sharing

"We have been offering clients a free planning service, so if anyone wants advice they should come and talk to us now. We have the proven ability to create activations that drive footfall, increase dwell time and change the focus away from a product's price and onto a product's experience - this is what you will need to succeed in winning the early business when it becomes available.



Oreo "Twist, Lick Dunk" game, awareness activation at Stansted airport

“So my strong suggestion to all brands and travel retail directors out there is that I know many of them have budgets on hold, but that doesn’t mean you can't start planning now; you can start testing new ideas for retail space without sacrificing revenue and be ready to move quickly when the time comes.”



Johnnie Walker, Gifting Studio, a new and unique initiative to drive gifting in Changi

Massive opportunity

Handley says travel retail is in a position to add to the experience of bringing friends and families back together when the time comes, which will be a massive opportunity for brands and retailers who are prepared. “Naturally things will be different but there will still be a great number of air passengers who are hungry to reconnect with great retail experiences and brands and retailers must be ready. If you are not on that start line with loads of great ideas then you’re in trouble.”



Cîroc Summer Colada, global launch and tasting experience

CircleSquare works with retailers such as Dufry, DFS and Gebr. Heinemann and a wide range of international companies responsible for major travel retail brands including Diageo, Mondelez and L’Oreal.