

Sales Pitch

A new retail strategy rejuvenates Emirates' in-flight duty-free offering.

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One month after Emirates launched its onboard retail platform, EmiratesRED, last October, the airline saw an overall sales increase of 23 percent and an average sales increase per customer of 10 percent. The jump has been attributed to a combination of improvements.

“We reviewed the whole proposition: the product mix, the marketing mix and overall positioning, technology employed and crew engagement,” says Patrick Brannelly, senior vice-president of Retail, In-Flight Entertainment and Connectivity (IFEC) at Emirates. “We thought hard about what people want to buy, why they want to buy and looked at huge amounts of historical sales data before launching the product.”

Key to the rising sales figures is a multichannel approach and a strong brand “persona” that Brannelly says breaks the mold of the traditional duty-free experience. This involved redesigning the airline’s *Open Skies* in-flight magazine and rethinking the IFEC system to better support the retail offering, including a dedicated channel with a host to showcase duty-free products. “If cabin crew push a retail cart down the aisles, they’ll make

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EmiratesRED, which offers 150+ duty-free items, sells the following in high quantities, every month:



170+
portable video projectors



1,000+
USB phone charging cables



13,000+
perfumes

Best-selling items of 2019:



Apple AirPods



Emirates A380 model aircraft



Creed Aventus cologne



Maserati Potenza wristwatch



Twelve South AirFly wireless headphone adapter

a few impulse sales. But to achieve the full potential, you need to look more holistically,” says Brannelly. “Relying on one channel alone will never work. We see the retail experience as something that enhances the overall customer experience, and we know success depends upon not doing it the way it was done in the past.”

The ubiquity of smartphones was also helpful in enabling the airline to adopt real-time in-flight payment approvals. Emirates has also started to sell tickets to theme parks and attractions in Dubai (and other UAE cities) on board, hence the name – Retail, Experiences and Dubai –

distilled to an acronym that, in keeping with Emirates’ red brand color, produces the “EmiratesRED” portmanteau.

In addition to looking at historical sales data, Emirates has also established key performance criteria to help determine whether it is making the right decisions and to ensure it is constantly improving its duty-free offering. “We’ve also spent a lot of time talking to crew to understand the nuances of each route, customer preferences as well as the operational realities,” says Brannelly. “This is no different than any successful retail establishment on the ground.” ■