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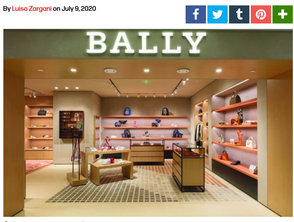
Bally CEO Nicolas Girotto Outlines Brand's Digital Transformation, China Focus

The company, which will mark its 170th anniversary next year, is also investing in brick-and-mortar stores in China.

By Luisa Zargani on July 9, 2020



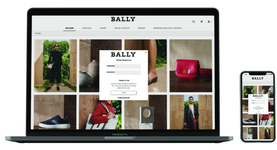
The Bally store in Hangzhou Tower courtesy image

MILAN — Bally next year will celebrate its 170th anniversary and the company, in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, will reach that milestone leveraging the lessons learned.

"I was amazed by the ability of the company to reinvent itself and by its agility, the spirit and reactivity of the team, adapting, living by the day and the hour, its entrepreneurship," said chief executive officer Nicolas Girotto. "I would like to keep this spirit and this strength for the future."

Keeping up with the times, as a step in the company's accelerated digital transformation, on July 8 Bally opened its virtual showroom in collaboration with Hyphen and will launch the brand's spring 2021 sales campaign on July 13.

"We've worked very hard and implemented it very quickly," said Girotto of the virtual showroom. "We needed to create more emotional content and enhance the experience, not only replicate it digitally."



Bally's virtual showroom for spring 2021. courtesy image

Along these lines, bally.com was redesigned in February, created with the London-based agency Wednesday, and in September the brand's spring collection will be presented digitally, on a micro site integrated with bally.com and a WeChat mini program.

By the end of the year, Bally also will launch its CRM app, enhanced by leveraging Social CRM through WeChat and evolving customer experience with the facelift of Bally's WeChat mini program in May featuring additional services and functionality to match the web site experience. "CRM is fundamental to improve the interpersonal, one-to-one relations with customers and understand their needs," said Girotto.

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The company is planning a digital presentation in September, "integrated with social media and as inclusive as possible, giving access to guests, press, and buyers, while engaging customers."

Bally has activated dedicated content for the Chinese market, unveiling a livestreaming event for the launch of a S20 capsule, engaging local KOL Bamboo, within its new Bally Haus at Hangzhou Tower in China.

Mainland China accounts for 30 to 40 percent of sales, said Girotto, admitting that China was especially impacted by the COVID-19 emergency, but adding that the region is "recovering steadily." So much so that in May Bally saw double-digit growth in China compared with last year. "Customers are still cautious in engaging physically, but they are back in a phy-gital way. Wherever there is more digital interaction, the recovery in [brick-and-mortar stores] is much quicker. COVID-19 has accelerated our digital agenda and China already had the infrastructure for integration between digital and physical," he said.

Bally's e-commerce in China consists of bally.cn, Bally WeChat mini program and Tmall Luxury Pavilion, which was launched in September. "It has proven to be highly successful, delivering a qualitative environment to showcase the brand at its best," said Girotto. Sales are up 200 percent year-to-date across Bally's digital ecosystem in China.

"Very soon Tmall will be our first store in terms of revenues," he revealed. Bally has been providing exclusive and localized capsules for Tmall, working with a local team and in sync with the Chinese calendar, offering animation and content. "Social distancing made it fundamental to engage," he said, adding proudly that Bally won the award for Best New User Acquisition in October.

At the same time, the brand will continue to invest in brick-and-mortar stores, which are still important, Girotto pointed out, while the company reassesses the pace and number of stores, evolving the mix of on and offline.

"We are benefiting from the repatriation of purchases. We don't expect a recovery in travel in the next 12, 18 months to the levels of 2019," said the executive. For this reason, Bally is focusing on catering to local demand in China, the U.S., Europe and Japan.

The company has opened two stores in Shanghai this year (in Hangzhou Tower and Yaohan) and rolled out refurbishment featuring the Bally Haus design concept, unveiled in Milan last year and emphasizing its Swiss heritage, to more cities in China this year — in Hangzhou, Chengdu, Chongqing, Changzhou and Shijiazhuang.

Despite the impact of the protests and of the pandemic in Hong Kong, Bally is also continuing to invest in that city. "We don't want to decrease our visibility there," said Girotto.

Bally ceo Nicolas Girotto. courtesy image

On July 28, Bally will launch its fall campaign globally called "Purity of Form," with a focus on nature. "Clean lines, organic materials and neutral tones reflect Bally's longstanding respect for the environment and its passion for design innovation," said Girotto.

Photographer Harley Weir captured models on set against a streamlined backdrop of reclaimed woods and stone alongside iconic Swiss furniture designs from Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret and Ueli Berger. "It was a challenge, all far from easy, but it was all also very flexible," said Girotto of producing the images during the pandemic.

These set shots are juxtaposed against intimate, natural landscapes photographed by Weir in various wildlife locations.

Last month, Bally also launched its A-to-Z campaign, an illustrated alphabet paying tribute to the storied label and featuring designs by artists including Swiss duo Nina Wehrle and Evelyne Laube of "It's Raining Elephants," Brooklyn, NY.-based illustrator Abbey Lossing; Baltimore-based George Wylesol; American-born visual artist Bryce Wymer, and Dutch cartoonist Lennard Kok. "It's a fresh way to talk about our history and the key values of the brand," said Girotto.

The company has succeeded in establishing the Bally Peak Outlook Foundation, reflecting its long-term commitment to preserve extreme mountain environments, and plans to expand its preservation projects to additional mountains in the Himalaya region and around the world, although the pandemic impacted the cleaning of the peaks in May. Bally is also launching a dedicated capsule collection, the proceeds from which will benefit the fund.

Further embracing sustainability, for spring 2021 Bally will present a fully recycled Echo line of multifunctional bags and accessories, which re-polymerize 100 percent recycled fibers into quality textiles.

To help mark its 170th anniversary in 2021, Bally will launch a coffee-table book with publisher Assouline.

bally China Hong Kong