

Watsons goes for retail omnipresence

Growing online without continually improving what's being done at its stores "would be crazy", says Singapore general manager

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WITH decreasing brand loyalty among today's consumers and an increasing number of mind-boggling options, health and beauty chain Watsons is opting to be omnipresent in the retail realm.

Its general manager in Singapore Dominic Wong said that in order to tap this increasingly affluent and newly empowered consumer base, Watsons will need to exist across all channels to reach as many consumers as possible.

"We must be a strong omnipresent player both in Singapore and around the world (to retain old customers and attract new ones). This is why our physical presence remains key – how we treat our customers both in the physical world and in the online world is paramount," he told *The Business Times* in an exclusive interview on Wednesday.

He said to get consumers to buy

something online, a brand needs to establish trust.

"We can't grow in the online world at the expense of good customer service and good customer interaction in the physical world. If we do that, if we just grow online without continually improving what we do at the stores, then I think it would be crazy," Mr Wong added.

He believed there will be a convergence of online and physical stores, and cited Amazon, the world's largest online retailer, as an example. Amazon opened its first completely offline book store in Seattle in November 2015.

A similar trend is increasingly evident across many countries around the world, where online retailers are going offline, and brick-and-mortar stores are moving online.

"We've been in Singapore close to 30 years, so we have an extremely good trust factor here. Our drive online is big and will be even bigger," Mr Wong said.

"I'm very pleased to say that we

formed a partnership with Lazada and since the end of last year, we have a shop-in-shop and doing extremely well. We also have very strong online presence on our e-store and recently launched our second-generation mobile app."

Apart from being omnipresent to weather the gloom in retail and boost its own viability, Watsons has also expanded into healthcare.

It launched its diabetes care programme with the National University of Singapore (NUS) Pharmacy Department on Wednesday. Patients can sign up at all 37 Watsons stores but the one-to-one consultations will be done at selected pharmacies.

Diabetes Care Bays are also available at 15 Watsons stores and are specially designed for customers to get quick access to diabetes monitoring kits, diabetes essentials and other relevant supplements.

"This new service aligns us with the government's focus towards preventative and community care, which is an important aspect in minimising



further health complications arising from diseases such as diabetes," Mr Wong said.

The diabetes care programme came close on the heels of its allergy care services and allergy bays, which were started last year.

Currently, there are about 400,000 Singaporeans living with diabetes, and this number is projected to grow to 600,000 by 2030.

Latest figures from the 2010 Na-

tional Health Survey showed one in nine Singapore residents, aged between 18 and 69 years, have diabetes. Out of these, one in three were unaware of their condition.

"We are reaching out to the community, extending our offering, both in services and in products to essentially address issues and I think if you are a retailer and you do that, there will be a place for you in Singapore," Mr Wong said.

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