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The 11.11 Shopping Festival in China 2021 has kicked off, with Chinese shoppers poised to break sales records. This year Alibaba is emphasising “Green Lifestyles” while also providing innovative solutions to senior shoppers who increasingly flexing their purchasing power through e-commerce.

Genesis

The idea of Single’s Day (also called Double 11 as it’s celebrated on November 11) was originally conceived by a few male students from Nanjing University in 1993 as an “anti-Valentine’s Day” for those fed-up with loneliness and pressures of relationships and to celebrate “single-ness”. Rather than spoiling a significant other with gifts, the idea was to spoil yourself instead — maybe with a night out with other single friends at a KTV (karaoke) and a hot-pot dinner.

The first official commercialization of Single’s Day happened in 2009 by Alibaba via their Taobao Marketplace (now called Tmall) platform — 27 brands participated with sales around 52 million RMB (\$8 million USD). Jin Dong (JD.com) followed suit in 2010 introducing their own Singles Day shopping event. What started as a day for single people to enjoy themselves and connect with others quickly turned into a full-on e-commerce bonanza, and eventually the largest shopping festival in the world. Last year in 2020, despite concerns that Covid-19 may

impact consumer spending during the festival, saw 487 billion RMB (\$75 billion USD) in sales for Alibaba and 747 billion RMB (\$115 billion USD) across all platforms.

11.11 Shopping Festival 2021

This year, events kicked off on October 20th and with so many shoppers flocking to Taobao for pre-orders, the app actually crashed for just under an hour. According to Alibaba, this year’s festival will be the largest one to date boasting 290,000 sellers with over 14 million discounted products for consumers. This year, the concept of “green lifestyles” and eco-friendly consumption will feature heavily in festival promotion, with Alibaba looking to incentivise shopper decision making by issuing 100 million RMB worth of “green” vouchers. Alibaba is also making it easier for seniors to get involved, with a slew of new technologies on the Taobao app including “seniors mode”, with voice-assisted shopping, simplified navigation and larger font sizes and icons.

Foreign brands should take notice of these trends, as eco-oriented lifestyles and product sustainability are becoming top-of-mind considerations for Chinese buyers. Additionally, the growing senior demographic in China means tremendous opportunity for targeted products and services. Currently, according to Renmin University, China has a population of 264 million over the age of 60 — and this is expected to grow to 500 million by mid-century. According to CGTN, China’s “silver economy” is expected to reach 5.7 trillion RMB in spending by the end of 2021.

Selling to Chinese Consumers Online

For brands that are looking to tap into China’s over 900 million online consumers during the 11.11 Shopping Festival or others e-commerce festivals including: Girls and Women’s Day, Men’s Festival, “I Love You” Day, Children’s Day, JD’s 618 Festival, Red Friday, Double 12 Festival and Christmas, just to name a few, there are a number of factors to consider.

Before launching a store on one of the many domestic e-commerce platforms however, it’s important to gain some market insight firstly about your product, its category, competition and how it may be received by Chinese consumers. If your intention is to sell on the domestic (classic) version on Tmall, which enjoys

exponentially more sales volume and traffic than Tmall Global, you are required to have a Chinese entity and register your products with the Chinese authorities. Logistics is also a key consideration as domestic Tmall products are usually warehoused inside China at Alibaba warehouses which makes shipping fast and efficient, whereas Tmall Global products are either warehoused in their country of origin or in China Free Trade Zones and only clear customs once orders are placed. For all these reasons and more, it is extremely helpful to work with a certified Tmall TP (trading partner) who can take you through all the necessary steps and ensure you don’t run into problems down the road.

Finally, and probably most important, know that opening and operating a store (regardless of whether it is domestic or global, or on any other platform) is only your first step — sales are not guaranteed. While e-commerce activation in China can be very lucrative, it is also extremely competitive — this is why the most successful brands online always maintain a robust integrated marketing/advertising programme to ensure their products are cutting through the noise and positioning themselves well against both foreign and domestic competitors.

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