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## CLARINS China commerce site adds to brand's momentum in China

### CLARINS

**Industry:**  
Beauty & Cosmetics

**URL:**  
www.clarins.com.cn

#### BUSINESS

Best known for luxury skin care products, CLARINS sells cosmetics in every country around the world through major department stores, specialty retail stores and spas as well as via several country-specific commerce sites.

#### CHALLENGE

Driving digital commerce in different countries around the world is a key growth area for CLARINS, including in one of the world's fastest growing markets, China. The complexity of entering the Chinese market, particularly in establishing an online presence that balanced a localized approach with CLARINS' desire to maintain a global brand identity, represented CLARINS' key challenge in entering this lucrative market.

#### SOLUTION

CLARINS extended its global use of Demandware to quickly launch its own branded e-commerce site in Mainland China, moving from RFP to go-live in just six months. Demandware's comprehensive solution – a combination of its cloud platform, third party integrations, partnership with eCommera, and unique offering for Mainland China – enabled CLARINS to quickly and confidently enter the Chinese market and establish a foundation for growing throughout Asia-Pacific.

#### RESULTS

Initial sales in China have exceeded expectations, with high double-digit sales growth in the first half-year since the site went live in September 2012. Since launching the new site on the Demandware Commerce platform, online customer acquisition is accelerating. CLARINS added 5,000 to 10,000 new newsletter subscribers each month from September 2012 to March 2013, and the site is significantly expanding the company's customer base: Over one third of online orders are coming from locations in China where CLARINS does not yet have a physical presence. Data about these new customers are adding to the company's intelligence about consumer demand and future expansion decisions.

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## BUSINESS

### LUXURY SKIN CARE, COSMETICS AND PERFUMES SOLD AROUND THE WORLD

Best known for luxury skin care products, CLARINS sells cosmetics in every country around the world. CLARINS sells through high-profile locations in major department stores and at specialty retail stores and spas as well as via several country-specific commerce sites (France, UK, USA, Spain, Germany, Japan and China).

One of CLARINS' biggest areas of focus is luxury skin care (it is the number-one luxury face care brand in Europe and the number-one luxury body care brand in the world, including in China). The company also offers makeup and sun protection lines, and while women are its primary target consumer CLARINS also has a full range of men's skin care products.

Its products' quality and uniqueness, along with its overall brand image, are extremely important to CLARINS. Both are encapsulated in two key phrases from the "Values & History" page of its website: "CLARINS, innovation from the very start," and "Because with CLARINS, life's more beautiful."

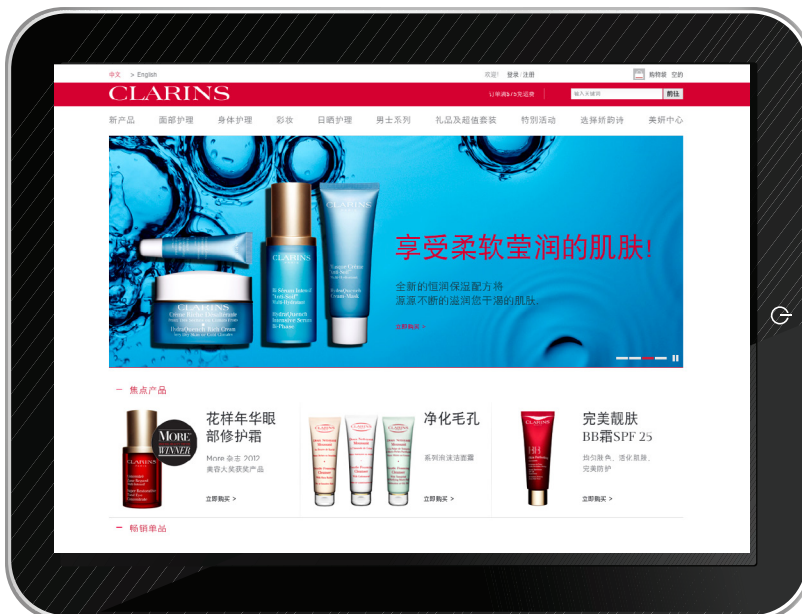
## CHALLENGE

### ACCELERATING GLOBAL DIGITAL COMMERCE GROWTH

Geographic expansion via the digital channel is a key growth area for CLARINS. CLARINS.com is the largest revenue growth engine for the brand in several countries, including the U.S. Those strong results have encouraged the company to accelerate digital expansion in new markets, particularly in Asia-Pacific countries.

Taking advantage of these new opportunities requires rapid rollouts of commerce sites in a number of international markets with different languages, currencies and customer

preferences. CLARINS seeks to provide a country-specific look and feel to each of its sites, while at the same time building and maintaining the global CLARINS brand image in these disparate markets and retailing environments.



"Whether the websites we operate in different countries are for commerce or simply there for informational purposes, having our own website in each country where we have a subsidiary and official presence is mandatory," says Julien Chiavassa, CLARINS' China e-commerce manager and head of digital strategy for the company's Asia-Pacific region. "We want to control the way that we communicate the brand, and be consistent across different channels in terms of brand identity, channels and guidelines."

The need to protect the company's valuable brand identity is a key reason CLARINS has already set up informational websites in Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong. Such sites can also lay the groundwork

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for a move to digital commerce sales, as they already have in China, Japan (launched in 2013) and Korea, where a commerce site launch is planned for Spring 2013.

#### **LOCALIZED APPROACHES FOR THE MAINLAND CHINA MARKET**

With its enormous population of 1.4 billion and rapidly emerging middle class, China represents a major opportunity for CLARINS. Online retail in China is expected to grow from \$169.4 billion in 2012 to \$356.1 billion by 2016, surpassing U.S. e-commerce sales, according to Forrester Research.<sup>1</sup>

China also represents a strong example of the need to balance a localized, country-by-country approach to digital commerce with CLARINS' desire to maintain a consistent global identity.

China's "split personality" – one of the world's leading economies but also a country that is still relatively closed to the outside world for both cultural and political reasons – presented several challenges to CLARINS as it set up its commerce site in the country in 2012.

Legal and regulatory challenges, particularly licensing requirements for operating a transacting site in China, as well as technology and infrastructure challenges, including operating within the restrictions of the "Great Firewall of China," presented key concerns for CLARINS to address.

While CLARINS' products were available via popular Mainland China commerce sites including Taobao and T-Mall, the company had a strong desire to establish a more official, direct connection with its customers that would provide it with direct control over pricing and brand presentation. Operating its own online commerce site was therefore critical to CLARINS' business goals and brand presentation in China.

Another big challenge was the use of and integration with key consumer engagement technologies, such as China-specific social networks and search engines. "Many different social networks are banned in China, including Facebook and Twitter, and even Google is very hard to access from China," reports Chiavassa. "We had to rethink and localize a lot of different features on the global website to fit Chinese needs, including switching all international social networks to local social networks."

For any online retailer, search engine optimization (SEO) is a business basic that must be not only built but carefully monitored and maintained on an ongoing basis. As with social networks, a local approach was essential in China. "Google's market share in China is quite small, so whether we were working toward paid or organic searches, we needed to optimize for the local search engines," says Chiavassa. "I would say even the algorithms for organic searches are different, so you can't just take a global SEO requirement and put it into China; you have to localize lots of things to maximize your opportunities in China."

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1. Forrester Online Retail Forecast 2011 to 2016 (Asia Pacific)

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**Julien Chiavassa**  
*China E-Commerce Manager,  
CLARINS Cosmetics*

## **SOLUTION** **FLEXIBLE GLOBAL DIGITAL COMMERCE PLATFORM SPEEDS AND SIMPLIFIES MARKET ENTRY**

CLARINS sought a technology solution that would allow it to quickly establish its online presence in mainland China despite the complexities this market presents, including the country’s technology infrastructure and issues around legal and regulatory compliance. Demandware’s cloud platform includes an Asia Pacific Point of Delivery (POD) and a specialized Site Acceleration Service (SAS) that meets CLARINS’ needs in the region. CLARINS’ worked with Demandware and its implementation partner eCommera, which was instrumental in simplifying many of the business licensing issues around operating a Mainland China commerce site.

The result was that CLARINS was successful in bringing its site online very quickly and efficiently: “The China website, including both back-end and front-end, took only six months to implement from the RFP at the beginning of the project until the go-live date,” says Chiavassa. Now that the template has been established, Chiavassa anticipates that sites for other Asia-Pacific countries could have an even shorter time to market. While Japan took eight months to go live, Korea is projected to launch in a five-month span from start to finish.

## **LOCALIZED SOLUTION FOR THE MAINLAND CHINA MARKET**

Demandware and eCommera provided CLARINS with a global solution designed for Mainland China that combines both the Demandware platform and unique services required to effectively operate and serve local consumers.

CLARINS made effective use of the platform’s robust capabilities to accelerate time-to-market as a local brand in Mainland China. CLARINS’ solution already included the cloud-based Demandware platform to support both informational and commerce sites in other Asian countries.

“We have had a very good experience with the Demandware platform and the team at eCommera across all of the markets where we already have websites, which gave us confidence in the platform to support our growing China business,” notes Chiavassa.

In addition, Demandware’s partner ecosystem allowed CLARINS to simplify and extend its global operations to the China site. “For instance, our end-to-end partner eCommera has developed features for a number of CLARINS sites that can be utilized or not utilized, depending on the needs of each market,” he adds.

The Demandware platform also addresses many of the technological challenges specific to China, including the North-South telecom divide within the country and “the Great Firewall of China,” as the extra barriers that have been erected around the Internet in that country are commonly called.

In order to optimize content and application delivery across Mainland China, Demandware provided a Site Acceleration Service – a content delivery network (CDN) optimized for Mainland China – which provides CLARINS with fast transmission of network traffic over the public Internet, cloud-based management of site traffic and acceleration of content from Point of Presences (PoPs) within the country. According to an independent study conducted by ip-label, a leading web performance monitoring company, Demandware’s solution delivers a very good end user experience in Mainland

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China, with a response time below four seconds per page and 99.8% reliability per page. This is better than the average 5-6 seconds response time consumers experience from most retailers in China, measured by an ip-label China e-commerce benchmark for the same period.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the Site Acceleration Service allowed CLARINS to establish a Mainland China IP address, which is critical to improving search engine rankings there.

The company also needed to adapt to long-standing consumer preferences in China, especially in the area of payments. “A large number of Chinese consumers don’t pay online; instead they use Cash on Delivery, paying the courier when the goods are delivered to their home,” Chiavassa reports. “This accounts for 30% to 35% of our online sales. The other payment system is a local PayPal system that can be used as an escrow account and as a gateway for online banking systems.” CLARINS also integrates with China’s largest online payment system, Alipay. eCommera was instrumental in helping CLARINS coordinate and integrate with these payment platforms, which are used by the vast majority of Chinese online consumers, as well as with Mainland China suppliers.

#### **RAPIDLY LEVERAGE SITE IMPROVEMENTS ACROSS REGIONS**

Chiavassa provided an example of the ways digital commerce functionality and problem-solving in one market is applied to other markets.

“We had initial challenges on the China site on transaction workflow. Our team in Europe had experienced similar challenges on sites in that region and had addressed it effectively,” he explains. “Demandware’s flexible and open development environment allowed for changes designed in Europe to be applied to the Chinese site almost immediately.

“We can directly leverage this within minutes, so we can switch to the new page design for China if we want, or keep the old one,” Chiavassa notes.

Centralized control of content, assets and functionalities – a key element of the Demandware platform – has also helped CLARINS manage its rapidly growing and increasingly complex international digital commerce business.

“The platform is quite flexible for online merchandising and control of our catalog, price changes and updating of product shots,” reports Chiavassa. “Even with having multiple sites, we are able to customize each rather easily. It’s very helpful knowing that the global team in Paris has full control and visibility of all our company’s digital sites worldwide (France, UK, Spain, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, USA, Canada, Russia, China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore). They have access to one URL and an intuitive merchandising and marketing administration tool, which means it’s very easy for them to access each country site from one location and deploy a feature across the different countries’ commerce sites.”

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2. ip-label e-commerce Benchmark China — 15/02 to 15/03/2013.



## THE BOTTOM LINE

CLARINS has leveraged the Demandware Commerce platform to:

- > Accelerate its global digital commerce growth
- > Create a localized solution for a huge market opportunity in China
- > Centralize control enabling site improvements across the region to happen rapidly
- > Rely on solid commerce platform performance
- > Deliver promising growth in China providing a strong basis for further expansion there and throughout the Asia-Pacific region

**CLARINS**

### ROBUST WEB PLATFORM PERFORMANCE

Despite the issues involved operating in China, CLARINS was confident that it could launch without any concerns about platform performance. “What’s even more important for us is that we don’t spend any time fixing technical bugs,” he adds. “This is a big added value; our teams can focus on the business side of digital commerce, such as bringing traffic to the site, working on conversion and fixing page layouts. They spend no time trying to understand why an order was wrongly put into the system because it never happens. This is a big strength of the platform – it is very robust and highly reliable, which is very important to us.”

### RESULTS

#### PROMISING GROWTH IN CHINA AND A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR FURTHER GLOBAL EXPANSION

CLARINS’ online sales have made a fast start in China, in part due to the rapid site deployment facilitated by Demandware and eCommera, achieving high double-digit sales growth in the first six months since the site went live in September 2012. While these sales still represent a relatively small portion of overall sales in the country, CLARINS is pleased with the progress so far and points to a number of encouraging factors.

“We have exceeded our initial expectations so it is a very good start of the year,” says Chiavassa. CLARINS’ China website is expected to become the largest CLARINS store in China, just like CLARINS.com is in several Western countries, including the U.S.

Other signs of growth include:

- Customer acquisition is increasing on a month-by-month basis
- CLARINS’ newsletter has gained 5,000 to 10,000 new subscribers per month from September 2012 to March 2013
- CLARINS’ average order value is higher in China than in Europe or the U.S., by as much as 30%
- Almost one third of online orders in China come from locations where CLARINS does not have a physical point of sale presence, “encouraging us about the high demand of Chinese consumers for our brand and contribution to opportunities and important information for the openings of our next physical counters,” says Chiavassa.

Sales are important, but data are also valuable. “Live chat and a well-performing call center service is the first point of contact for us to get to know our customers better,” says Chiavassa. “We have a dedicated team to work on e-mail, live chat, phone and SMS feedback to customers, whether through our website or our social networks, such as Weibo or Weixin.

“Product ratings and reviews are going to be implemented very soon to get feedback to be shared with other ‘netizens’ on the site directly,” he adds. “Eventually, we will start to synergize offline and online CRM activities to cross-match data and get to serve our customers’ needs even better, tailoring our offers and our feedback to them.”

This type of targeted personalization will be critical, along with larger-scale efforts to raise awareness around the CLARINS brand in China and throughout Asia. “We are still a challenger with a much lower market share than the two market leaders, Estée Lauder and Lancôme, but the momentum is there and CLARINS is gaining market share,” says Chiavassa.

With Chinese consumers’ heavy use of mobile devices for shopping, CLARINS has invested in a mobile optimized website for smartphones for their Demandware-powered commerce site. CLARINS has stayed ahead of the competition in mobile commerce, which has driven measurable results for the brand. Mobile now accounts for 20% of all online traffic and 10% of digital sales.

Digital commerce activities are central to the company’s growth plans in this region. “We believe we can be a leader in the beauty digital landscape,” says Chiavassa. “My role was created to spread the word in Asia and transform traditional to digital.”

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**ABOUT DEMANDWARE**

*Demandware, a leader in digital commerce, enables the world’s premier retailers to move faster and grow faster in the changing face of retail. Demandware’s enterprise cloud platform minimizes the costs and complexities of running global, omni-channel commerce operations, and empowers retailers to respond with speed and agility to new market opportunities and continually evolving consumer expectations. For more information, visit [www.demandware.com](http://www.demandware.com), call +1-888-553-9216 or email [info@demandware.com](mailto:info@demandware.com).*

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