

# A Chinese Worker Dreams of Returning to the Office

*Editor's note: This is the first in a series of articles about how the COVID-19 epidemic is impacting people's lives and business operations in China, the world's second-largest economy. Future articles, which will be coauthored by Ed Rowland and Alice Wang, will bring to life the challenges of coping with this epidemic.*

By Ed Rowland

It's one thing to read about the coronavirus. It's another thing to be living it.

Since early January, most Chinese people must work from home, as public transportation has been curtailed or halted. The world's largest test of remote online working is happening now.

As a child, Alice Wang, who recently left Alibaba's Healthcare Division and has deep consumer health care roots, dreamed of making money while lounging around at home. So did her brother and many young friends, now collectively known as China's Generation Y. Who wouldn't want to earn a good living staying in the comfort of their own home? Recently, that dream came true, but a little differently from Alice's childhood musing.

The general Chinese population learned about the coronavirus before the New Year and the



Team connectivity has been hindered by Alice Wang's work at home.

country became a remote workplace world literally overnight. Alice never thought it would enable her to stay in bed for weeks. No need to rush for a morning bus. No rush hour traffic jams. Just work from bed.

The feeling of freedom lasted about five minutes. Alice now must prepare breakfast, lunch and dinner after only intermittent cooking for the last five years. She must be online virtually 24 hours a day, as her boss might call for a conference at

anytime. At the office, long hours were the norm, but her boss would eventually send her home, showing what the Chinese call a "caring face." Now, there are team conference calls after 9 pm.

Alice describes herself as a "guinea pig" along with hundreds of millions of peers, participating in the online virtual experiment. According to research, there are about 18 million Chinese enterprises and 300 million people now working from home.

Alice lists the "pros" she has

experienced so far:

- More family time. Her pets aren't complaining. Her dog, Danae, has been told, "Darling, I have to finish this presentation now, play by yourself for a while."
  - Saving money and time. No premium cosmetics and luxury clothes this month. It's also good news for her "dude" boyfriend who could never tell the difference between Chanel and a cheap copy.
  - Avoid unnecessary meetings. The daily two-hour review session to keep her boss and colleagues aligned and (over?) connected has been eliminated.
  - No traffic jams! That's *huge!*
- However, when one window opens, a door also shuts. There are issues with working online; some challenges are not easy to manage whether short or long term:
- Workplace efficiency and security. Team connectivity has suffered. Ensuring data security feels like the sword of Damocles. HR and IT have not slept well for weeks in a lot of companies.
  - No discernable boundary between work and life. Everyone is exhausted. When Alice opens her eyes, she hears her work time clock. For now, she likens it to a sweatshop and Karl Marx-like exploitation.
  - Poorer communications.

Face-to-face workplace connectivity is indeed necessary and beneficial or irreplaceable in some cases.

• Too many distractions at home. This includes family and pets, but another unexpected issue has been loneliness. We have socialized needs of working together to solve problems.

*American Factory*, the Oscar-winning Best Documentary Feature, mentioned that more than 377 million people would have to do very different work, and adapt to the challenges of working from home. China is now doing this experiment for the world.

Meanwhile, it's time for Alice to close her laptop. "Darling Danae, come here to mommy ..." Alice's dream now is to return to the office next week. She worries that she might not be sufficiently contributing to her company's success and hopes her boss won't figure this out before it's too late.

*Ed Rowland is the principal of Rowland Global LLC (www.rowland-global.com), which supports companies in their strategy, tactics and execution of international growth initiatives. Alice Wang is a consumer health care professional with deep knowledge of Chinese e-commerce, the world's largest internet market.*

# Walmart.com Changes Offer New Routes for CPG Brands

By Melinda Clark

For the U.S. consumer packaged goods industry, e-commerce is a three-horse race between Walmart.com, Amazon and direct to consumer (DTC). Despite its massive audience and its potential to drive domestic sales, Walmart.com has remained a distant third for marketers looking to grow their e-commerce revenue. This is all about to change.

When it comes to Walmart.com, e-commerce marketing has historically been more challenging for brands trying to break into its platform. In the past, the company has been less transparent about how it prioritizes brands and categories, and it offers fewer tools to help marketers optimize their Walmart.com strategies.

Meanwhile, there aren't as many outside experts to help companies build success on Walmart.com as there are for Amazon. Without the depth of experience of an external partner, brand marketers have been forced to make decisions about how to elevate their products on Walmart.com with less data.

But Walmart has been working to alleviate these pain points. If you've tried and failed to build your brand through Walmart.com in the past, new changes to the retail platform warrant a second look. As Walmart.com undergoes extensive changes to its internal structure and its external user experience, CPG brands have an

opportunity to be early adopters of these new tools and strategies for success.

## An improved user experience for customers and sellers

The upgrades to Walmart.com's user experience are twofold, and both improve the selling opportunities for CPG brands. From a customer perspective, the e-commerce site has overhauled its aesthetics, offering a clearer focus as well as improved site navigation and search tools. A more user-friendly interface increases shopping activity, which increases product sales opportunities.

Walmart is combining its teams of buyers in an effort to turn e-commerce into a profitable business. Suppliers can now seamlessly partner with Walmart on pricing and assortment online and in-store. This also unifies customer experience, and no matter where they choose to shop, they'll have the same low prices.

## Better tools to market your products

Walmart.com has now partnered with a handful of self-serve platforms that make it easier for small and mid-sized brands to manage their own media instead of depending on Walmart.com's internal teams to manage these changes. Brands can now exercise greater control over the optimizations needed to maximize product visibility and ranking in relevant searches.

Within the self-serve platforms offered by Walmart.com, CPG brands have better tools to elevate product visibility through both organic and paid means. One example is the ease of purchasing sponsored product placements, which can now be purchased directly through partnered self-serve platforms.

Marketers can optimize their bidding to guarantee that their ads appear above competitor listings — a great tool for outsider brands looking to raise brand awareness in their category. Walmart.com also offers a cost-per-click (CPC) auction methodology that differs from Amazon, setting winning CPC bid prices according to the highest bid. This prevents competing brands from overbidding in an effort to drive up the winning bid price, which is commonplace on Amazon.

More recently, Walmart.com announced the debut of Walmart Fulfillment Services to give third-party sellers the option of paying Walmart to store, pack and ship items sold through its platform. This mirrors a similar fulfillment service already offered by Amazon and can streamline Walmart.com selling strategies while potentially speeding up order delivery time lines.

## Grocery pickup and delivery continue to expand

As Walmart.com expands its grocery pickup and delivery services across Walmart's network

of brick-and-mortar stores, this e-commerce channel provides a valuable opportunity for CPG brands—especially brands selling perishable products.

Walmart is looking to attract more consumers on its online grocery shopping experience by adding Walmart Grocery to its main app. It has operated two separate apps for years. This meant shoppers had to download and switch between two separate online experiences. The setup limited Walmart Grocery's overall reach, as users of the traditional app did not know grocery was available. These changes mean a more seamless shopping experience but also a

unified marketing approach for suppliers.

Because Walmart.com offers less visibility into its system and how it works, it can take more time for CPG brands to figure out what success looks like through this channel. Patience is a must when launching a Walmart.com strategy. But as Walmart pours more resources into building e-commerce success, CPG brands would be wise to revisit this channel and build a marketing strategy that takes advantage of these new retail opportunities.

*Melinda Clark is vice president of strategic solutions at Bold Retail in Bentonville, Ark.*

## RILA Endorses Anti-Trafficking Bill

**ARLINGTON, Va. — The Retail Industry Leaders Association (RILA) is supporting legislation that targets traffickers of stolen and counterfeit goods.**

**The INFORM Consumers Act was introduced in the Senate on March 10 by Sens. Bill Cassidy (R., La.) and Dick Durbin (D., Ill.) The bill requires third-party sellers on online platforms like Amazon.com to disclose certain business and contact information.**

**"Online marketplaces make it easy for small and medium-sized businesses to connect with customers all over the world, but some have become a hotbed for unscrupulous actors to sell stolen and counterfeit goods," said Michael Hanson, senior executive vice president for public affairs for RILA. "Retailers have seen a dramatic increase in organized retail crime in recent years, with career criminals targeting stores with alarming frequency and, in many cases, escalating levels of violence. This is because perpetrators, often organized and coordinated to target multiple retailers, are increasingly turning to online marketplaces to move large quantities of stolen merchandise."**