

Titan's Mantras For Safe Jewellery Shopping

Those who resist change, perish. Businesses that will embrace technological changes on a war footing will be the ones who will thrive and survive and get the first-mover advantage. Ever since the lockdown was imposed due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, consumers and businesses went into isolation for some months. Consumers were forced to change their mode of shopping at the speed of sound! The invisible and threatening virus has forced Indian retail jewellery businesses to understand the consumer psychographics and adapt and implement digital tools to ensure seamless and easy ways of online shopping.

As the restrictions have begun to lift in several parts of the country, **GJEPC Editorial Team** spoke to **AJOY CHAWLA, CEO of the Jewellery Division at Titan Co. Ltd.**, the largest jewellery brand in India, to find out the way technological innovation at its jewellery stores is setting examples of how businesses should be conducted in the months to come.



The Titan jewellery division has 475 stores across the country -- 340 stores for Tanishq, 93 for CaratLane, and 42 stores between Mia and Zoya. To restart operations, Ajoy Chawla, CEO of the Jewellery Division at Titan Co. Ltd., stated that the company made a detailed blueprint to keep the safety checks and balances in place beginning April. Here are some of the measures Titan took for a safe start:

A strong safety protocol had to be put in place and to ensure that we implemented the best practices not just at the retail level but also at our factories, and for our 80-90 vendors across the industry who operated from homes or units. Our aim was to protect people. We put together a 'Gold Standard' in safety and our objective was to be the safest stores across several towns – for our customers and employees.

But once the rules were set, we had to make sure that we deployed it accurately and it was important that the 20,000 people who work in our ecosystem, including karigars, store staff and vendors, were educated about the protocols through online training or tutorial videos in regional languages. Before reopening our stores, they were deep-cleansed and sanitised, and between May



and June, most stores opened up gradually depending on the containment-free zones.

Sales staff teams were grouped separately, so that if a member in Team A got Covid, the entire team would be quarantined and Team B would take over. We did have three cases of Covid among our staff, but luckily all are fine now.

Our entire field force of about 100 area business managers, who doubled up as safety 'inspectors', also audited the stores to ensure 100% compliance before giving a formal go-ahead to open them. A safety pledge is taken daily by all staff across our stores.

The pandemic can take months before we find a cure for it – so compliance and processes are critical, as is educating the staff. Apart from providing oximeters, UV boxes to sanitise paraphernalia, ultrasonic jewellery cleaning machines, and cashless transactions, though not mandatory, we are tracking every employee and customer's health parameters. This makes buyers feel completely safe in our stores.

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Fortunately, we have been working on our digital journey since the last few years, and the process has now been accelerated. We have invested in many areas like website, analytics, and a CRM tool. We also have a common loyalty programme across jewellery, watches, and eyewear with 18 million active customers with whom we stay in touch.

Titan has invested ₹ 100 crore in IT over a period of three years -- but we won't be able to gauge how much has been allocated to the jewellery division. Our digital teams are common to the entire company, and we have an analytics team, central call centre and customer care team.

We have introduced a lot of remote selling opportunities for the customers. Video calls that last an hour or so to help the customer to shortlist the pieces, which may then be magnified for better viewing. We have a virtual try-on facility as well. The Endless Aisle is an IT tool that displays all the inventory of our stores across the country -- for instance, it enables a customer who walks into a physical store in South India, to seek options from a store in the North, and perhaps select a piece from there. The shortlisted piece is then sent to the customer. Shortly, we will be launching a new app called Golden Harvest.

The real opportunity, as we see, lies in offline and online collaboration for a joint closure. Online selling for CaratLane and Tanishq was a small fraction of the total business, but that has now quadrupled. Also, typical ticket sizes that sold earlier were around ₹17,000, but now pieces tagged at ₹35,000 are also doing well.

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