

# Taking Fashion Online

## 把时尚带到线上

Club Elysée is a Swiss fashion e-tailer that is successfully making inroads into the highly competitive Chinese B2C market.

**The Bridge** talks to Pauline Houli, Chairwoman, of Club Elysée on how it managed to conquer the Middle Kingdom.

by **Mark Andrews**



Club Elysée 是瑞士的一家时尚电子零售商，在中国竞争激烈的 B2C 市场披荆斩棘创出一片天地。《桥》杂志采访了 Club Elysée 的主席 Pauline Houli 女士，探访她在中国市场取得成功的秘诀。

作者：**Mark Andrews**

**W**hat have been the keys to Club Elysée's success as an e-commerce company?

Clubelysee.com is a Swiss company with Swiss, French founders and investors. Despite having a collective 40 years luxury industry experience, we realised we needed to build a whole new organization and structure to build a successful e-commerce business in China.

We had a clear vision of how we wanted our business to look after five and 10 years. First, Club Elysée had to have a competitive advantage otherwise there would have been no point in taking on the challenge in one of the world's most competitive countries. So we found a business model and a method that enabled us to sell new and past collections of luxury goods at a much cheaper price than they normally retailed for in China.

Second, we made sure we were properly capitalised. When you start any business, you have more costs than revenue. In e-commerce start-ups, cash can go out very fast during the first years of operation, therefore we made a realistic forecast to weather this difficult stage.

**作** 为一家电子商务公司，Club Elysée成功的秘诀是什么？

Clubelysee.com是一家由来自瑞士、法国的创始人和投资人创建的公司。除了具有40年的奢侈品从业经验，我们还意识到需要设立一个全新的组织和架构来铸就在中国商业的成功。

我们对公司的五年后、十年后的前景很清晰。首先，Club Elysée必须要具备高度竞争力的优势，否则就不可能克服世界上最激烈的市场之一所带来的挑战。因此我们创立了可以保证在中国以极其优惠的价格销售当季和过季奢侈品的商业模式。

其次，我们确保理性的资本运作。刚开始一项生意的时候成本大于收益。在电子商务初创阶段，头几年的运营中难免陷入资金迅速耗尽灯枯的窘境，因此我们需要对这个艰难的阶段作出实际的预估。

Third, we recognised the need for having a good partner in order to have a good distribution channel and to be in phase with e-commerce in China. Finding the right partner in China is a real challenge. If you are not selective enough you might have serious issues in a country where as a foreign company you may have less legal recourse or experience. We recommend finding a Swiss or international partner who has operated in China for many years and knows the market very well.

### What was different about an e-commerce website in China to one in Europe?

We needed to have a strong IT team both in China and Europe to develop and maintain our platform. Our top priority is to give the best customer experience possible. This is important because the expectations of Chinese customers are higher than in Europe. There are also many more legal and technical requirements in China with building a website which is fast and reliable compared to Europe. Many websites are blocked in China; so we used a server which will not be blocked by the government and also has backups. Social media sites used by people in China are totally different than in other countries, and we needed to create successful alliances with KOL (Key Opinion Leaders) such as Chinese celebrities, media and women's leader groups that have a great influence on consumers.

### What do Swiss companies need to be aware of when trying to crack the e-commerce market in China?

Swiss companies can capitalize on the good image of Switzerland. Switzerland is seen as one of the most innovative countries in the world by Chinese people. They especially envy us for our lifestyle, scenery and clean environment.

最后，我们意识到，想要适应中国电子商务的节奏，我必须找到一个拥有分销渠道的合作伙伴。在中国要找一个合适的合作伙伴真是一大挑战：如果没有精挑细选，作为一家外资公司可能遇到严重的麻烦，因为在异国没有足够的法律资源和经验来解决困难。我们的建议是，找一个在中国市场已经运作多年、对中国市场非常熟练的瑞士企业或外资企业作为合作伙伴。

### 在中国做一个电子商务网站和在欧洲有什么区别？

我们需要一个强大的IT团队，不仅能够在中国也能在欧洲开发和维护我们的平台。我们的首要目标是给顾客最好的消费体验。这一点很重要，因为中国消费者的期待比欧洲消费者要高。在中国建一个又快又可靠的网站也需要相较于欧洲更多的法律和技术支持。中国政府封锁了很多网站，所以我们使用了不会被封锁而且有备份的服务。中国人惯用的社交媒体网站与世界上其他国家的人们截然不同，而且我们需要同当地意见领袖建立一个成功的同盟，例如中国的名流，媒体和女性领导团体，这些对我们目标消费者有强大影响力的人。

### 瑞士公司在攻克中国电子商务市场时需要注意什么？

瑞士企业应该充分利用自身国家的良好形象。在中国人眼里瑞士是最有创新能力的国家之一。他们尤其羡慕我们的生活方式，风景和环境。

对于瑞士企业来说，认清在他们行业成功的关

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Identifying the keys for success in their industry is of paramount importance for Swiss companies. Each year, I see many foreign companies fail in China because they forget to consider these basic rules. Companies also need to be prepared to operate in a very competitive and aggressive business environment in China, and Swiss companies can't expect to beat the competition if they don't adapt their structure and management accordingly. The most common mistake made by foreign multinationals is to manage the Chinese team as if they were back in Europe, and apply rules they have created for Switzerland which are totally irrelevant in China.

Also Swiss companies must have a real strategy for Chinese social media, such as Wechat, Weibo and QQ, that will help them to build their network and connect to the main actors in the sector. For brands, they have to tell a story in order to create an intimate connection with Chinese consumers. If you are an e-commerce platform, you must use Chinese social media to communicate about your products and services to provide your audience valuable information they will then share among their network. The bigger your presence is on social media, the bigger your chance of success. The competition is very fierce and you must always innovate and new competitors will appear much sooner in China than in Europe. You should expect that your products and services will be copied very fast.

I'd also recommend that It is sometimes better to start small to test and learn about the market rather than investing huge amounts of money upfront. Large multinationals such as Ebay and Uber failed in China because they wrongly believed that they could conquer with their name and capital. But if you don't get the essence of these unwritten rules, you can't be successful in China, no matter how long you are here.

For online businesses it is very important to recognise that internet culture is also different. For example, Europeans are willing to fill in a detailed form to register on a website, but you won't get users to do this in China. The online registration process must be as quick as possible.

### **Your business is retailing and you only do it online. Did you also consider retailing offline?**

To be an offline company needs a lot more cash and that was beyond us at the first stage of development, although we didn't set out to be only an online company. Leaving an offline capability to the second stage of development seemed more realistic. Also, we wouldn't have received as much funding from our investors if we were planning to open a store immediately, because they were much more interested in an e-commerce opportunity. Also, the Chinese government wants to promote online businesses so e-commerce companies can import products with a very low tax rate.

### **What have been some of your key challenges as a company and how have you overcome them?**

In the past there weren't so many services and products available online, but today almost everything is. That's why the most important thing is to fully understand the industry in which you will operate your business. Also, culture and lifestyle differ greatly from one country to another. Staff management is another key challenge in China. Cost inflation is high. Overheads and operational costs such as salaries are increasing very quickly compared with other countries in the world. Finally, the large Chinese e-commerce companies receive huge funding from state owned companies, so it's almost impossible to compete with them directly. ○

键因素至关重要。每一年我都见证了许多外资公司在中国的滑铁卢，因为他们忘记了考虑这些基本法则。公司还需要做好准备迎接一个极具竞争性和攻击性的商业环境。瑞士公司不能指望在相应的架构和管理上不作任何改变就能够打败对手，赢得市场。外资企业最常见的错误就是将瑞士的那一套企业管理模式生搬硬套到中国员工身上，并且在中国实行和中国国情毫不相容的瑞士规矩。

另外，瑞士企业必须要为中国的社交媒体制定详尽的策略，比如微信，微博和QQ，这些都能够帮助企业建立他们的人际网，与这个市场的主导人物取得联系。对于品牌而言，他们必须讲述一个品牌故事来同中国顾客建立紧密的联系。如果企业本身是一个电子商务的平台，就可以使用中国的社交媒体提供产品和服务。提供给观众的信息有价值，他们就会在自己的人际网络传播扩散。在社交媒体抛头露面越多，获得成功的几率就越大。在激烈的竞争中，必须一直保持创新精神，而且新的竞争对手在中国总是出现得比在欧洲要快得多。产品和服务很快被复制，对此要有心理准备。

我还建议瑞士企业最好刚开始小范围试验一下，了解中国市场的特性之后再开始大规模投资。Ebay和Uber这样的跨国大公司都在中国市场都碰了一鼻子灰，因为他们以为光凭自己的名气和资本就可以征服中国市场。但是如果没搞懂中国市场潜规则，不管在这里待了多久，都无法在中国取得成功。

电子商务中的网络文化的差异也应该引起重视。例如，欧洲人总是愿意为了注册一个网站填写很复杂的表单，但没有中国用户会这样做。网上注册必须越便捷越好。

### **贵公司的业务目前主要是零售，只在网上售卖，你会考虑线下售卖吗？**

线下销售需要大量的资金，这超出了我们第一阶段的发展计划，但我们并不会安于一做线上业务。将线下发展的势力保存到第二个发展阶段应该是更加明智的选择。而且，如果我们打算立即开一家线下零售店的话，我们就无法从投资人那里获得这么多的现金，因为他们对于电子商务的机会更感兴趣。并且，中国政府希望发展电子商务，因此电商能以非常低的税率进口商品。

### **贵公司面临的主要挑战是什么？你是怎么克服的呢？**

过去网上没有这么多的服务和产品，但是如今几乎所有的事物都可以在网上找到。这也是为什么将你要涉足的这个行业完完全全了解透彻是十分重要的。而且，不同的国家文化和生活方式都不尽相同。人员管理是在中国面临的另一大挑战。通货膨胀成本，管理费用和运营成本很高，例如薪资水平相较于世界上其他地区增长迅速。还有，大型中国电子商务公司从国有企业获得了数额庞大的资金，所以同他们正面交锋取胜的几率几乎为零。 ○