



Susanna Wong
黃思麗

YATA Chief Executive Officer
一田行政總裁

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Susanna Wong: quality and flexibility take modern Japanese lifestyle department store to new heights

黃思麗：崇優·靈活——重新詮釋日式生活百貨

Despite intense competition in the local retail industry, YATA continues to thrive rapidly. Three supermarkets were opened during the year and new stores are being planned for Kwai Fong and North Point. These, together with the Sha Tin store renovation due to complete in late 2018, are expected to bring sustained growth for the company. Chief Executive Officer Susanna Wong says that instead of following others in selling their products at cut prices, she emphasizes flexibility and quality because she believes that is the key to winning in a competitive market.

Industry on the move

Japanese goods are always much sought-after by the people of Hong Kong for their quality and variety. In the 1980s, Japanese department stores were everywhere in the city, but many of them were eventually forced out. So how does YATA, positioned as a modern Japanese lifestyle department store, manage to secure a firm footing in the market? Susanna said: "Japanese department stores used to operate

by gathering a variety of retailers in a large establishment, but times have changed and this approach to department stores was replaced by shopping malls long ago. We must therefore be bold to innovate; take the initiative in understanding customer needs and respond promptly to the changing market. Susanna thinks there is no shortcut to success, the only way is to always observe and listen to customers. "For example, if a

particular candy isn't selling well, you need to ask what has gone wrong? Is it on racks too high for kids to notice, or doesn't it meet consumer tastes? We need our frontline staff to observe and communicate with customers to get this information." As the Chinese idiom goes, 'Speed is the most valuable in war.' and the same applies to the retail industry. "If the situation does not improve after we relocate the product and reduce price, we need to

adjust the quantity and variety of our stock. Susanna thinks that in running a supermarket, one has to be responsive and decisive because many products have a limited shelf life. A product may expire if you do not act quickly enough."

Quality over price

Competition in the retail industry is fierce and price wars among industry players have a direct impact on profit. According to Susanna, YATA's operating strategy is not to engage in price wars but to make greater efforts in sourcing goods that consumers want and which are lacking in the market, so you can attract a group of discerning customers. She said: "Price reductions don't help build customer loyalty. Only by offering unique, quality products will customers have the incentive to make continuous patronage. That said, sometimes when others in the industry launch cut-throat price wars, we have no alternative but to make difficult decisions. All in all, we need to follow the trends and adapt to the changing circumstances."

Online shopping has grown rapidly in recent years. The YATA team recognized this and took steps to meet the challenge. Susanna said: "We don't plan to develop online shopping on a large scale at this stage because of the high logistics costs, but we find that our young customers do have a preference for online shopping so we have a strategic approach to attracting more customers to use our online shopping service, for example by making specific goods exclusively available from YATA's online store."

A flexible, efficient team

In the eyes of Susanna, the success of YATA comes from a team where everyone supports and helps each other and is also self-motivated, and this is evident even in just a frontline employee. When YATA has Shopping Days, Susanna often works together with the frontline staff, usually helping to bag at the cashier because this gives her a direct understanding of customer preferences. She remembered one time when there was a difficult customer: "She kept coming back asking for plastic bags to hold her refrigerated food. I asked her why she needed so many



Susanna thinks only quality products and services can build customer loyalty
一田百貨近年擴展迅速·黃思麗認為堅持提供優質產品和服務·才能建立顧客的忠誠度

of them and she started hurling abuse at me saying I did not bag her groceries properly so she needed more bags to rearrange her goods. It wasn't true and I felt very upset hearing her cursing. Fortunately, my colleagues stood up for me. At that moment, I truly appreciated the patience of all our frontline staff who can remain calm despite having to stand all day long."

Colleagues are willing to contribute because the company cares for them. Susanna said: "We insist on giving staff sufficient room for development so they feel this isn't just the business of a company but also their career, and this way they work hard." The company limits frontline staff to work 8.5 hours a day so they do not wear themselves out. It also provides a reasonable place for breaks so they can take as much rest as possible when they are off duty. "Sometimes, we treat staff with popular, seasonal fruits or specialty food. It may not be a big favour, but at least it represents the company's appreciation for staff for their contributions and hard work", she said.

Failure drives innovation

To Susanna, innovation comes at a cost. "For any new attempts, there's a chance of failure as well as success. Instead of blaming anyone in the team, you should treat failure as a learning opportunity. Only then can you encourage the whole team to innovate."

Leading a team of around 1,000, Susanna feels a heavy responsibility is rested on her. She follows an aphorism by the late American President Theodore Roosevelt as her management philosophy — "Keep your eyes on the stars, and your feet on the ground." "As management, it's important that we set our sights high, but not chase castles in the air."

Special back up

As a mother of two, Susanna feels blessed to have her family as strong support. Every weekend, she spends some time visiting YATA stores with her family, both to see how business is doing and buy groceries. She said her family is used to the routine and is even very dedicated to her work: "Whenever they see something new while shopping, they will call me right away to see if that can be an inspiration to my work." She joked that while she was a consultant in the retail industry before joining the Group, her husband is now her personal consultant. "My husband is seasoned in management, so whenever I run into problems, I talk to him and he gives me advice." At work, Susanna has good colleagues. Outside, she has the full support of her family. These are the most important driving force for her work and life.

本地零售業雖然競爭十分激烈，但一田百貨仍然迅速發展，今年更先後開設三間超市，並計劃進駐葵芳及北角區。加上明年尾沙田總店翻新工程竣工，業務持續向前發展。一田百貨行政總裁黃思麗認為，要跳出業界爭相減價求售的思維，以崇優、靈活反應快的管理，才能突破市場的限制。

不能被動的行業

香港人向來熱衷質優款多的日貨，八十年代日式百貨公司更開得成行成市，惟大部分最終都被市場淘汰。以現代日式生活百貨為定位的一田又如何能在市場站穩？「當日日資百貨的賣點，在於邀請外來的店舖加盟，但時移世易，現在早已被商場取代；因此我們一定要敢於創新，主動了解顧客需要，並因應市場變

化即時作出反應。」要做到上述要求，黃思麗認為沒有捷徑，只有不斷觀察和聆聽顧客需要：「例如一款糖果銷情平平，你就要先想想究竟哪裡出了問題？是貨品放得太高令小朋友看不到嗎？還是不合顧客口味？這一切都要靠前線同事觀察和與客人溝通。」所謂「兵貴神速」，零售行業同樣如是，「如果換了擺放位置，做過減價推廣促銷，情況亦未如理想，便要及早調節入貨的種類和數量。黃思麗坦言經營超市，反應一定要快和果斷，因為很多產品的保鮮期有限，稍一猶豫貨物便不能出售。」

以質優取勝 不打價格戰

零售百貨競爭激烈，同業之間的減價戰更直接影響企業的利潤。黃思麗表示一田的經營策略是盡量不參與「減價

戰」，寧願花精力發掘一些市場缺乏和顧客感興趣的產品，凝聚一班「崇優」的客群。「減價無助建立消費者的忠誠度，唯有你能夠為他們提供獨特而優質的產品，顧客才有意慾持續性光顧。當然，有時面對同行突然大幅『劈價』，我們也要果斷地作出一些艱難決定。總之要因勢而行，隨機應變。」

近年網上購物愈見盛行，一田的團隊亦看到此趨勢並作出部署。「一田暫時未會大規模發展網購，因為當中涉及大量物流成本計算，但我們發現一田的年輕客群確實較多選擇網購，所以會作出針對性策略，例如一些特定的產品只有在一田網店才能買到，藉此吸引更多消費者使用我們的網購服務。」

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作為管理層，我們要將目光放得高一點，可是千萬不要『離地』。

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Susanna cares about every frontline staff and the company is committed to providing a good working environment for all employees
黃思麗重視每一位前線同事，公司亦致力為員工創造一個良好的工作環境

The YATA Team embraces success and faces setbacks together
一同迎接成功，一起面對失敗，是一田百貨這個團隊的寫照



Susanna helps at YATA Shopping Days to back up frontline staff and understand consumer behaviour
每逢一田購物優惠日，黃思麗都會到門市幫忙，給予前線同事支持之餘，亦可親身了解顧客的購物習慣

靈活高效的團隊

在黃思麗眼中，一田的成功，源於擁有一支互相協力、自覺性甚高的團隊。即使是站在前線的一名普通同事，也能見到這份特質。黃思麗表示，每當舉行「一田購物優惠日」，自己都會落場與前線同事一起工作，通常她會選擇到收銀處協助入膠袋，因為可以直接觀察到客人的喜好，可是有次卻遇到一位女顧客刁難：「她來來回回，就是不斷問我拿雪袋，多要了幾次後，我便問她為何有此需要，之後她便對我破口大罵，說我貨物入袋入得太亂，才令她需要更多雪袋重新整理，但我自問收拾算很整齊，聽她這樣大聲責罵，心裡不是味兒，幸好我身旁的同事立刻替我解圍。此時我想到所有前線同事長時間站立工作，還要時刻保持著很高的情商，這份能耐其實很令人佩服。」

當然，同事願意用心付出，也是源於公司對他們有情。黃思麗表示：「我們堅持要給予同事足夠發揮空間，讓他們覺得這不只是公司的生意，也是自己的事業，大家自然會努力工作。」此外，公司安排前線同事每天工作8.5小時，

免他們過份勞累，亦會提供一個合理的休息空間，讓他們食飯時可以爭取時間休息。「有時當我們引入了一些暢銷的時令水果或特色食物，也會請每位同事食，雖然這不是甚麼大福利，但至少表達公司對同事的付出和辛勞的謝意。」

接受失敗 方能創新

黃思麗笑言，要團隊敢於創新，其實也要付出代價：「所有新嘗試，有可能會成功，亦有機會失敗。當遇上失敗，應該要視為團隊上下一次學習機會，而不是要怪責任何一個人，這樣才能鼓勵團隊敢於創新。」

帶領著一田百貨約1,000人的團隊，黃思麗自然任重道遠，她以美國已故總統羅斯福的一句格言作為其管理哲學：Keep your eyes on the stars, and your feet on the ground — 「作為管理層，我們要將目光放得高一點，可是千萬不要『離地』，這一點十分重要。」

「特別團隊」作後援

作為兩名孩子的母親，黃思麗慶幸得到家人的支持，成為她工作背後的重要團

隊 — 每逢週末，她與家人總必花一兩個小時，逛逛一田的分店，既為視察，也順道買些餸菜和日用品。黃思麗稱家人已很習慣這種生活模式，甚至對她的工作很著緊：「我的家人在逛商場時，每有新發現，也會立即致電，看看能否為我的工作帶來啟發。」她笑言加入集團前，是從事零售消費行業的顧問工作；今天她的角色改變了，丈夫則成為她的「私人顧問」：「我丈夫亦是一位資深的管理人員，每當我遇到困難時也會跟他傾訴，他也會給我一點意見。」工作上有一班好同事，工作以外亦有人全力支援，這兩個重要「團隊」，亦成為黃思麗工作和生活的最大原動力。



Family support gives the strongest impetus to Susanna's work
黃思麗坦言家人的支持，是她工作最大的原動力