

# Perfecting retail experiences

*Partly owned by global communications services group WPP, Smollan is an international retail solutions company focused on perfecting retail and shopper experiences for retailers and brand owners worldwide. Services on offer include leading solutions in field sales and retail execution, activation, and information and technology. Michael Power, Smollan's Chief Information Officer, highlights their recent acquisition of a stake in Roamler, a location-based crowd-sourcing app that has been discovered by some of the world's leading retail brands as a street level market research tool.*

Founded in 1931 in Johannesburg, Smollan initially concentrated predominantly on the South African market, providing field marketing, market intelligence, customer contact and brand activation services to many of the country's best-loved brands. In 2008, Smollan began expanding their business into international territories. "The partnership between Smollan and WPP, assisted in further accelerating the globalisation of the Smollan business", said Mr. Power. They are now active on 5 continents with a team of almost 60 000 employees.

WPP is the world's leading communication services group. The UK listed company had a market capitalisation of 16.4 billion GBP as of April 2014 and is at the forefront of a wealth of services. These include- to name but a few- advertising, branding & identity, public relations and a wealth of specialist communications. The company is active in over 111 countries and boasts more than 3000 offices as a result of its worldwide positioning and subsidiary holdings. WPP owns (in part or in full) over 400 companies, including names such as Millward Brown, JWT, Grey, Ogilvy & Mather and of course, Smollan.

Meanwhile Smollan's technology footprint has also considerably expanded and the company now firmly focuses on retail execution and all this entails, such as promotional activities, asset management, retail audits and proof-of-performance information collection. Behind the scenes, Smollan supports brands through active involvement in stock management (forecasting, ordering, returns processing) at DC and in store, as well as driving the introduction of new product innovations (listing and ranging, implementation of new planograms) from inception to the basket of the shopper.

Mr. Power says the acquisition of initially a 10% stake in Roamler adds



value for Smollan geographically, bolstering its European presence, but also in terms of further broadening its spectrum of services for retailers and brand owners. "Roamler has identified the strong demand for street-level market research," says Mr. Power. "The insight brands can gain could be crucial to their success and with such a willing, and competitive, mobile workforce, the potential is huge."

Some of the companies currently involved with the Roamler app include Heineken, Coca Cola and TomTom. The company was founded by Dutch entrepreneurs Martijn Nijhuis and Wiggert de Haan, reportedly following a market research project of theirs for a company that rents out advertising space at bus stops. Roamler today is an international community. People who sign up to Roamler download the Roamler app, which works by pinpointing their location to help give them the opportunity to fulfil tasks in their area. The initial tasks are quite simple to help affiliate users with the app. Following this, they are then given the chance to perform tasks for brands which give them the chance to begin to earn money. Examples could include





photographing a certain thing or site, highlighting a product's placing in a store or even simply buying a pint of beer and taking a picture of it. By increasing their XP (Experience Points) through these tasks more will eventually become available and subsequent (slightly) higher earning possibilities. The beauty of the app is that it can be beneficial for both individuals and companies. Whilst a brand can gain important street-level research findings, individuals can obviously earn some money and also learn new things.

With the strategic investment from Smollan, Roamler should be able to accelerate its growth and service offering. The plan is to launch Roamler in new countries, and increase the reach of retail audits building on Smollan's international network. Smollan has a particularly strong presence in South-East Asia as well as its native Africa, which should give Roamler the chance to gain exposure to fast-growing, emerging markets and sectors. On that note, Mr. Power points out that Roamler will be launched in South Africa soon, in a 50-50 joint venture between the two companies.

"We work well together; Roamler and Smollan have a similar company culture. Both are family owned, and have all the core values typical of a family business."

Mr. Power adds that he believes Smollan has positioned itself well in what in his view is still a relatively young industry. "We have plenty of growth potential as retail execution is consolidating, and a growing number of retailers and brand owners are starting to recognise the value of this service. To be successful, brand owners need visibility and control over how they execute their corporate strategies and tactics in the retail environment. And particularly for retailers with sales

on multiple continents, it can be a challenge to ensure the quality of in-store sales in all locations, and to streamline the collection of sales channel intelligence, for example. That's where Smollan comes in."



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