

CEO INSIGHTS | CHRISTOPHE CANN

Group Chief Executive Officer, Asia Pacific of Al-Futtaim Group



Christophe Cann is the group Chief Executive Officer, Asia Pacific of the Al-Futtaim Group conglomerate. He helms the Robinsons Group of Companies, which includes Robinsons, Royal Sporting House and Marks & Spencer. It also carries brands such as Zara, Massimo Dutti, Bebe and Ted Baker in its portfolio. Cann oversees all business strategies and the group's operations across Southeast Asia, which includes a \$1.3 billion sales turnover, 652 stores and 6,500 employees. Prior to his career at Al-Futtaim Group, Cann was the Deputy CEO of Galeries Lafayette, the high-end French department stores.

With technology fast becoming the most dynamic force in the retail industry and the Asian middle class is predicted to double to 1.32 billion by 2020¹, the region's consumer base and their expectations are changing rapidly. Retailers (and malls) must strive to emulate the speed, dynamism, customer centricity in Asia, and ultimately get innovative to attract their attention.

In this interview with Leadership Advisory Inc, Al-Futtaim Group Chief Executive Officer, Asia Pacific - Christophe Cann shares how the company is seeking not only to remain competitive but also to grow by hiring and developing the right talent to meet its customers' rising expectations. An edited transcript of the interview follows.

Leadership Advisory Inc: Prior to joining Al-Futtaim Group, you spent close to 20 years in Galeries Lafayette. What prompted you to join Al-Futtaim Group?

Christophe Cann: I was in Galeries Lafayette since 1994, so I have over 20 years of experience in retail running department stores, and I joined the Al Futtaim group in 2014. I moved to Al Futtaim as it was a wonderful opportunity to be based in Southeast Asia (SEA). I was excited about the growing retail landscape in SEA, the opportunity to run a department store in Singapore, and also the opportunity to run multiple standalone brands such as Ted Baker, Mango, Inditex brands.



Leadership Advisory Inc: Technology is evolving rapidly and disrupting other industries. How have these technologies changed your industry as a whole?

Christophe Cann: Technology such as ecommerce shopping has created more competition in the retail landscape for Robinsons. To keep up with this emerging trend, Robinsons is continually evolving and playing in the digital landscape. This includes a better website with more offerings, and to allow people to shop at Robinsons anytime of the day. The goal is providing people with wider shopping choices via omni-channel retail, be it online or offline shopping. And lastly, to attract the millennials of today, we are integrating social commerce with our platforms, so we can interact with our customers through a tighter community platform.

Leadership Advisory Inc: You mentioned previously that "The world is changing fast. You have to be very flexible... and go to where growth is." To what extent has the pace and breadth of change shaped your view of leadership?

Christophe Cann: Change is the only constant in our life, and to keep ourselves going in this dynamic retail industry, we are running transformation plans, because we simply cannot stick to the same formula to run the business, we have to be agile and change constantly. With that, we are investing in our people and our talents.



We are also conscious about hiring different types of talents. I believe that retail cannot be based on how we have run it in the past. Now, it is all about connecting with people, and understanding our customers through deeper analysis of data. It is about being there for them through different stages of their lives, that Robinsons will always help create meaningful memories for them.

Leadership Advisory Inc: One of the greatest challenges of operating a business in Asia is coping with diversity. This includes bridging differences in culture, language, religion, political systems, and economic development. How have you done it at Al-Futtaim Group?

Christophe Cann: Because everyone is different and we are a people industry, it is all about respecting the differences between each other and to understand each other better. I believed that if we take care of our staff, it will make them happy and in turn, that will make our customers happy. Our staff are truly our ambassadors. Hence, respect and collaboration are a big part of the Al Futtaim's core values, and I believe that with these values, we can make Al Futtaim a better place to be in.

Leadership Advisory Inc: What is the most pivotal moment in your career that you either learned from and that got you where you are?

Christophe Cann: The most pivotal moment was going from being a sales executive in Galeries Lafayette to becoming a sales director and then becoming a Deputy CEO of the brand. I have walked in different areas and levels of retail, and these experiences have made me more versatile, dynamic, and more hands-on in retail.

Leadership Advisory Inc: If you are not who you are today, who would you be?

Christophe Cann: I would have become an architect because I enjoy art very much. And I would love to build something beautiful for people.

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1. A Magnet for Retail | Tracking the expansion of retailers across Asia Pacific. Jones Lang LaSalle. (June, 2014).

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