

COVID-19: Interview with Olivier Ramel, CEO & Co-Founder of Kymono

Culture is a top priority for startups and large groups alike, and Kymono offers their clients an ever-evolving selection of products to ensure that culture, even in the most difficult times, is kept sacred. Maddyness spoke with Olivier Ramel, CEO and co-founder of Kymono to understand how the company is coping during the COVID-19 pandemic and what the future holds.

[Maddyness] What have been the biggest professional challenges during lockdown?

[Olivier] What we experienced during the lockdown was a very swift shift to very conservative management. Obviously, it's understandable and we not only support it, but we also had to do the same internally and find new ways to keep conducting business.

The biggest challenge at Kymono was to adapt to the current needs of our

clients while maintaining the business running. The unexpected ray of sunshine was the incredible work done by our HQ in shifting gears and immediately finding new products and alternatives for us to be able to cater to all of our clients' current needs (customisable masks for instance).

Was remote working a new thing for you and if so will you be adapting your work to allow more of it?

Working remotely for maybe two days, or even a week was not a new thing. However, working remotely without the possibility to leave and no foreseeable end in sight, well... that was definitely something new.

I can imagine it becoming a new reality, to both employers and employees will have to adapt. There are definitely different opportunities to see the bright side of life, especially as I'm answering these questions sitting by the beach in Lisbon with Francisco Breitenfeld Sá Dantas, Kymono's UK Country Manager.

How have you been keeping your employees happy?

We have a small team in the UK, and especially in times of uncertainty, the most important is communication and transparency. It has been rather challenging for everyone both personally and professionally, but for us, the most important is that we as a team are able to openly communicate and together adapt to all the challenges and changes.

I don't believe I have done anything special to keep them happy, but we have been working together to make sure we stay strong together.

As a leader, have you successfully managed your (and your teams) mental resilience through lockdown?

I'm incredibly lucky to have the team that I have because they are strong individuals with great ambitions and resilience. I truly believe that together we supported our way through the current situation. Personally, it wasn't easy, but every day you find small wins that make everything worth it.

Have you made any changes to your business and business model?

We started by furloughing the team, and some still are, until we are able to fully get back on track. In the short months that everything drastically changed we managed to make some big changes to streamline our costs, create alternative sources of revenue, and overall be more efficient with what we have. A plan that was in work for a while was forced into action by the virus, which was closing our beautiful showroom, but it opens opportunities to find better places after.

Another change, for which I am not only incredibly proud but also impressed, was made by our French team who managed to create a number of products, relevant to the current situation, that was in line with the values and culture of Kymono.

Our HQ team has been working tirelessly to make ends meet, and they have managed to exceed expectations at every step of the way. We created customisable organic masks, made the French Masked Heroes t-shirts from which all the proceeds went to help institutions fight the virus, and helped companies nurture their culture through this time of uncertainty. Overall all changes, as difficult as they might be, will have a positive outcome!

What have you implemented to stay competitive?

To stay competitive we created our new COVID catalogue while maintaining the sustainability/organic and style perspective. In addition to that, we launched our culture consulting offer to guide companies through their internal demons and problems, and make sure they come out even stronger!

Additionally, we also launched our drop-shipping offer, for our clients who want to create their own brands and sell worldwide.

Do you feel confident in your business post-COVID?

COVID-19 took us by surprise that's for sure. We were definitely not ready for what was to come, but luckily we were already in the process of changing the company to make it more agile.

What happened just allowed us to work through our changes faster, and that's why we believe that post-COVID Kymono will be even stronger than it was before.

Are there any changes that you think will help you?

In the midst of the chaos and fear of this world pandemic, we also saw people coming together and communities growing stronger than ever. Even if the first reaction was a conservative one, companies and people are starting to learn how to best deal with the vastly different situation. With that comes new ideas and opportunities to do things differently, which goes in line with our way of thinking.

Tell us about your future post-COVID?

For now, all we want to say about the post-COVID future is that there is a lot coming. We look forward to giving our clients new surprising opportunities! Stay tuned.

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