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Country Focus

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Avon's success helps raise standards

BEAUTY company Avon has achieved remarkable results since opening in Romania in 1997, both internally and from a wider business perspective. As a hugely successful global corporation, it has helped raise public awareness significantly while bringing the direct selling opportunity to even greater numbers of people.

The local cosmetics market is dynamic and growing, with the forecast optimistic despite current economic conditions. A 2008 IPSOS survey showed that seven out of 10 Romanian women between the ages of 16 and 69 had purchased an Avon product in the previous year.

The main drivers of growth are people's desire to improve their standard of living, continuous change in urban customer preferences and the increasing demand for personal care products in rural areas.

By understanding this change and the competitive environment, Avon has performed consistently well, remaining market leader (in sales value) since 2002.

Commercial director Razvan Diratian said, "The prognosis for the next few years is favourable based on the popularity of the direct selling channel for beauty products. Avon has helped reinforce this popular view through its sales Representatives by setting high standards for the Romanian direct selling industry and introducing innovative ways to enhance sales and service."

With over 120,000 Representatives it is the largest direct selling organisation in the country and its achievements have been widely recognised both internally by Avon and by external bodies. Most recently, Raluca Kisescu, Senior Manager, Commercial Marketing, was recognised as Marketer of the Year by the magazine The Marketer. In 2008 Business Woman magazine awarded former Country Manager Angela Cretu the title of Businesswoman of the Year.

Other accolades include reaching the list of Best 50 Companies in which to work and receiving a Silver Lion award for best social campaign following a groundbreaking programme in support of the Avon Breast Cancer Crusade (Direct Selling News Europe – January 2008), a global campaign in which Romania is an active participant. Over €900,000 has been raised and donated here since 2002, and just a few weeks ago (October 1st) the company opened the first modern oncology clinic in Timisoara in association with charity partner Oncohelp.

Innovation has been a common theme from the beginning, the company using cutting-edge technology to complement its traditional person-to-person operation and find new ways to improve service for Representatives and customers. Examples include ordering via mobile telephone (M-commerce), internet express home delivery within 30 hours to any part of the country and the first fragranced credit card in this part of Europe that includes breast cancer insurance.

The Avon Space blog is a unique initiative offering a fun and friendly forum in which consumers can ‘chat’ – over 43,000 site visits since launch in September 2008 and going strong.

While internet technology is vital, the strength of Avon – and indeed any other direct selling organisation – remains the relationship between Representative and customer. More than 90 per cent of Romanian women have seen at least one Avon brochure during the last year, and with two million customers seeing each three-weekly brochure it is probably the biggest single source of beauty information.

“Many factors have combined to make Avon Romania so successful and we are proud of all our people who have made this happen,” said Razvan. “Avon has the highest beauty image index among competitors, a complex but highly significant indicator based on criteria that define brand value from the customers’ perspective.”

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