

BUSINESS

Decathlon plans big expansion in China

French sporting goods retailer to set up innovative concept stores to attract consumers

By ZHONG NAN
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To ride the boom in China's sports market, Decathlon, a French sports equipment and sportswear manufacturer and retailer, plans to open 20 to 30 stores annually in China over the next two years, said its senior executives.

As Chinese consumers, especially the younger generation, have shown a growing passion for buying sports products, the Lille, France-headquartered group also plans to introduce a number of smaller and innovative concept stores, each around 1,000 square meters in size, in various Chinese cities in the coming years.

To further spread awareness of its brand, Decathlon launched several stores with a new brand identity in China as well as around the world this year, offering customers a new and immersive experience.

Barbara Coppola, CEO of Decathlon, said the China market plays a pivotal role in the company's development, and the group is committed to investing in the country.

Coppola noted that China's sports industry, with its significant growth, presents unparalleled opportunities for business expansion.

Government data showed that China's five-year (2021-25) extensive mass fitness program is helping the general public have improved access to physical fitness opportunities. Fitness facilities are fully available in counties, towns and villages. For communities, facilities are accessible within a 15-minute walk. Demand for such facilities is expected to rise further. The sports industry is expected to reach a valuation of 5 trillion yuan (\$690.84 billion) by 2025.

Currently, about 94 percent of Decathlon's products sold in China are made in the country. The retailer has plans to increase this to 100 percent soon.

"I am also impressed by the speed of digitization and its development in China, especially with innovative marketing methods such as TikTok (Douyin in China) and Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book). During my visit to China, I discovered how our Chinese colleagues interact with consumers and sell products online," she said.

With this year marking the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Chi-

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Barbara Coppola, CEO of Decathlon

555.11 billion yuan

value of trade between China and France last year, according to Customs data

na and France, Coppola said that Decathlon has been developing in China for decades and the country is distinguished as a major global market with extensive capabilities, encompassing industrial, logistical, product design and retail strengths.

"I think Decathlon can be a unique link to strengthen the relationship between the two countries. We can not only share innovations but also build more win-win business partnerships," she said.

Trade between China and France was worth 555.11 billion yuan in 2023, up 3.1 percent year-on-year. China's imports from France were worth 262.42 billion yuan, surging

10.9 percent year-on-year, statistics from the General Administration of Customs showed.

Supported by more than 101,000 employees globally, Decathlon has built a market presence in 78 countries and regions. It currently runs four factories, 11 intelligent manufacturing and sourcing centers, three logistics parks and over 200 physical stores in more than 100 cities across China.

Committed to long-term development in China, the company sees new growth opportunities as the country has a fairly strong sporting atmosphere where football and cycling are well promoted, said Steve Dykes, Decathlon's chief retail officer.

"Decathlon, as a multi-specialist sports brand, has always encouraged people to become more involved in sports, which is in line with the philosophy of sports promoted in China," said Dykes, adding the company thinks that products like bicycles and outdoor sports equipment have great growth potential in the Chinese market.

Similar views were expressed by Jiang Yiyi, deputy dean of the sport, leisure and tourism school of Beijing Sport University. "The Paris Olympics (from July 26 to Aug 11) will boost interest in niche sports across China and spur the dynamic growth of trend-driven sportswear for categories that have not yet captured significant market share."

Jiang said the Paris Olympics is set to rekindle consumer enthusiasm for sports, being the first Olympics after the COVID-19 restrictions had been lifted, and noted that this resurgence is expected to invigorate the sporting goods market.



A Decathlon employee checks the condition of a bicycle at a store in Beijing on May 1. Decathlon plans to open 20 to 30 stores annually in China over the next two years. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Side by side



A drone image shows the construction site of a highway expansion project in Jingjiang, Jiangsu province, last week. Builders with China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp completed installation of box girders of a major bridge, a milestone in the expansion project of the Pingchao-Guangling section of the Shanghai-Xi'an Expressway, which aims to enhance coastal-inland links. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Solar exec debunks ‘overcapacity’ claims

By ZHENG XIN
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China's initiatives in advancing photovoltaic imports and exports, along with green technology transfers, have been instrumental in driving the transition toward a more environmentally friendly world, said a solar power company executive.

With persistent emphasis on technological innovation, China has fostered a robust and competitive solar power market, facilitating rapid growth of the new energy industry at home and abroad, said Li Xiande, chairman of JinkoSolar Holding Co Ltd, the world's largest solar panel producer by shipments.

The global new energy industry is currently experiencing a scarcity of high-quality production capacity, rather than "overcapacity", Li said in response to recent claims that China's new energy sector has overcapacity, causing global price distortions.

"The high-quality production capacity is never enough, while the low-quality production capacity is always in surplus," he said.

"With prices and sales of goods determined by global market forces in the era of economic globalization, the theory (of overcapacity) is unfounded with no substantial evidence."

Li added that China's success in green transition is partly due to continuous efforts in technological innovation. JinkoSolar, as a major photovoltaic firm in China as well as on the global stage, has also been stepping up investment in research and development to ensure a robust and competitive market environment for the rapid growth of the new energy sector.

JinkoSolar announced in March

the launch of the first of its "Neo Green" modules to be produced with renewable energy. The N-type TOPCon Tiger Neo panels are produced at factories certified as "zero carbon", making it the first company in the industry with factories classified as such for ingot manufacturing, wafer cutting and cell and module manufacturing.

An analyst said China has been providing more choices to the global market and giving everyone equal opportunities to use green energy during the process of promoting the development of green energy worldwide.

"China's sufficient production capacity has helped other countries and regions around the world reduce their burden, in terms of production costs and technological development," said Ma Yinqiong, a senior analyst covering materials supply chains with global consultancy Rystad Energy.

While cost is the biggest bottleneck, especially for underdeveloped regions, China's raw material products have helped them reduce costs with faster green production capacity construction, she said.

The country's large-scale and standardized industrial technology has also helped developed countries and regions accelerate the process of greening, she added.

Li of JinkoSolar currently sees its cumulative shipments exceeding 250 gigawatts, with products sold in 190 countries. It has 12 production bases worldwide, three of which are overseas.

Operating on a global stage is crucial for JinkoSolar with its success hinging on globalization, as it allows for expanded market reach, diversified production bases and access to a broader talent pool, he said.

Globalization enables the scale and efficiency needed to lead in

technology, innovation and distribution, allowing industry leaders to tap into various markets, meet international demand and foster sustainable growth, making it indispensable for their operations and success, he said.

In response to the growing share of renewable energy capacity and the deployment of electric vehicles, JinkoSolar believes energy storage will be a leading technology for energy transition investments over the next three years.

It has been significantly ramping up its efforts in energy storage modalities, investing heavily in the development and deployment of advanced energy storage solutions to complement its robust photovoltaic portfolio.

According to the 2023 Reuters Events Energy Transition Insights report, energy storage is going to be a leading technology for energy transition investments in the coming three years.

Energy storage will become a priority technology during the 2024-26 period. While batteries currently dominate growth in the sector, several other promising alternatives will be deployed commercially in the coming years, it said.

By integrating energy storage with its solar technologies, JinkoSolar aims to optimize energy use and address the intermittency issues associated with solar power, making it a comprehensive provider of renewable energy solutions.

The company is exploring partnerships with leading technology firms and research institutions to drive innovation and efficiency in energy storage systems, including developing high-capacity batteries, improving storage efficiency and reducing costs, thus making energy storage more accessible and scalable.

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Only through harmonious coexistence can we ensure a shared future filled with peace, prosperity and happiness. Let's share our joy with the world around us, the blossom on the trees, the birds, the bees, all creatures, great and small.