



A Professional Standard for a tobacco product category specialist

Developed in partnership with industry standard development expert People 1st

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Product category specialists work as frontline retail employees within a duty free and travel retail environment, but have particular responsibilities to their specialist product category. They must be passionate about delivering a quality service that always aims to exceed customers' expectations and be the brand ambassador for the products they represent. They either can work for the duty-free and travel retail organisation, or may work directly for the supplier. Although in this instance their specialism is tobacco, they will be expected to have a base knowledge of other product categories in order to assist customers in the most effective way. They enjoy direct contact with customers from a variety of backgrounds, nationalities and cultures, and are motivated by maximising a sale and meeting / exceeding the travelling customer expectations. Using their excellent depth of product knowledge, an effective product category specialist will engage with customers providing information, support and guidance. The level of customer service experience will have an impact on maintaining and enhancing all aspects of customer loyalty such as, the duty free and travel retail environment, specific locations, retail operators and brands.

A product specialist should be aware that the mind-set of a travelling customer could be very different to that of someone shopping in the High Street. The stresses and strains of travelling through an airport, often under the added pressure of time, will require a degree of empathy and the ability to engage the customer and maximise the sale in a relaxed but time efficient manner. Maximising sales by utilising up and link selling techniques is a key competency for any product specialist. Due to legislative and regulatory requirements, elements of this standard may not be suitable for use in countries where the promotion of tobacco and tobacco products is restricted or prohibited.

This standard comprises of three levels of competence expected from a product category specialist and should be used in conjunction with the professional standard for a front line retail employee in a duty free and travel retail environment. Expansion of areas in the standard are included at the end of the document in the **range** section. Statements in the main body of the standard in bold link to these range statements.

This standard has been structured into three levels to which tobacco product category specialists can aspire:

Foundation level

The **foundation** level describes the range of competencies and values an employee should develop as part of the on-boarding and induction phases of employment. It would typically take up to three months to achieve.

Competent level

The **competent** level describes the range of competencies and values an employee should display as a fully functional member of the team, operating independently on a day-to-day basis whilst meeting organisational targets and conforming to regulatory requirements. It would typically take up to six months to achieve.

Outstanding level

The **outstanding** level describes the range of competencies and values an exceptional sales assistant will consistently display in the organisation. Outstanding employees are typically rising stars with ambition to excel in their role. It would typically take up to one year to achieve.

Structure of the standard:

This standard contains the competencies needed by a product category specialist, which have been split into key areas. Each area has three levels of competence, building from foundation to outstanding. As individuals progress from one level to the next they are expected to demonstrate higher levels of ability and commitment in each of the key areas for the role.

- **Product knowledge**

Knowing and understanding the full product range is a key competence for a tobacco specialist. Knowledge of the manufacturers and their brands and blends of the region, tobacco alternatives, accessories and the regulations in place regarding the display, promotion and sale of tobacco products are all key to a tobacco specialist's approach to customers and their ability to advise / influence a customer's decision to purchase. A tobacco specialist will use their knowledge and tailor recommendations for products, or alternatives, in a way that satisfies the customer and adheres to organisation / brand standards in compliance with local regulations.

- **Manufacturing and processing**

In order to effectively recommend and sell any tobacco a specialist requires the knowledge and understanding of how tobacco and associated products are made, including the key blends, the manufacturing process and how this differs for each type of tobacco by brand and region.

- **Product characteristics**

Understanding the product characteristics of tobacco is essential for a tobacco specialist, including local and international differences in blends, ownership and production of brands and customer expectations. The tobacco specialist will understand the products they have on sale and how to ascertain which ones best meet the customers' needs.

- **Product storage, quality and display**

All products on sale in the duty free and travel retail environment must be stored and transported securely between storage areas and the sales floor. Damages, breakages and issues with the quality and availability of stock are key areas which the tobacco specialist needs to know and understand to ensure maximum business performance.

- **Sales approach**

The key competencies of a tobacco specialist are to know and understand the products they are retailing. This, coupled with the ability to profile customers and adapt the sales approach lead to maximising the opportunities for sales. A good tobacco specialist will also realise that the customer relationship is key to current and future business and look for ways to establish and keep loyalty to the organisation and brands.

The following provide **guidance** on the **range** of detail that may be appropriate to cover for areas highlighted above in the body of the standard. Retail organisations/brands should ensure appropriate coverage of these areas

Manufacturers – examples could include:

- China Tobacco National Company (CNTC)
- Phillip Morrison International (PMI) / Altria
- British American Tobacco (BAT)
- Japan Tobacco International (JTI)
- Imperial Tobacco (ITG)
- Reynolds American
- Korea Tobacco and Ginseng Corporation (KT&G)
- Karelia
- Kings Tobacco International (KTI)

Blends

- Virginia
- American
- Oriental
- Specialist / other

Conditions that may affect product quality

- Humidity
- Temperature
- Pest infestations
- Rotation of stock items
- Damage of stock items
- Shelf life

Product specific information

- Make your own
 - Price per pack (PPP)
 - Potential number of sticks per can / bag / pack
 - Price comparison to factory/ready-made cigarettes
 - Price comparison to domestic (i.e. non duty free or travel retail) purchases
 - Common pack sizes
- Roll your own (RYO)
 - Price comparison to domestic (i.e. non duty free or travel retail) purchases
 - Available **accessories** and which to recommend to the adult customer depending on the tobacco purchased
- Cigarettes (Factory/Ready-made)
 - Pricing descriptor (Premium, Sub-premium, Value)
 - Width and size (Slim, Super slim, Ultra slim / King size, Queen size, Super Kings, 120s, Royals)

- Flavoured
- Capsules / Crushball
- Low ignition propensity (LIP)
- Low Side Stream (LSS)
- Price comparison to domestic (i.e. non duty free or travel retail) purchases
- Potential differences in local and international blend for the brand
- Cigars (Premium / Mass market)
 - Origin and resultant restrictions on importation
 - Characteristics (taste, smell, volume)
 - Blend
 - Ring gauge
 - Preparation required pre-smoke
 - Storage (Humidor) requirements
 - Local regulations regarding the smoking of tobacco, electronic cigarette and vaping products
- Pipe Tobacco, SNUs & Snuff
 - Snus
 - Snuff
 - Chewing tobacco
 - Pipe tobacco
- E-cigarettes, Vaping
 - E-cigarettes
 - Vaping (coil and tank)
 - Power and process for vaping
 - Available nicotine strengths, flavours and blends
 - Local regulation regarding the use of e-cigarettes and vaping
- Accessories
 - Lighters
 - Papers (weight, size, flavour – how these affect smoking quality)
 - Filters
 - Tubes
 - Tubing & Rolling machines
 - Humidors
 - Cigar Cutters