

Alejandro Betancourt Lopez On Hawkers Rise in the Eyewear Industry — and the Trends That Shaped Its Business Approach

By [ED](#) • 5 minute read

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Although Hawkers' line of affordable, high-quality sunglasses initially debuted in Spain roughly a decade ago, the company's market has since grown to include other countries.

In addition to a number of neighboring European nations, including France, Italy, Portugal, and Germany, Hawkers' international expansion has also brought its products to Colombia, Argentina, and Peru.

Currently, the brand is focusing on enhancing its presence in Mexico, according to Alejandro Betancourt Lopez, [an early investor](#) who today serves as Hawkers' president. Betancourt previously launched businesses such as asset management enterprise O'Hara Administration and ride-share service provider, Auto Travel.

"We've been very successful in Mexico," Betancourt says. "We are one of the leaders, and it's a country that, population-wise, is as big as almost half of Europe. We want to expand not only our digital presence, but our physical presence — in the next two years, we should be opening some stores there and offering optical services in different places in Mexico."

Within Hawkers' first few years in business, the vigorous response to its stylish, well-crafted sunglasses — made with lightweight, impact-resistant polycarbonate frames and polarized lenses that reduce glare and provide UV protection — earned the company \$78 million in income and allowed it to secure \$56 million in investor-based funding for future growth.

"When I joined Hawkers, we were a company of 40 people," Alejandro Betancourt Lopez says. "Today, we employ more than 500. We have about 80 stores alone in Spain. We have a huge wholesale division; and the online division of the company employs about 100 people. We have grown, not only in presence in different jurisdictions, but also in the amount of people we employ and provide services to."

Connecting With Customers

Hawkers was able to successfully enter the sunglasses market 10 years ago — which, on a global scale, has traditionally been dominated by a small group of high-end luxury brands, such as EssilorLuxottica and Kering, according to a Mordor Intelligence report — due in part to an inventive marketing campaign that highlighted the lack of competition and resulting product price inequality within the eyewear industry.

In a 2015 Kickstarter [campaign](#), its founders referred to the disparity as deeply unfair, and issued a request for allies to help Hawkers conquer the world — with a #HawkersRevolution hashtag — essentially positioning the company at the forefront of a retail uprising.

"There's now more sensitivity to recognize what is a fair price," [Alejandro Betancourt Lopez says](#). "There's a democratization of the eyewear industry, where you have the choice of picking something that is really high-end, but it doesn't have to be \$200. Any company doing business in this sector has to understand that. A strong brand doesn't mean you can ask for prices that don't make sense in regard to the real cost of the product."

Betancourt adds that some of Hawkers' initial promotional efforts, which centered on cost-effective social marketing venues such as Facebook — a communication platform that wasn't established in Europe at the time as it was in the U.S. — helped the company become one of the largest, [fastest-growing sunglasses brands](#) in the world.

"The Hawkers founders discovered the conversion rate was crazy," he says. "It was extremely inexpensive to get impressions on digital media; you'd spend \$100 on Facebook and get \$300 in revenue."

Social media posts helped direct potential customers to the company's website, where its products were available for purchase. Hawkers' site, within two years of the company's launch, generated approximately 90% of its sales, according to a 2016 TechCrunch article.

Hawkers' social media endeavors — which have ranged from stylish short films promoting a sunglasses collection designed with Latin trap artist Anuel AA to a college [campus-based brand ambassador program](#) involving students in several countries — played an integral role, according to Alejandro Betancourt Lopez, in distinguishing the company from its competitors.

"We were providing a good quality product at an affordable price, which was something different," he says. "In a market where, mostly, the big brands had a monopoly, Hawkers was able to penetrate it by providing an even better quality product, at a fraction of the cost of what was out there. Plus, it was cool, it was fresh — and we were doing something different than anybody else at the time with social media marketing. That approach totally disrupted the market; that innovation built the Hawkers' brand."

Ensuring Continued Consumer Interest and Value

In the years since Alejandro Betancourt Lopez first reached out to Hawkers' founders about possibly contributing funding to the company — after an investment manager he worked with told him about their innovative plans — both the organization and Betancourt's position have increased in size and scope.

"The leaders of the company have evolved into a more diverse role," he says. "We have to adapt to the different markets we are entering. We have to learn how to apply the tools and solutions we had when we were only a one-channel company, but — now that we're omnichannel, with a retail, wholesale, and online presence — at the same time, be efficient in the other channels we're building."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Hawkers pivoted its business model to allow for a larger percentage of its potential customer base spending more time at home.

"The pandemic was a big problem for us, as for many other companies," Alejandro Betancourt Lopez [shares](#). "Not many people were going outdoors and needing sunglasses, so we focused more on trying to develop new products for people using eyewear for their computers. The outcome of that experience is now we have a robust eyewear division, which is steadily growing — and the sunglasses division came back with force."

Despite the cost of living and other spending challenges consumers faced in the past year — such as globally escalated inflation, rampant in some

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