



Last year's buyers chose domestic goods for their competitive pricing

VITALY GIL

Goods driven by service sector

Year-end results show that trading organisations have seen success but more growth is possible — including in the service sector

By Yuri Chernyakevich

In advance of the World Ice Hockey Championship, being hosted by Minsk in May, preparations continue at full speed. As hospitable hosts, we want every guest to feel comfortable, so new sports buildings and hotels are being launched and English language signs installed across the capital.

The service sector is particularly active, explains first Deputy Trade Minister Artur Karpovich. Speaking at a recent press conference in Minsk, he noted that shop workers, and others in the public service sector, are being given foreign language

lessons. Of course, goods bearing championship emblems are on sale everywhere. Meanwhile, foreign visitors to dozens of Minsk shops are able to use a VAT refund system to reclaim their tax. Belarus is the first among CIS states to introduce such a system.

Trade figures for 2013 are up, for sales of foodstuffs and non-foods: most bear the recognised brand 'made in Belarus'. Naturally, more is always possible. Customer service can certainly be improved, with shop assistants playing their part to tell customers more about goods available, and any attractive discounts. Recent monitoring by the

Trade Ministry has shown that few shop assistants can communicate with foreign customers, even in the capital's largest shopping centres. In advance of a major world event, the problem is especially topical.

Just as our impression of a theatre begins with the coatroom, so are impressions of a country formed while shopping. A smile from a shop assistant may inspire a visitor to return again to Belarus, just as being ignored may inspire the opposite. 2014 is Belarus' Year of hospitality, with the aim of driving forward tourism: the 'golden goose'.

Service in the sphere of trade should reach the highest level, being

an axiom of modern life. According to American Express — the world's largest service corporation — most customers who receive bad shop service never return, resulting in loss of income. All this is perfectly understood by the Ministry for Trade, which is taking all measures to raise Belarusian customer service to meet world standards.

Lyudmila Petrakovskaya, an adviser in trade and services for the Trade Ministry, emphasises, "I agree that quality of customer service is sometimes lacking — both in our capital's supermarkets and in small regional shops. This occurs despite the quantity of shopping centres

growing annually. We know about this problem and are working on it, holding regular seminars and training sessions. We've been inviting foreign experts to share their expertise with our service sector workers and have seen progress over recent years."

The Ministry considers that it will take some time for the service sector in Belarus to reach European level, with shop assistants understanding that being affable is part of their job. Perhaps, as competition grows, it will inspire more rapid progress, ensuring that local and foreign customers receive friendly service.

With a view to the European market

By Andrey Fiodorov

Two dozen domestic enterprises represent Belarus at international Green Week exhibition, held in Berlin

Green Week is the largest world forum for the agriculture and food industry. Since 2008, Belarus has annually organised a stand, fea-



International Green Week exhibition in Berlin

turing Belgospishcheprom and the Ministry for Agriculture and Food. This year, a record 20 enterprises will present their production in Berlin, including Kommunarka, the Klimovichi Distillery, the Grodno Distillery and Slodych Confectionery Plant. The stand is covering a larger area than ever before as a result.

Green Week is an extremely popular trade fair for foodstuffs and alcoholic drinks within Germany, bringing together manufacturers from many countries, including Belarus. It offers the opportunity for us to enter the European market and promote our exports, while raising the profile of our enterprises.

Precious metals still in favour

By Andrey Fiodorov

National Bank sold nearly 400kg of gold bullion to public last year

In 2013, Belarus' main bank sold

almost 400kg of gold ingots, over 500kg of silver and more than 11kg of platinum to its customers. The most popular weights were 1, 5, 10 and 20g of gold, and silver in 10, 20, 50 and

100g bullions.

The National Bank and some commercial banks in Belarus have been selling gold since August 2001, adding silver and platinum in April 2005.

Trademark on wave of great popularity

By Sergey Ivanov

Belarusian products enjoy popularity across Russia

Belarusian brands are known across Russia as being of extremely high quality. Russians love our meat and dairy goods, our confectionery, footwear, clothes and furniture. Yandex enterprise has been working hard to promote and distribute Belarusian goods. Every week, it receives around 150,000 enquiries from people seeking out Belarusian produce online and from fairs.

Clothes are the most popular item, with Russians — especially Muscovites — most interested in our knitwear, underwear, dresses and suits. Furniture is the second biggest generator of income: especially Belarusian oak-made kitchen sets. Cosmetics come in third in terms of sales. Many customers desire information on branded stores selling Belarusian cosmetics in the main Russian cities.



Made in Belarus