

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Safilo CEO: Licensing is a means, not an end in itself

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Marion Cotillard wearing Dior So Real sunglasses

By SARAH JONES

NEW YORK A brand's decision to seek a license should be based on more than just financial goals, according to the CEO of Safilo.

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Rather than just lending a name in exchange for checks, a licensee's role in the partnership involves oversight and a true collaboration. A conversation at Luxury FirstLook 2017: Time for Luxury 2.0 on Jan. 18 delved into the relationship between brand and licensee, drawing from Safilo's experience producing and distributing eyewear for brands such as Christian Dior, Marc Jacobs and Max Mara.

"The theme behind Safilo is craftsmanship, and when it comes to licensing, we don't want to be a licensee, we want to be a brand steward who is a partner and works in the ecosystem of a licensor, as opposed to the old fashioned licensee who would push volumes and the licensor who would somehow try to control us desperately," said Luisa Delgado, CEO of Safilo Group. "Those times are over."

"I've actually discovered that in the modern world, licensing is just a means for a prestigious brand to play in a category that is highly technical when it comes to product and product development and manufacturing," she said. "You can't just do your glasses yourself. It doesn't work because glasses are more than an aesthetic vision, if you want, there's a lot of technicality to it."

"And our 2020 transformation...has been about rejiggering or reframing our capabilities to become brand builders as opposed to third party suppliers who distribute no matter how, which perhaps is the picture that some of you may have from the old fashioned licensing of the 80s or 90s."

Luxury Daily produced [Luxury FirstLook 2017: Time for Luxury 2.0](#)

To license or not to license

Safilo gets about two to three calls per week from brands wanting to discuss a licensing deal. This volume makes it impossible for the company to even meet with everyone, requiring a series of litmus tests to see if a brand is ripe for an eyewear deal.

In a potential licensor, Safilo wants to see a strong design personality and brand character, with a visual story that would translate into frames and lenses. Requests are also weeded out if a label seems more interested in adding an income line than making a thoughtful, strategic move into a new category.



Fendi eyewear

The licensing industry has evolved, with the excesses of the 1980s and 1990s making way for more selective, collaborative partnerships. This also means that Safilo is looking for companies that can relate to its philosophy and values, since a mutual trust is necessary to make the business relationship work.

Ms. Delgado compared licensing deals to a marriage that has a defined end. While both parties go into the commitment together, at the end of the term, they can walk away without saying anything.

For those that decide to become a licensor, organization and managerial skills are imperative for the partnership to be successful. Giving an example of negligence's impact, Ms. Delgado shared a story of a big brand that missed an entire season of eyewear because they did not approve the collection in time.

Eyewear's technical requirements mean about a year of product development before a collection is ready.

On the flip side, Jimmy Choo has been a particularly successful partnership for Safilo, stemming from a creative collaboration built on mutual respect.

A surprise hit for Jimmy Choo has been its optical frames, which have grown year-on-year for three years and which make up about half of its collections. While most fashion brands only do limited optical at the request of Safilo, Jimmy Choo has shown interest since the beginning, which Ms. Delgado attributes to the brand taking a deep look at who its customer is, recognizing that she would want daily prescription glasses to go with her shoes.



Jimmy Choo eyewear

While eyewear is often thought of as an entry-level category, Safilo has worked with brands to create products at varying price points, keeping its desired retail channels in mind as it designs. These may include brand boutiques, their franchisees, travel retail, department stores and select opticians.

For instance, for couturier Elie Saab, Safilo might make a pair of handmade frames that will only sell in his own boutiques.

Eying opportunities

Looking toward the future, Ms. Delgado sees technology playing a major role in eyewear.

Recently, Safilo embraced 3D printing technologies to produce the prototypes of its eyewear frames in record time.

By having the ability to quickly create 3D-printed models of potential eyewear designs, Safilo-licensed brands will be able to send new frames to market at a higher rate, a significant benefit due to the popularity of the eyewear category ([see story](#)).



Safilo prototypes created using a 3D printer

The eyewear maker has also launched its first wearable eyewear for its Smith brand, premiering the frames at the Consumer Electronics Show earlier this month.

Ms. Delgado also sees opportunities in customized eyewear, creating frames that enhance a person's natural facial asymmetry.

Technology is also being used to change the way in which Safilo markets and sells its eyewear. Last year the company worked with women's magazine Marie Claire to change the conversation around sunglasses.

#GetFramed put a spotlight on the accessory category poised for growth, communicating the idea that consumers should have frames to complement each type of outfit and that sunglasses should be bought with each new season along with other wardrobe updates. Creating a link between content and commerce, the program includes mobile integration, where consumers can virtually try on and purchase eyewear from Safilo licensed brands including Fendi and Givenchy ([see story](#)).

"Eyewear is an old industry, with all the beauty of it, but also with all of the limitations," Ms. Delgado said. "It's a relatively old-fashioned industry still. I think technology gives the opportunity to really modernize and simplify what we do."

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