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## Italian government aids country's beauty brands to break into US market

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*Me's lifting product line. Image credit: Mei*

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By MICKEY ALAM KHAN

Targeting the opportunities ahead, the Italian government has for the first time created a program geared to promoting Italian beauty brands entering the United States market.

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The government's Italian Trade Commission has introduced its Beauty Made in Italy campaign to push awareness, availability and excellence in Italian beauty products and brands making an incursion into the U.S. Nine Italian brands initially participated in the launch.

"The U.S. is one of the most sophisticated cosmetics markets with high levels of consolidation in channel, as well as high barriers to entry as the level of investment required here is quite high," said Meredith C. Kerekes, head of the U.S. beauty desk at the Italian Trade Agency. "It is also prestigious to achieve success in the U.S. market, which can be translated and applied to new entry in smaller markets if done correctly."



*Meredith C. Kerekes*

In this interview, Ms. Kerekes outlines how the Beauty Made In Italy campaign educates member Italian companies on the specific properties of the U.S. market through brand analyses, industry research, webinars, promotional initiatives and events, allowing them to make successful inroads.

The participating brands also work with a review board of beauty industry experts to gain an understanding of the U.S. market, consumers and retail channels. Please read on:

Why did the Italian Trade Commission choose this moment in time to debut the Beauty Made in Italy campaign?

Beauty has always been a strong sector in Italy for both domestic and international markets.

In fact, over 60 percent of the world's color cosmetics are manufactured in Italy. Because of the strength of the sector, as well as the American consumers' recent infatuation with indie beauty and discovering new brands, were all main motivations in launching this new program.

The Italian Trade Commission has long supported beauty brands through its standard suite of services, but with guidance and support from Cosmetica Italia [the national trade association for cosmetics in Italy] the Beauty Made in Italy program launched in 2017.



*Dibi Milano's Lift Creator line*

What is the key focus of the campaign? How does it work?

The program's mission is to promote the excellence, awareness and availability of Italian beauty products and brands to the US market and consumer.

This goal is realized by educating participating companies through brand analysis reports and webinars, by hosting promotional events and initiatives, and by creating a shared, cohesive brand and message of Italian beauty to the

American market.

The key focus is twofold: one, to reintroduce Italian beauty to the American market and consumer. Italian beauty products are not as top of mind as other countries currently, and much of our work will be to create a unified brand and message of the quality, innovation and craftsmanship that goes into each Made in Italy product.

We are in the process of seeding an Italian Beauty Council comprised of executives from Italian heritage brands, major beauty retailers, beauty professionals and other industry experts. These council members will provide mentorship and guidance for our businesses, as well as act as ambassadors of Italian beauty broadly.

Additionally, the U.S. is a very sophisticated beauty market and our other goal is to help Italian brands navigate best practices in how to launch in this market, who the major players are, what American consumers prefer, et cetera.



*Biosalis' Energizing Water product. Image credit: Biosalis*

In early 2018, we will launch our business support program with two distinct tracks to best serve Italian brands where they are.

The first, a Business Incubator, is for brands that are not yet operating in the U.S. and are seeking information on the market, and feedback on their brand. They receive a custom brand analysis completed by a panel of U.S. beauty industry experts; access to a resource library that includes webinars, white papers and industry news; featured placement on our Beauty Made in Italy Web site; and access to our U.S. Beauty Desk team who can answer questions and provide counsel.

This program is open to any Italian-incorporated beauty company for a 1,000-euro membership fee.

Our second track of the program is a Brand Accelerator. This program is for high potential Italian brands that already have U.S. distribution or ecommerce capabilities.

The goal of this program is to help these companies quickly scale their operations and to provide 360 wraparound support for them from our U.S. Beauty Desk team, mentorship from our Italian Beauty Council members, to highlight these brands as beacons for our other incubator companies, and to promote them broadly as exemplary examples of Italian beauty.

The focus of the Accelerator program is to generate promotional opportunities for these brands through beauty subscription box and retailer partnerships, public relations support and influencer marketing campaigns.

The Brand Accelerator program is application or invitation only, as companies must be able to meet rigorous criteria to be accepted.

What potential does the United States offer for beauty and cosmetics products?

North America is the world's second largest cosmetics market after Asia Pacific and a key focus for Italian beauty

brands.

However, the U.S. is also one of the most sophisticated cosmetics markets with high levels of consolidation in channel, as well as high barriers to entry as the level of investment required here is quite high. It is also prestigious to achieve success in the U.S. market, which can be translated and applied to new entry in smaller markets if done correctly.



*Kelamata's Honey Miel line. Image credit: Kelamata*

Is there a focus on certain cities within the U.S. or certain retail channels, outlets or brands?

Our work as a governmental agency is to help educate Italian companies on the particularities of the U.S. market little use of intermediaries, high marketing investments, et cetera as well as create opportunities to re-introduce Italian beauty to American consumers.

We meet the companies where they are and provide feedback and guidance on what is the best go-to-market strategy for each individual brand.

Therefore, there is no one-size-fits-all strategy. However, we do provide examples and case studies utilizing best practices so companies can adapt to their unique needs.

How did the commission choose the first batch of brands to promote?

The current portfolio of companies was recruited by our partner Cosmetica Italia, the national trade association for cosmetics firms in Italy.

As a governmental agency, however we serve all Italian beauty brands who are interested in learning more and have two distinct, yet similar programs to assist in their path to learning more about the US market and growing here.



*Herbatint's 5N hair color gel. Image credit: Herbatint*

Which Italian brands are participating in the campaign? And what type of products are they promoting?

Currently, we have around 35 brands participating in the program, which range in category from bath and body, to professional hair care, to color cosmetics, and skincare. A small subset of the participating brands is available on our Web site at [beautymadeinitaly.com](http://beautymadeinitaly.com).

Are these products positioned as premium or luxury? Who is the typical target for these brands and products?

The brands are across all categories and some are positioned in the luxury space, others more mass market, and some prestige or masstige. Each target would be different for each brand.

Our goal is help position Italian beauty brands and products as part of the consideration set, or top of mind for American consumers.

What makes Italian cosmetics different from, say, French, Japanese or American products?

Italians have been world leaders in the cosmetics sector for decades. Their innovation and cutting-edge technology in color cosmetics and hair care are unparalleled, which is why many American and French brands often manufacture their products in Italy. Their focus on product development, inventive packaging and natural formulations are world class. Where there is opportunity for growth is in brand creation and marketing.



*Evagarden's Matte lipstick. Image credit: Evagarden*

The key challenge in the U.S. is getting retail distribution. Is the Italian Trade Commission opening doors for the brands participating in the campaign or do they have to knock on department stores' doors themselves?

We strongly believe the best strategy is to empower and educate each company or brand on how to achieve success on its own terms, with support from agencies and partners like ITC.

We provide companies and brands with practical knowledge and training to pitch retail partners, as well as warm introductions for those deemed ready, but we do not sell the brands into stores on their behalf.

We also often recommend that companies and brands first approach this market through ecommerce and digital marketing efforts.

At this day and age, major retailers will rarely pioneer brands and want to see evidence of some traction and demand from consumers before bringing a brand on.

What is the ultimate goal of the campaign?

The ultimate goal is to reintroduce Italian beauty brands and products to the American market and consumer, to help facilitate a renaissance of Italian beauty here.

We want Americans to consider the excellence, innovation and art of Italian beauty craftsmanship when choosing their products, and our work is to ensure that Italian brands are top of mind, and well represented in the marketplace.