

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Local is a new kind of global: Dolce & Gabbana exec

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Dolce & Gabbana's runway opened with drones. Image credit: Dolce & Gabbana

By SARAH JONES

VENICE, Italy Italian label Dolce & Gabbana takes a traditional yet innovative approach to fashion, centering its brand on artisan tailoring while embracing technology and up-and-coming consumers.

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Speaking at the Financial Times Business of Luxury Summit on May 21, an executive from Dolce & Gabbana explained some of the brand's tactics, from its numerous fashion shows to its early millennial outreach. Contrasts including tradition and innovation are central to the brand, as the two namesake heads of the label find balance.

"Considering how we're doing, and what is going on at the moment in our company, I think it is the right way to do business," said Fabrizio Cardinali, chief operating officer of **Dolce & Gabbana**. "Because we want to be very close to our customers, we want to be very close to our audience.

"And this is why they are approachable for our customers, and that's the reason why we have been rolling out this strategy and we have been traveling all over the world doing shows and understanding what the people really want," he said. "So really local is the kind of new global."

Revolution of Dolce & Gabbana

Dolce & Gabbana is centered on tailoring and craftsmanship, working with artisans and establishing a school to train seamstresses. The brand also keeps its Italian heritage at its center, using the culture as a source of inspiration.

Separating it from many of its peers, the label is still run by co-founders Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana, creating a natural consistency over its 33 years.

Mr. Cardinali said that Dolce & Gabbana has never considered going public. The \$1.5 billion brand's private status affords it a level of independence that it would not have otherwise.

In recent years, Dolce & Gabbana has positioned itself at the high-end of the fashion industry. The label closed its diffusion D&G line in 2012, and it has morphed from a business-to-business to a direct-to-consumer distribution model.



Dolce & Gabbana has focused its business on direct to consumer. Image credit: Dolce & Gabbana

From Mr. Cardinali's perspective, it is less common today to see a brand thrive in the middle of the fashion industry, with the mass and high-end labels seeing more success.

In-person events are central to Dolce & Gabbana's strategy, as the brand travels the globe putting on about 40 runway shows per year. Over the years, it has amassed a core club of loyal clients through word of mouth who attend these spectacles.

Dolce & Gabbana also shows multiple couture, or Alta Moda and Alta Sartorialita, shows per year, showcasing handcrafted fashion.

Part of this consumer-centric strategy also revolves around omnichannel retail, which Dolce & Gabbana prefers to call "one channel."

Dolce & Gabbana's focus on technology has also led to innovative marketing efforts.

For instance, the brand sent drones down the runway carrying its Devotion handbags during its fall/winter 2018 show in February ([see story](#)). This tactic worked, leading to many pre-orders of the style.

This tech-friendly approach is not new. Back in 2009, Dolce & Gabbana was also one of the first to invite bloggers to sit in its front row.

Dolce & Gabbana has also been reaching out to millennials, making appeals to the generation early on.



Dolce & Gabbana, spring/summer 2017. Image credit: Dolce & Gabbana

The brand has cast millennial-aged models for its spring/summer 2017 campaign, as the luxury apparel industry continues to jockey for the demographics' market share.

Dolce & Gabbana's colorful and realistically styled campaign for spring/summer 2017 was photographed by Franco Pagetti in Capri, Italy. Each season, Dolce & Gabbana explores familial relationships, with the spring/summer effort featuring a cast of close knit friends ([see story](#)).

Controversial approach

Dolce & Gabbana has frequently attracted controversy. This is part of the brand's contrast, in which the sacred and

profane coexist.

For instance, Stefano Gabbana accused fashion Instagrammer @Diet_Prada of cyberbullying.

The @Diet_Prada handle posts criticism of the fashion industry and its stalwarts as well as calling attention to design and campaign rip-offs. The account, once ran by an anonymous figure within the fashion community, has more than 207,000 followers and no brand or designer is safe from its critical lens ([see story](#)).

Mr. Cardinali noted that the company does not manage the designer's account.

"It is part of the values since the beginning," Mr. Cardinali said. "The company of the contrast the black and white, the north and south. I don't manage Stefano Gabbana's Instagram account and altogether you can see that he himself is very spontaneous.

"And on the other side, the corporate one is a bit different," he said. "It is exactly the two opposite. At the end of the day, I think that we find a very nice balance."

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