

FRAGRANCE AND PERSONAL CARE

Italian beauty brands should blend authenticity, localization for US push

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Beauty Made in Italy is run by the Italian Trade Commission. Image credit: Beauty Made in Italy

By SARAH JONES

NEW YORK Despite being a major production hub for beauty goods, Italy has remained under-the-radar in the category, but a national initiative aims to bring the country's cosmetic makers to the forefront.

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During a panel discussion at the Italian Trade Commission, moderated by *Women's Wear Daily's* executive beauty editor Jenny B. Fine, speakers noted the differentiated approach to beauty in Italy, as well as the opportunities and challenges for Italian beauty brands attempting to enter the U.S. market. Through a mix of education and storytelling, European brands can position themselves to reach an American audience that is seeking out innovation and newness.

"The majority of the world actually makes their cosmetics in Italy," said Meredith Kerekes, head of the U.S. beauty desk at the [Italian Trade Commission](#), New York. "You may not realize that but if you look at the bottom of that mascara or your compact, you're going to see that it's most likely made in Italy, even if it's a French brand or an American brand.

"I think that...what really stands [Italian beauty] apart from a J-beauty or a K-beauty or a French beauty [is] it's intentional, it's glamorous and it's all about innovation and creativity," she said.

Beauty business

The panelists agreed that Italian producers have beauty and style ingrained in them, whether they are making fashion or food. This therefore naturally translates to the cosmetic and personal care sector.

Many beauty products from companies based outside of Italy are made in the country, taking advantage of its capabilities.

Vincent Longo, who has an eponymous makeup line, spoke of the Golden Triangle, an area of Italy centered on industry and innovation. Much of the research that goes into development and testing is tied to universities, backing up efforts with scholarly investigations.

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A post shared by Vincent Longo Cosmetics (@vincentlongocosmetics) on Apr 3, 2017 at 5:25am PDT

Instagram post from Vincent Longo Cosmetics

Hairstylist and haircare brand founder Rossano Ferretti noted that Italians have an appreciation for ingredients, whether they are cooking or making haircare. They also approach creation from a tailor-made perspective, and are willing to think outside of the box.

Mr. Longo noted that Italian producers are more willing to backtrack and return to the drawing board to make sure something is right.

Echoing this, Linda G. Levy, president of the Fragrance Foundation, noted that Italian brands seem more concerned with reaching a state of perfection. This may mean missing a deadline for a launch or not introducing a new product at all if it is not up to standards.

While the panelists agreed that made in Italy has a strong positioning and global potential in the personal care category, they noted that more needs to be done to market the nation as a beauty producer.

Ms. Kerekes said that Italy does not have the equivalent of the French conglomerates such as LVMH. The country's regional mindset also means that there is a less centralized made in Italy beauty brand.

Consumer education will be key. Brands should use social media to share their story and craftsmanship content.

Beauty Made in Italy hosted an influencer trip

Today, self-promotion is less expensive than it was mere decades ago, according to the panelists. Whereas brands used to have to pay for print ads to get their name in front of shoppers, today they can launch an Instagram account and an ecommerce site and start selling.

American approach

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.

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 ([see story](#)).

For European brands looking to enter the United States, Mr. Ferretti suggested they retain their authenticity and heritage while embracing the local culture.

One of the aspects that differentiates American shoppers from their European counterparts is their willingness to impulse buy and embrace innovation. Meanwhile, consumers from markets such as Italy or the United Kingdom tend to be more conservative.

With a diverse population, the United States can also be a testing ground for brands. For instance, success with the Latina market in the nation could bode well for a brand's ability to find an audience in South America, according to Ms. Levy.

For beauty brands, ecommerce distribution is now more sophisticated, and distribution centers are more open to taking on indie labels.

Outside of ecommerce, there are more bricks-and-mortar options for beauty brands. From indie retailers to smaller test buys from department stores, newer models allow for a less risky entrance into the market.

Beyond beauty, Italian-made goods continue to retain their positioning in the market, according to panelists from the 2017 Italian Luxury & Design Summit. From a fashion point-of-view, both Bally's Claudia Cividino and Max Mara's Cristian Notari have seen made in Italy appeal boost products' values or make consumers more comfortable purchasing ([see story](#)).

Compared to other nations that have heavily branded themselves, panelists noted that Italy's lack of national marketing has led it to fall under the radar.

"We are the most undiscovered quality country in the world," Mr. Ferretti said. "People started to discover us in the last 10, 15 years, but we were completely undiscovered because we are not a marketing country."