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Diadora Chairman: "Sustainability must be something you are, not something you do"

By Barbara Russ
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Diadora was born in 1948 as a mountain shoe producer. Since then, it has grown into an international player in the sports, lifestyle, and utility (safety) markets for shoes. Today, the brand is present in more than 60 countries across the world and is continuing its expansion thanks to a vast array of products belonging to three different categories: footwear and apparel, centered on sport performance lines - with a special focus on running, tennis and soccer - on fashion and style, with the high-end Heritage collection and an urban Sportswear line and safety. FashionUnited spoke to Enrico Moretti Polegato, Chairman of Diadora about his plans for competing in the highly competitive sports market, his plans for the German market, and the production line in his country.

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In the German market, you are present both with sportswear as well as with your utility lines. How do you summarize Diadora's positioning in Germany?

Sports is the brand identity of Diadora. Even though we have three different branches of activity, the new projects are always born from sports. In Germany, we want to be identified by sports, but we are present with all our three branches. In Sports, we are working in Running, Tennis, and Football.

The main driver of our growth, including Germany, is in Running, where we are present in the most important running sales points. We are still at the beginning of our strategy of expansion in the German market but we already see the first very positive sales results. In F/W 21 we will be present in 67 doors. And we are planning a significant growth for S/S 22. In Running, our identity is based on innovation, in particular, on our patented Blushield technology, a shoe that guarantees stability while running, which is good for pronators and supinators alike. Innovation is a constant process and we just launched a new running shoe called Volo, a lightweight running shoe.

In Sportswear, we are present in Germany in high-end doors, especially with our Heritage collection. Heritage is our luxury line and comprises re-editions of our historical sports shoes adapted into sportswear, but not as performance shoes.

In Safety, our goal is to be the most innovative safety brand in the world, because we want to contribute to the wellbeing of the worker through innovation. One of our main innovations is the Net Airbox, developed in collaboration with our sister company Geox, a breathing technology for safety shoes. Another very important new product is Glove Eco, an innovative safety shoe with sustainable features in every component. It will be sold worldwide through very selected retailers. We are growing consistently in the German-speaking markets with safety.

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How do you compete in the running market with giants like Nike and Adidas?

The competition forces us to be different. This approach pays in view of the excellent figures of the American market. The market is practically owned by a few big players, but our figures are growing by double digits every year. These performances are also due to our blend of authenticity in sports - we've been making sports shoes for the last 73 years - and our Italian style, as well as very close attention to our clients.

Diadora has recommissioned an old production facility in Caerano di San Marco (Treviso) that had been shut down for more than 15 years. A few years ago, we wrote that you wanted to produce 100.000 pairs of shoes in the revived factory. Did that plan work out?

Yes, we are now around five percent of our production Made in Italy. Our in-house production line includes the Glove Eco, and the most important heritage shoes made by Diadora. In the future, we will increase that percentage. A sister project to the re-shoring to Italy is near-shoring which we also want to focus on. The goal is to have a shorter supply chain.

In your Utility branch you now offer a new service of customization. Tell us more about that.

As part of the general digitalization strategy in B2C and B2B, in a few months, we will launch a new in-house e-commerce website, while a few weeks ago we offered our clients a new customization service, a personalization opportunity for safety apparel in Diadora Utility. Our clients can personalize online their uniform with their logo or a company image or whatever else they wish.

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With the Eco Glove, you've stepped foot onto the field of sustainability. Will you roll it out onto other models?

I want to roll out sustainability on the whole company, not only on the product. It has to be something you are and not something you do. As human beings, we consume. So, I believe we should act sustainably in both our personal and professional lives. What we can do is improve step by step just like in sport .. So far, as a company, we have acted in three channels. We've had the supply chain and each of our suppliers certified and audited by an independent entity called EcoVadis. Our headquarters too have been certified by EcoVadis, and awarded gold, meaning that we are among the top 5 percent of companies they audit.

We are also working on the products and after Glove Eco we will soon launch a sustainable version of our other iconic models. We have already renounced some materials that are not in line with our sustainability policy, namely kangaroo leather, which was used for soccer shoes. We have also substituted the packaging of our shoeboxes of the Heritage line with a special material made of excess seaweed from marine environments. And there is more to come in terms of sustainable products.

We are also working to make the company itself sustainable. We have abolished the use of plastics in the HQ, like bottles and cups and in the near future, the energy consumed in our headquarters will be 100 percent renewable.

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