

Advice to Foreigners Wanting to Invest in Italy

Interview with a Canadian entrepreneur who has done it successfully

Mr. Moti Biya you are a foreign businessman who came to Italy for education and then found interesting developments for your business.

Being a young entrepreneur I was initially looking to make my business more efficient and my clients happier. I was having a lot of success selling suits, but I wanted to add new product offerings for our clients.

We had momentum building up a base for us to sell to, but I found some of my clients asking me for more premium fabrics and craftsmanship. To be honest with you, I never thought of Italy until I went to visit my brother who was living in Paris at the time. While I was there visiting some friends I met a friend of his who happened to be from Florence. She was a fashion student, and it was natural for us to discuss menswear. While discussing my business she told me about the menswear industry in Florence and gave me a list of places that I should go see. One of the places was a leather school called *Scuola del Cuoio*. I went to visit the school and I was impressed with the artisan craftsmanship and traditional style. After taking a tour I found out they do courses and I met with a very charming lady name Benedetta who sold me on the idea of learning how quality leather goods were made. I signed up for the semester, called my team back home and went online to secure an apartment.

How did you develop your business idea?

IZOTTI was a brand we initially started at the beginning of 2017. It all started after a good friend of mine was completing his MBA program abroad in China. We are childhood friends and I have always had a reputation for wearing very stylish clothing. At that time I was working in a very corporate environment, and he introduced me to some suit makers in China. Initially I only made clothing for myself and a small circle of friends and coworkers. My goal was to provide a simple way for young men to buy finely tailored clothing for a reasonable price.

I've always been a man interested in business and sales, so naturally I had a very extensive network of friends and clients throughout my city, Toronto, and although we were very successful in selling locally, I felt that we could do more.

The fashion business was never my forte, but I think it helped that I was an outsider, and so able to see areas of the business that would benefit from innovation. Tailoring is a business that has been around for hundreds of years, but because it was so labor intensive and suits are a very personal purchase, it was hard to scale.

I thought I would develop some type of application that could measure clients from their phone or webcam. But it was difficult to attain consistent results because the sample sizes had to be so large and there were so many variables when capturing measurements: camera quality, distance from the camera, privacy concerns, not to mention our customers' confidence in using a web-based measurement system to purchase \$500 suits.

So I went on a tear, reading everything I could about html5 webcam access, application program interfaces, machine learning, etc. By chance I came across a documentation that was used for airport security and a method to measure using two picture profiles and then calculating volume. From there I worked my way backwards to adapt it for men's fashion and then gave it to my team and put together a prototype. It took a bit of trial and error but we got it to work and then we implemented it on our website. We've been rolling ever since.

Who helped you in the development, and how?

Countless people helped in the development: friends who let me make their suits even when our measurements were completely off, some of my professors from University of Toronto, my young and extremely ambitious development team (Lifted Solutions), my teachers at *Scuola del Cuoio*, and also committed Italian professionals.

What advice would you give to foreigners who come to Italy to invest?

I think there is a misconception internationally about Italy in that it is not friendly to business or that it's difficult to get things done. But my experience has been good. I think there are a lot of young, very talented, ambitious Italians who can make things happen. The team we have in Italy has been a great investment for the IZOTTI. My advice to anyone looking to invest in Italy is to give it a try. It has been a very welcoming place for business and the country still has huge reserves of untapped potential.

– by *MGI Vannucci e Associati*

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