



ITALY BY NUMBERS

ERMETE REALACCI and **DOMENICO STURABOTTI**
of the Symbola Foundation use data to paint a picture
of a surprising growth story, driven by creativity.
Brunswick's **MANUELA RAFAIANI** reports

Tired of being a poster child for Europe's slow growth and recession, Italy is using deep dives into hard data coupled with attractive presentations to tell a surprising growth story.

The Symbola Foundation, set up in 2005 to promote Italian quality, says the country is unjustly lumped in with the poorest performers in the European Union. Symbola Director Domenico Sturabotti says a media focus on bad news in Europe has made Italy a scapegoat, and overlooks the country's regional competitiveness in the face of incursions by China and the other BRIC countries.

"The picture being painted is of a country that can't make it," Sturabotti says. "I think of the 2005 cover of *Time* with Michelangelo's statue of David competing with the statue of one of the Chinese terracotta warriors. It was a metaphor of our weakness, a declaration of the lack of confidence in us. Instead, 10 years later, Italy is still here and, objectively, is doing better than before."

Since 1999, Italy has retained 71 percent of its export market, far better than most other industrialized countries in the region, including France, which managed to hold onto 61 percent, and the UK, which kept 55 percent.

That resilience owes a lot to the worldwide respect commanded by the "Made in Italy" brand, which implies not only quality but a strong emphasis

on stylish design. Ferrari, Vespa maker Piaggio, Olivetti, Versace and Fila are just a few of the influential exported brands exhibiting the classic Italian blend of form with function.

Beginning with Italy's reconstruction after World War II, observers have repeatedly applauded the country's small, locally rooted manufacturers of fashionable products imbued with high-quality functionality and workmanship. In 1997, US economist John Kenneth Galbraith called those manufacturing values Italy's "major advantage" against rising globalization.

PAOLO GENTILONI, Italy's Minister of Foreign Affairs, says it is an advantage that continues to the present day, and underlies the strength in exports documented by Symbola.

"It is no coincidence that within a moment of globalization and economic crisis, Italy remains one of the main exporter countries globally," Gentiloni says, "thanks to quality, innovation and a rich artistic and cultural heritage."

In addition to big names such as Ferrari, some say Italy's smaller brands are a source of untapped potential.

"I see Italy and its manufacturers making amazing products that sell largely in their home market but would find a place on shelves across the world," says columnist Tyler Brülé in a recent *Financial Times* article. A list of the best niche manufacturers, he says, would

include "slippers from South Tyrol, chopping boards from Piedmont, door handles from Veneto and paper products from Florence."

It is precisely the combination of tradition and innovation, designed form and elegant function, local roots and an international market, that is at the heart of Symbola's mission, says foundation President Ermete Realacci, also a member of the Italian Parliament.

"Italy holds an enormous place in the world because it folds economic needs in with a more human dimension, expressed through quality and beauty," Realacci says. "It knows how to focus on design even in traditional crafts and has learned to connect our know-how with new technologies."

"I have a thousand examples in mind, among them the extraordinary experience of Angelo Inglese, a tailor from Ginosola in Puglia who, with the help of the World Wide Web, exports his G. Inglese brand of traditional tailored products all over the world. Among his customers are Prince William and Japanese prime ministers."

Realacci is quick to point out, however, that the past is not a recipe for the future. A reputation for quality and design alone won't help the country's economy shake off its post-recession doldrums. "We can't emerge from this crisis as the same country that entered," he says. "It's impossible to put this perfect storm behind us if we do not change direction."

As part of that change, the country has made a major commitment to businesses focused on the environment. "More and more companies are seeing green investment as a way out of the crisis," says Realacci. "And they do it not because they have had an epiphany about environmental sensitivity, but because it is worthwhile to bet on the green economy, and cross innovation with the traditional quality and beauty of Made in Italy." →



EXPORT QUALITY

Italy ranks in the top three for more than 900 products, measured by trade surplus. Popular items include leather handbags, sunglasses and wine

Fifty-six percent of small-to-midsize businesses in Italy have at least one “green employee” whose role benefits the environment, compared to 36 percent of similar businesses in the UK and 30 percent in France, according to a European Commission report.

While economic challenges remain, *GreenItaly 2014*, a joint report from Symbola and the Italian Chamber of Commerce, offers a string of positive statistics showing how the country’s push for innovation and investment in green technology is beginning to drive economic growth. Since 2008, more than 340,000 companies – nearly 22 percent of all Italian businesses – have invested in the environment, adding €101 billion (\$108 billion) to the national economy, which had a \$2.129 trillion GDP in 2014. Nearly two-thirds of new jobs in 2014 were tied to environmental investments.

PART OF SYMBOLA’S mission is to encourage the old and new aspects of the Italian economy to see one another as allies and to show the world the close relationship between the best aspects of the country’s culture – its “qualities,” they like to say – and its land and people.

“Ferrari could not have been created anywhere but Maranello,” Realacci says. “From there, its story has conquered the world with its mythical narrative. As [author] Paul Auster said, ‘Stories happen only to those who are able to tell them.’”

Symbola tells Italy’s story with official statistics augmented by data from Italian



ERMETE REALACCI

Ermete Realacci is the President of Symbola. He is also President of the VIII Environmental Commission of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, and has been a Member of Parliament since 2001.



DOMENICO STURABOTTI

A landscape architect by training, Domenico Sturabotti was named Director of Symbola in 2007.

SYMBOLA

The Symbola Foundation promotes the Made in Italy brand. The word comes from ancient Greek and refers to two parts, often of a medallion, that join together into a whole. The foundation aims to combine the values of tradition with innovation, of regional roots with global competition, and to reconcile development with concerns for the environment.

companies and international sources, which they interpret and frame with infographics and engaging design. The integrity of the data is critical to the success of the foundation’s message.

“It is essential to be able to compare our data against reliable, international standards,” Sturabotti says, “and often, official sources lack the data necessary for a deep evaluation of a particular area. So when, for example, we want to know how much creativity is exported from Italy, we can turn to Gucci, Armani and other companies.”

First, Symbola set out to change the conversation within the business community and spread the word about Italy’s strengths, particularly in the creative industries. Next, they addressed national political and public forums and created what the foundation refers to as “a lobby for quality, and a network of expertise, relationships and exchanges” that could help build on the past and create success in the future.

Sturabotti says that while the foundation’s initial target audience was fellow Italians, telling them the story of their country’s success and mapping its roads to recovery, “Now, we want to tell the world about that Italy.”

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Statistics: www.symbola.net



ENVIRONMENT

One of most eco-efficient EU countries, Italy emits 104 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide for every million euros of GDP, less than Germany’s 143 tonnes and the UK’s 130 tonnes



BRAND POWER

Ferrari was named the world’s most powerful brand in 2015 by research company Brand Finance, topping Apple and Google. It was one of only 11 brands to earn an AAA+ rating



EXPORT STRENGTH

With a trade surplus of \$122 billion in 2013, Italy ranks in the top five of the world’s nations, below Germany and China, but above the UK, France and US