

THE INTERVIEW

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Salumificio Sorrentino taking over the world

In the last 20 years, foreign sales of the Abruzzo-based firm have sharply increased. By virtue of the family at the helm of the company and the dynamism of the export manager, Americo Liberato. Who recalls the milestones of a success story.

Maybe it's due to the rare combination of first and last name, or to the astonishing ability to establish a direct connection with whomever he meets, the fact remains that it is impossible not to take a liking to Americo Liberato. Born and raised in Abruzzo, Liberato has been export manager for 20 years at Salumificio Sorrentino, and he has been involved in the phenomenal development of the company overseas.

The first question is a must: can you tell us about your career? And how did the collaboration with Salumificio Sorrentino come about?

It all started in high school: Martino Sorrentino's class was next to mine. When I was attending the last year, he was in his third year, hence we had a lot of opportunities to see each other and chat, and get to know each other better. When I was about to finish my studies in Economics and business, we met and a few weeks later he called me to offer me a job.

So you were new to the delis world...

Absolutely. As a matter of fact, when I first started working in the company in November 2003, I had to work my way up the ladder. I worked in the credit department, as an agents manager, in the sales department...

What kind of phase was the Salumificio going through?

It was going through a delicate moment, one that almost all companies are met with at a certain time: that is to try and make a qualitative leap from a small family-run company to a more structured firm. A transition that we have worked on since the year I arrived at the Salumificio in 2003 up until 2010-2011, when the path we had to take on became clearer.

That is?

As we all know, those were the years after the great crisis of 2008, followed by the crisis of the Italian sovereign debt crisis, with the measures of the government Monti, in 2011. Well, in that exact context, the company realized that export could and should be the cornerstone to face the future. So, one day, they called me in and said: "We absolutely have to strengthen our export, do you want to take care of it?". Even if I was not familiar at all with business negotiations and such dynamics, I couldn't decline.

This was the start of a 'second life' at the company.

Up until that very moment, I had only been on desk duty. It had been a formative period, actually, which has been extremely helpful. From that moment on I was busy with meetings around the world, international trade shows, and frequent trips overseas.

You have been working in Sorrentino since 2003: what does it mean to spend 20 years in a family-run SME?

It's a challenge and it's not for everyone. Personally, I have always found it more exciting to be part of a 'measurable' project, working hard every day.

Which are the strengths and weaknesses of such a business?

In family-run businesses the mood among employees affects the environment and daily work, for sure. As for the great strength, there's definitely a more rapid decision making

and the possibility to interact with the top management on a daily basis.

What can you tell us about the Sorrentino family, how has the relationship with them evolved through the years?

The Sorrentino family has always believed in me, maybe because I have always given my all. They are hard workers, nothing is done by chance. There has always been an ongoing dialogue, a direct relationship, characterized by easy and rapid questions and answers. They have granted me maximum freedom of expression, without limits.

The million-dollar question: what's the secret to selling abroad?

First of all, there is not only one right answer. Many are the aspects coming into play: the company's size, the sector where it operates, the products' range, the geographical location, and the management's mindset.

How much did the export of Sorrentino account for when you first started and how much is it worth now?

150,000 euro at the beginning, whereas now it amounts to approximately to 9 million euro, accounting for 30% of the turnover.

Let's get back to 2011-2012 when your adventure as an export manager started.

Actually, my first major debut abroad happened in 2009, during Anuga in Cologne. The first trip in 2012 to Beirut, Lebanon. I told myself: "I've got to start somewhere!". I packed my bags and there I was in Fiumicino.

And how was it?

Once I got there I immediately understood that the path would have been long and winding. Yet at the end I came back home bearing a rich order of delis. And that's where the Americo export manager was born.

How would you sum up your vision that led to the results achieved in these years?

Having and maintaining an underlying authenticity, always contributing with far-sightedness and ideas, in order to keep everything in balance. Three adjectives for my vision: speed, simplicity, and clear operations. Definite and quick answers, easy and direct messages.

In a nutshell, could we say that the main challenge consisted in finding an identity abroad?

Right, an identity that belonged to Sorrentino and none else. To find it, we had to analyze the company and understand how we could stand out from the competitors that had been present on such markets for many years.

Travelling is at the heart of many of your stories, what does it mean to you?

I feel lucky I am able to travel, not so much for the trip itself, but rather for the exchange, the discovery of our limits that allows us to work on and develop our potential. Furthermore, since I have been travelling around the world, I fell in love with Italy all over again. I love my country and I feel grateful to be born in Italy: nothing can beat our imagination, the food, our smiles, and our zest for life. I have extensively reconsidered the Italian population, its commitment and its ability to give the best in hard times. It's what makes us unique. And we should be proud of it.



Roberto Maccio (left) with the Export team: Gregory D'Ulisse, Americo Liberato, Luca Olivieri and Donato Di Rado



The expansion of the production site of Mozzagrogna (CH)



Il Salumificio Sorrentino alla conquista del mondo

Negli ultimi 20 anni le vendite all'estero di Salumificio Sorrentino sono cresciute esponenzialmente. Merito della famiglia alla guida dell'azienda abruzzese e del dinamismo dell'export manager, Americo Liberato. Che ci racconta le tappe di una storia di successo.

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