



# Brand Strategy and Ideas for the Relaunch of Benetton

---

By Geeta Sundaram



[www.peripateticperch.com](http://www.peripateticperch.com)

## **Brand Strategy and Ideas for Benetton Relaunch**

### **Background**

- Benetton, a leading manufacturer of readymade apparel in the smart-casuals category worldwide is facing tough competition and falling sales
- In operation since 1965, according to the [company website](#)
- Owned by the Benetton family, the company was first listed in Milan in 1986, though it was recently delisted and taken private in 2012
- Benetton revenue from sales and net profit has been falling for several years, most pronouncedly since the Covid-19 pandemic
- Benetton's gross revenue from sales in 2023 was €1.11 billion, net sales of €898 million and net profit of €10 million which is a huge fall from the previous year, according to an [Integrated Report 2023](#) on their company website. The amount gone to something called public administration has meanwhile shot up 14-fold over the previous year, which makes little sense
- This, when the company had earnings that were much better in 2006 of €1.9 billion and net profit of €125 million according to their [company website](#)
- According to [this article](#) from Reuters, Benetton has been struggling to grow its revenue and stem losses
- It has two fashion brands, Benetton and Sisley, a premium fashion brand it acquired in 1974
- Benetton's largest markets seem to be Italy and Europe, especially Eastern Europe, followed by Asia, US and the rest of the world
- Benetton seems to be facing pressure from fast fashion brands such as Zara, H&M and Uniqlo in the segment in which it operates for the past decade and more
- When I checked Benetton's pricing in the UK a couple of years ago, I found that it is priced slightly higher than Zara and H&M
- Clearly the Benetton brand needs to tweak its brand strategy in order to justify its premium pricing and its price-value equation

### **Objective for Benetton brand refresh/relaunch**

Establish once again Benetton's superiority among fashion brands in the smart-casuals segment in order to justify its higher pricing.

### **Benetton's strengths**

- Benetton's decades-long heritage and success as a fashion brand around the world

- Its range of colourful smart casual clothing for men, women and children that offer great value for money in the sense that the apparel is of durable quality
- The fact that Benetton makes its own yarn and textiles gives the company flexibility as well as control over fabric quality and costs
- For most of the Benetton range of merchandise, the styling is classical and timeless while staying contemporary
- Unfortunately, some of this might be working against the brand in comparison with Zara and H&M who capitalize on new and changing styles that define fast-fashion
- Benetton's Italian credentials should also help to give the brand an edge in fashion apparel though it is seen as an international brand
- Benetton's universal brand appeal of human rights, equality, peace and justice that remains strong and even more relevant in the world in today's context.

### **Competition for Benetton**

As I have already said, the biggest competition for Benetton are the fast-fashion brands such as Zara and H&M as well as Uniqlo because of their rapidly changing styles and their competitive pricing.

In certain markets, Benetton could also be facing competition from brands such as M&S and GAP.

While Benetton is struggling to grow its revenue and net income, competitors such as Zara and H&M are doing rather well. For [2024](#), H&M posted net sales of €20 billion and net profit of €1.03 billion (approx).

Zara meanwhile posted net sales of €27.7 billion, a growth of 6.6% over 2023, and profit before tax of €5.4 billion.

### **Who is the target customer for Benetton?**

I don't have any data or research to corroborate my view at the moment, but I think the arrival of fast-fashion brands such as Zara, H&M and even Uniqlo decades ago has disrupted the industry, especially in the smart-casuals category

Young, urban and affluent Gen Z, Gen Alpha and even younger millennials are all buyers of fast-fashion brands. The latest and rapidly changing styles seem to appeal to the younger customer cohorts, also because they are competitively priced.

However, I think it might be possible for Benetton to carve out a market for itself within these younger customer cohorts as well as the older Gen-X group who also wear Benetton and identify with the brand. And I think

they can do this by tweaking their merchandise a little, at no or little cost to the company.

Ideally, Benetton ought to target Gen-X and older millennials who would be regular customers of Benetton, and attract new buyers from the younger millennials and Gen-Z cohorts. The idea is to address young and older working adults who need smart and stylish casuals that they can also wear to work and for an outing. In other words, smart and stylish business casuals that they would love to wear to office, for a business lunch and to the golf course or a cocktail party.

### **Implications for the Benetton product merchandise**

- Benetton would have to up the style quotient of its smart-casuals clothing and tone down the casual dimension a tad
- In any case, distressed, stonewashed and cargo jeans and pants would be a serious no-no for a brand like Benetton
- Benetton should continue to make its own textiles and knits and should not give up this part of their operations in order to cut costs, as it gives the Benetton product and brand a distinct competitive advantage
- Benetton ought to stay focused on contemporary and classic styling and invest in a good team of fashion designers and creative director in-house
- Benetton ought to invest in recycling and in the circular economy, while also investing in cleaner technology that is more energy and water efficient
- Benetton stores around the world ought to have a collection box for old garments that customers can drop off, which are used to create recycled fabric and clothing

Overall, in type of merchandise, I recommend that Benetton shift from:

**Smart-casuals**  **Smart and stylish business casuals**

### **Strategy for building the Benetton brand anew**

- No reason to give up on Benetton's brand strategy and positioning of United Colours of Benetton which has served the brand well for decades and is even more relevant in today's context
- Tweak and modify Benetton merchandise to give the brand an advantage over competition and to justify higher prices

- Create and shift to new fashion segment of smart and stylish business casuals for young working adults
- Continue to manufacture textiles and knits on a captive basis
- Double-down on United Colours of Benetton brand positioning through new communication that highlights the brand's strengths and core values
- Redo the company website as it currently offers little-to-no information on the company, the brands and the financial performance of Benetton
- Add the circularity and sustainability dimensions to the Benetton brand

### **Focus on rebuilding the Benetton brand**

In an attempt to turn the company and the brand around, it would be tempting to cut costs across the board. I think greater care and thought needs to be given to where and how costs are cut. For example, there might be a need to cut down the numbers of stores and shutter many, and Benetton management needs to consider which outlets to close and where they might need to open new ones.

On the integrated manufacturing of fabric and ready-to-wear garments, Benetton ought to retain this and in fact, add the recycling and upcycling aspect to their manufacturing.

I would suggest that Benetton cut costs in non-core areas such as fashion shows, large publicity events and shows, car racing, and other such activities that are not essential to the core business of Benetton. Until such time as Benetton revives its business and its customer base, these can be dispensed with.

### **Brand positioning of Benetton**

The united colours of Benetton that believes in unity, diversity and equality for all of humanity.

### **Brand benefit/promise of Benetton**

Benetton, with its colourful and stylish range of business casuals, allows you to express yourself and connect with the world on issues that matter.

### **Rationale**

- A range of stylish and smart business clothing that you can just about wear anywhere
- Classical styling and durable quality clothing
- Benetton's integrated manufacturing and design capabilities

- Benetton's core values of respect for human rights, equality, unity and peace
- Benetton's efforts in recycling/upcycling textiles and clothing and in using clean technology
- An 80-year track record of leadership in the smart-casuals fashion segment around the world
- A worldwide network of over 3000 retail stores across several countries around the world

### **Tone and manner**

- Upbeat and confident
- Full of colour
- Champion of values that unite the world
- Smart and stylish

### **Creative strategy or how communication will strengthen the Benetton brand**

As I have said, there is no need for Benetton to change its main brand positioning or strategy of United Colours of Benetton.

However, as the brand seems to be suffering falling sales and profits, there is a need to rethink the target customer and the merchandise. This too requires a slight tweak with no major changes: shift from smart casuals to smart and stylish business casuals.

The other area that needs rethink is the brand communication. Benetton needs to retell its story to customers in a refreshing new way, so as to generate interest in the brand and its apparel all over again. The same United Colours of Benetton story with its focus on racial diversity, equality, peace, unity and justice needs to be communicated from a new angle.

In an age of heightened geopolitical tensions and with societies more polarized than ever before, Benetton has a message of great importance and relevance today. This needs to be communicated through a campaign that is based on a deeper thought than mere images. Years of advertising for Benetton being directed by Italian photographer, Oliviero Toscani have run their course and it's time to reconnect with Benetton's target customer through an idea and thought that goes beyond clothes, to the kind of person who wears Benetton. By appealing to the person's sense of self-worth that goes beyond clothes, we establish a direct, human connection with our customer through the values of unity, equality, diversity, etc.

### **Creative Idea**

We re-establish Benetton's superiority in textiles and clothing, by dramatising the looped yarn logo of Benetton as the tie that binds humanity together, through the values of unity, equality, peace, justice, etc. that Benetton has always stood for.

This idea is executed slightly differently in the TV/video medium and in print, though the message and the idea remain the same.

### **TV advert for Benetton relaunch**

We wish to establish Benetton's Italian credentials and origin as they carry great significance in the world of fashion, and the relaunch film is set in the towns of Ponzano and Treviso where Benetton is headquartered.

Film opens in the town of Ponzano in Tuscany, where a family is gathered on the lawns of their home for a Sunday lunch on a fine day. The sun beats down and everything is bathed in the warm glow of a Tuscan afternoon. As we can imagine, the Sunday family lunch is anything but a staid affair; there is plenty of joking and friendly – even boisterous banter – among this large Italian family, with people of all ages from children to grandmas and grandpas all partaking of it.

From here, we dissolve to another vignette of life in this town that is equally warm, lively and full of exuberance. We capture vignettes of Italians at cafés, in pizzerias, and out shopping, as they interact with each other in spontaneous and cheerful ways.

Through all these vignettes of life in Ponzano/Treviso, we also get a chance to glimpse the ordinary Italian's sense of fashion. Their sharp styles, their innate sophistication and their natural flair come through abundantly.

We also get to see people of different sexes, races, and religions mingle and interact – both on the streets and in their homes at get-togethers. We even see families chatting across their apartment balconies on either side of a narrow street!

This liveliness is infectious and what seems to help it along is a looped yarn that travels from one scene to the next. Taking the viewer on a tour of human connections, friendships and optimism, that the Benetton brand is known for.

With the first appearance of the looped yarn in the Sunday family lunch scene, music begins. The music track could either be a contemporary classical composition for violin and cello, or just a chorus of operatic

voices singing the notes. I think the latter might be a better and more distinctive music piece to use.

The yarn loops around such scenes of camaraderie and bonhomie between people before it moves on to the next such interaction, changing colour each time as it does so.

**FVO: From this small town in Tuscany**

**To the entire world**

**This is what binds us together**

**In the warp and weft of life.**

The looped yarn finally forms the Benetton logo that we all recognize and know.

**Super: Because we're more than what we wear**

**Sign-off: United Colours of Benetton**

### **Print campaign for Benetton relaunch**

Note: The print adverts all carry the same headline, with different images and a different stance in copy.

#### **Print advert#1:**

**Headline: Because we're more than what we wear**

**Copy:**

We are united, even in diversity.

Bound by the values of equality, liberty and justice in the fabric of our lives.

We remain committed!

**Sign-off: United Colours of Benetton**

#### **Print advert#2**

**Headline: Because we're more than what we wear**

**Copy:**

We remain together, despite our differences.

Bound by the values of equality, liberty and justice in our way of life.  
We stay united!

**Sign-off: United Colours of Benetton**

**Print advert#3:**

**Headline: Because we're more than what we wear**

**Copy:**

We learn to care for each other, and our planet.  
Bound by the values of equality, liberty and justice that tie us all together.  
We learn young!

**Sign-off: United Colours of Benetton**

**Print advert#4:**

**Headline: Because we're more than what we wear**

**Copy:**

We work with each other to achieve shared goals.  
Bound by the values of equality, liberty and justice as a close-knit community.  
We're a team!

**Sign-off: United Colours of Benetton**

**Print advert #5:**

**Headline: Because we're more than what we wear**

**Copy:**

We come together as one human race.  
Bound by the values of equality, liberty and justice in the warp and weft of life.  
We're one humanity!

**Sign-off: United Colours of Benetton**

Additionally, all Benetton print adverts carry a message of recycling old clothes:

Benetton urges you to dispose of your old clothes responsibly by dropping them at any of our 3,000 stores worldwide. We upcycle them to new clothing!

### **Thoughts on the Sisley brand from Benetton Group**

From what little I have been able to read online Sisley seems to be a brand that Benetton acquired in 1974. Originally conceived as a cotton and denim brand, it appears to have later become an urban lifestyle brand.

Both these descriptions don't mean very much and they do not give Sisley a distinctive brand positioning or image of its own in the fashion industry. Sisley is meant to be the more premium brand, and to this extent, it must stand for something differentiated not just from Benetton but from other fashion brands as well. Having shopped at both Benetton and at Sisley in Delhi ages ago, I can sense the difference as a customer.

As an advertising and brand communications professional, however, I think there is plenty more that can be done with the Sisley brand both for its own sake and to grow the profile of Benetton Group as a textile and clothing company.

The name Sisley instantly brought to mind the Impressionist artist, Alfred Sisley. I wonder if this is indeed the origin of the brand Sisley but even if it isn't, it might help to connect the brand with the art and life of the 19<sup>th</sup> century painter. Alfred Sisley was an English artist who lived and painted in France. What can Sisley's English birth, French life and now an Italian connection thanks to Benetton possibly lead to, in our imagination?

I thought that the English's fascination for France, especially the South of France and for Italy, particularly Tuscany, is well-known. I think it might be because of the warmer climate through most of the year, and of course, plenty of sunshine. Colour and light are extremely important in Impressionist art and in the work of Sisley as well.

Therefore, is it possible to fashion the Sisley brand as one that celebrates the soft hues of colour and light in a Mediterranean way? I think it has immense potential as a fashion brand exclusively for women.

Imagine a fashion brand that is focused on soft, light-weight and luxurious fabrics from light wool/cashmere to crepes, silks, fine cotton and even linen. Imagine further that prints, if any, are soft, understated and

impressionistic as well. And finally, imagine that the clothes reflect a relaxed and luxurious Mediterranean style: light-weight pant-suits, coordinates, dresses, skirt-suits, shirts and blouses for women that are elegant and distinctive.

### **Possible strategic direction for Sisley**

Mediterranean-style clothing for women that is inspired by Impressionism

### **Brand Identity of Sisley**

I think the current brand logo of Sisley is too plain and nondescript. It lacks any particular character or style and can do with a redesign.

Since brand logos ought to always follow strategy, the Mediterranean style inspired by Impressionism direction that I am recommending would require a different Sisley brand logo.

I think that instead of all-caps and sans-serif, which every fashion brand thinks is contemporary, Sisley ought to have a serif typeface that is soft and gentle, and is lettered in upper-lower case. Also, the letters of Sisley needn't be so spaced out. I leave the redesigning of Sisley to graphic designers and art directors or a design agency that the Benetton Group might hire.

### **Benetton Unity/Peace Campaign**

After the Benetton brand has been relaunched with new merchandise in stores and the relaunch campaign that is meant to refresh the Benetton brand in customers' minds, it would be a good idea for Benetton to focus on unity and peace as a message to the whole world.

In today's fractured world with conflicts everywhere, Benetton would do well to communicate its message of unity and peace, and engage customers in this endeavour. This would help to keep the Benetton brand top-of-mind and would also generate new interest in the fashion brand.

The Unity Campaign is about engaging citizens around the world and especially Benetton customers in an exercise that demonstrates unity itself. We invite people to drop off their old clothes at Benetton stores around the world – which is recommended anyway - and use these old clothes to create a giant patchwork quilt that could even be a world map! Benetton can work with an NGO in Italy to have this made.

The giant patchwork quilt is then used to raise money with wealthy people and corporations donating a certain amount per patch of cloth. This money can go towards helping people in war/conflict torn areas such as Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan, etc.

The fund-raising event is held at the UN headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, and the giant patchwork quilt is donated to the UN to be displayed permanently in their office.

I recommend that Benetton do this with a TV/video advert as well as a campaign in the print medium which can also be adapted to digital.

### **Creative Idea for the Benetton Unity Campaign**

We will show how Benetton works to create harmony and unity in times of conflict through Benetton's looped yarn that brings hope and help to people in need.

#### **Benetton Unity TV/Video advert:**

Film opens on a dusty road in the middle of nowhere along which we (camera) seem to be driving. The film is entirely shot from the POV (point of view), enabling the viewer to immerse himself/herself in the story.

As we drive along, we see a long, barbed wire fence or a wall barricading unwanted migrants out on one side of the road. The scene appears desolate and threatening at the same time.

Suddenly, we see a spot of bright colours in the fence/wall and as we drive closer, we find that someone is holding out a bunch of brightly coloured flowers through the fence/wall. At the same time, a brightly coloured looped yarn circles the hand holding the bouquet and moves on.

(Music track is a contemporary composition using violin and cello)

We are now in the middle of a refugee camp somewhere in a desolate and deserted landscape. We see a mile long queue of people lining up for food at the camp, and some desperately trying to break the queue.

Suddenly someone frantically points in a particular direction and tells others that more aid is on its way. We discover that several parachutes of food parcels are being air-dropped from the sky. People cheer in delight and run towards them. The same looped yarn of Benetton circles the scene, in a different colour this time.

Dissolve to us now in a war cemetery, with thousands of gravestones stretching out as far as the eye can see. We drive slowly past them, when we notice that one of them has a wreath or bouquet of fresh flowers placed at the foot of the gravestone, and a white umbrella shading it from the elements. Another looped yarn of Benetton appears in the frame to circle this sight and lead us onward.

We might have a couple more of similar scenes play out, with a surprising twist.

We end on a row of white people looking at us. Suddenly, coloured people of various other races and ethnicities push themselves forward into the group, between the white faces. The white faces turn to see the new additions, and break into smiles that indicate surprise. All this takes place in good, lighthearted humour, with smiles travelling from one end to the other as camera pans across. The final loop of the Benetton yarn circles across the entire frame.

**FVO: Just to remind us all that unity, peace and equality are always worth fighting for.**

**Super: Join Benetton's Unity Quilt Project today at [www.benetton.com](http://www.benetton.com)**

**Sign-off: United Colours of Benetton**

### **Benetton Unity Campaign in print:**

#### **Print advert#1:**

**Headline: When hope appears in the most unlikely places, it might just be all of us.**

#### **Copy:**

Ever since our beginnings in 1965, Benetton has championed the cause of unity, peace, equality and justice around the world.

Join our latest Unity Campaign as we create the world's largest patchwork quilt with all your old clothes to reflect the single humanity, we all belong to. And at the same time, raise money to help the poor and needy in war-torn areas.

**Sign-off: United Colours of Benetton**

#### **Print advert#2:**

**Headline: When help seems heaven-sent, remember it is our collective will.**

#### **Copy:**

Ever since our beginnings in 1965, Benetton has championed the cause of unity, peace, equality and justice around the world.

Join our latest Unity Campaign as we create the world's largest patchwork quilt with all your old clothes to reflect the single humanity, we all belong

to. And at the same time, raise money to help the poor and needy in war-torn areas.

### **Sign-off: United Colours of Benetton**

#### **Print advert #3:**

**Headline: When lives are lost in futile wars, it is up to us to stop them.**

#### **Copy:**

Ever since our beginnings in 1965, Benetton has championed the cause of unity, peace, equality and justice around the world.

Join our latest Unity Campaign as we create the world's largest patchwork quilt with all your old clothes to reflect the single humanity, we all belong to. And at the same time, raise money to help the poor and needy in war-torn areas.

### **Sign-off: United Colours of Benetton**

#### **Ideas for Benetton Stores worldwide**

As part of the relaunch of the Benetton brand worldwide, it might make sense to also spruce up the stores with some new ideas, to help customers experience the Benetton brand a little better.

- All Benetton stores ought to have a giant screen in-store that plays the new Benetton brand TV advert as well as the Unity Campaign advert in a looped fashion
- Let the unity message come alive in-store with customers who might be strangers actually being introduced and being snapped together as part of the United Colours of Benetton experience. This would require store staff to be properly trained as the impromptu "United Colours of Benetton" photo must be handled tactfully and discreetly in the quieter hours of shopping
- A large bin for collecting old and used clothes in every Benetton store worldwide. Customers who drop off their old clothes receive a small memento thanking them for helping Benetton upcycle old to new clothing.

#### **In conclusion**

- Benetton doesn't need to change business or brand strategy as much as change and improve its merchandise to tone down the casual aspect and tone up the style and business-wear aspect
- It needs to maintain its strengths in design and manufacturing
- Benetton must relaunch/refresh its brand with new communication that tells the story of United Colours of Benetton in an engaging new way
- This, along with new and stylish clothing ought to help Benetton revive its business and its brand.

*This brand strategy document for Benetton and the ideas it contains have been conceptualized and written by Geeta Sundaram, advertising professional and blogger at [www.peripateticperch.com](http://www.peripateticperch.com) who can be reached at [geetasundaram08@gmail.com](mailto:geetasundaram08@gmail.com) and via <https://www.linkedin.com/in/geeta-sundaram-aka-wise-owl>*