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## Milano Unica: Expanding Its Global Reach

**Exhibitors are aiming to grow their markets beyond their core.**

By [Sofia Celeste](#) on January 25, 2017



A selection of fabrics from Bonotto

George Chinsee

Mills that will exhibit their spring 2018 fabrics at the three-day [Milano Unica](#) fair that begins Feb. 1 are girding themselves for a challenging macro environment in 2017.

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In response, [Milano Unica](#) will launch a business-to-business platform at the event, to help expand the sector's global reach. The project is being developed in partnership with New York-based firm Sundar.

"To face the global climate, Milano Unica hopes to reach a new customer that isn't just located New York or L.A. We want to reach different people, like start-up companies that would benefit from traditional European suppliers like us, that are developing different ways to do business," said Milano Unica president Ercole Botto Poala.

Sundar has developed tools that will allow visitors to customize their experience by connecting with suppliers to match their needs and requirements in real time. They'll also have access to data and profile analytics in a secure digital infrastructure.

"Sundar has used its strongest capabilities — building powerful core technology — and has customized it for Milano Unica [attendees and registrants] to create a private and curated 365-day experience," said Sundar ceo and founder Jag Gill.

Botto Poala, who is also ceo of Biella, Italy-based wool-maker Reda 1865, said it will be an uphill climb for Italy's small and mid-sized family-run companies to digitize.

"It's a risk, but one that needs to be taken given the economic environment," said Botto Poala, noting that fabric-makers across the board are likely to raise prices of their spring 2018 catalogues by 2 to 5 percent compared to last season, as the euro nears parity with the dollar. The dollar is trading at around \$1.07 per euro, and economists expect to see parity since the Federal Reserve is expected to hike interest rates in 2017.

"The cost of Supima and Egyptian cotton have gone up substantially in the last 12 months. Besides that, the rate of exchange is not helping us," said Albini Group president Silvio Albini, noting that the Albini Group has an international presence in more than 80 markets, which has allowed it to offset currency risks. "We will raise our prices in euros slightly and will keep our U.S. prices untouched."

According to ISTAT, the international outlook for Italian companies continues to be defined by the solid growth of the American economy, the decline in international trade and the rise in oil prices.

Shirt fabric-maker Gruppo Tessitura Monti said despite uncertainty worldwide, it is still holding strong.

"In 2016, we saw stability. We expect modest growth in 2017 due to a rebound in the high-end range," said Tessitura Monti ceo Luca Belenghi, who noted that the company is working to improve its natural dyeing techniques and expand its selection of blended fabrics that prominently include linen.

Botto Giuseppe ceo Silvio Botto Poala said in terms of markets, Italy, Japan, South Korea and the U.S. were top performers, while it saw lackluster sales from Germany.

"Our eyes will be on the presidency of Donald Trump. We want to see if he keeps his promises with regard to boosting the economy," Botto Poala said.

Albini said, "We will definitely put even more effort into the U.S. market. We are very curious about the policies of the new president."

The Italian textile sector's cash cow is still the wool industry. Last September, Milano Unica said Italy's wool market share was 39.3 percent, while cotton represents 20.6 percent, knits about 18.7 percent and silk 17.7 percent, with linen at 3.7 percent. But exports of linen fabrics outperformed, surging about 20 percent between January and May 2016, as the market turned toward more eco-conscious materials that are completely biodegradable and natural. Wool exports rose about 5 percent, while silky and knitted fabrics experienced a slight drop, falling about 4 and 3 percent, respectively.

In February, trends will mirror the consumer's desire for escapism. Milano Unica's art director, Stefano Fadda, said Nefertiti, the legendary Queen of Egypt; Ibiza, the heart of the international social scene; the majestic city of Tehran, and the Italian coastal town of Sorrento are a few elements and locations that inspired fabric-makers in terms of colors and textures.

Across the board, mills will focus on innovation, sustainability and blends.

Companies like Bonotto, known for its creative jacquards, will showcase heddle-loomed fabrics for a more traditional look, as well as quirky patterns like bold stripes and fluid finishes.

Tollegno 1900 will showcase silk, cashmere and wool blends for formal wear and expand its fashion forward 3-D, bi-stretch and Rainmaker lines. It will also focus on more sustainable fabrics such as linen and unfurl a new ICE-Linen line that has a handmade, washed appearance.

Bella-based Lanificio Botto Giuseppe, will also focus on elasticity with its pure cashmere stretch line for the ultimate high-end consumer. The firm will also expand its Naturalis Fibra fabric collection, made with “slowool yarns.”

The three-day fair will unfold for a second time at the new, more expansive Milan-Rho fairgrounds, instead of the traditional venue Fieramilanocity.