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EXPANDING A GREEK FASHION
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The purpose of this thesis was to introduce a way for a Greek fashion company, Owl, to expand abroad, since it has already gained tremendous popularity within its borders, and is now ready for a new international chapter.

The approach will be to research and find out what is, at the first place, the objective of a fashion company when deciding to grow international, to provide innovative and successful ideas, but as well be realistic and present the difficult situations that will need to be faced, along with solutions to these difficulties and finally to show the steps that have to be made for this successful expansion.

The methodology will include a comparative analysis of three similar Greek fashion companies that have established themselves in the foreign markets, and a presentation of how they did it.

Overall, all four companies have problems and struggles that are similar to one another, so there will be something to be learned from how they have coped and what approach they have followed to overcome everything.

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1 Introduction

An international expansion for a fashion company is accompanied by two words; costly and risky. However, fashion is something that has always had a great demand worldwide and is continuing to do so.

Brands that put as a priority to have good and ethical quality of materials, but at the same time make available their merchandise in affordable prices for the average consumer, are the ones that will most likely succeed and appeal the most. It is also a good investment for the future, since the economy might be unstable within the borders, like it is in Greece, but abroad the chances for profit might be higher and more positive.

Also, fashion trends tend to change quite rapidly, so having a customer base internationally will help coping with the new demand for something different, that might occur domestically, and the loss of profit will not be as dangerous. This also means that the company will be ahead of its competitors within the country, due to the fact that they will face different opportunities and struggles abroad and this will prepare them for the challenges that might occur domestically.

Despite the above, it is hard for a new company to take such a leap. The entrepreneurs need to make conscious choices, pick the right markets, pay attention to the finances and be aware of imminent threats.

2 Purpose

The purpose of this research is to comprehend how three Greek fashion brands have achieved to expand abroad with great success, what they have faced during that process and after settling and how they overcame those struggles.

The three companies in this study have their own story and although there are significant differences between them, there are also great similarities and patterns which combined, can provide very good information and insight about the fashion industry.

Giving answers to some very important and fundamental questions like what leads to success, why do companies choose to invest in international expansion, does it come naturally and if so when is it time to do it, which markets are appropriate, is it a strategic or random choice to make the decision to even begin to export. The questions will provide Owl clothes company with objectives and create a focused path to follow.

3 Research methodology

3.1 Research approach

A sample of three Greek companies, similar to Owl company, were chosen and a research was made with multiple questions to the companies' representatives to discover what choices they made to go international and why, so that eventually multiple ideas will be presented for expansion. The companies' managers, CEOs and the working staff were contacted via email to provide honest answers. Their online popularity was checked as well, on Instagram and Facebook, to examine their fanbase and the amount of positive or negative feedback from their customers.

The companies that were chose are PCP Clothing, Vagrancy and Zini Boutique. All three of them are successful in Greece and also abroad. Among those companies there are similarities and differences in how they have chosen where to export their products, what difficulties they have faced and how they have handled them.

Among the four main research approaches, which are quantitative research, qualitative research, pragmatic approach to research (mixed methods) and advocacy/participatory approach to research (emancipatory), was chosen the qualitative research method in order to identify the growth strategies of those companies.

The qualitative research focuses on discovering why a target audience behaves the way it does and what drives it to particular topics and issues. It emphasises the nature

of reality in the way that this reality is socially constructed. It uses in-depth studies and analysis to uncover why humans behave in a certain way, their experiences and emotions. The main purpose of this type of research is to understand people's drive and actions and the result is descriptive rather than predictive. (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, 3)

3.2 Data gathering

A semi-structured interview was conducted, via emails, in order to construct a good description and analysis of how to help Owl expand abroad, by describing the experiences of its local competitors (Collis 2003). Qualitative interviewing is a valuable research method for exploring "data on understandings, opinions, what people remember doing, attitudes, feelings and the like, that people have in common" (Knight 1999, 2)

In order to work on the expansion plan there are several topics that need to be identified in order to proceed carefully, according to Pella Christina Papachristou, the CEO of PCP clothing, and those are:

- motive for expansion
- business models
- representatives
- sales channels
- barriers
- easy and difficult markets
- finance
- mistakes
- pitfalls
- knowledge acquisition



Figure 1. Data gathering measure

3.3 Data analysis

As is stated above, the research approach that was used is qualitative, which means that the analysis will be a qualitative data analysis. Qualitative data analysis is the range of processes and procedures whereby we move from the qualitative data that have been collected into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the people and situations we are investigating. (Taylor, C and Gibbs, G R 2010, Online QDA Web Site)

The companies will be analysed, according to what and how much information it was able to be gathered from them and other sources. They will be evaluated separately and then a comparison will take place in order to identify similarities and differences between them, and then the combined result and analysis will be presented in the conclusion.



Figure 2. Qualitative data analysis method

4 The Greek companies

These companies are considered among the most popular ones in the Greek market and are also successful internationally, having orders from all around the world. They have existed in several different markets, which means that it will not be presented just one particular market. All the companies design their own clothes, have their own brands and produce both clothes and accessories. They have also endured for several years in the market, which does not put them at the start-up category anymore and shows that they have the necessary experience.

Two of the companies, Zini Boutique and PCP, have less than 250 employees, but have a turnover of more than 30 million euros. Vagrancy is defined as a small company with a turnover between 2-6 million euros and less than 50 employees. These companies had in 2013 together a turnover of just under 1 billion euros which is almost 4 percent of the total turnover of 44 billion in the Greek fashion industry.

The companies have grown rapidly over the past five years. The total turnover of these companies was about 1.9 billion euros in 2008 and 2009. The sales growth has been mostly high, but it is quite different among the companies and in some cases it has even decreased. The 3 companies had in 2011 and 2012 an average total export growth of 52 percent. The total export from these 3 companies in 2011 is 1.3 billion euros, which is 15 percent of the total fashion export, of course not including the larger fashion stores and chains. Although one would think the turnover is connected with the length of the company on the market, it is rather because of their clothing collections and the smart strategies they have used for their expansion.

The companies have been on the market for several years already and have still the same owners, although new business partners have joined them in their journey. Three years ago there was a rumor about Vagrancy of copying other companies' designs, but the company did a re-start and cleared its name with new designs and branding strategies.



Picture 3. Company logos

5 Objectives for expansion

5.1 Why to expand

Most companies that want to go international start immediately to export their products, since it is the most common way to grow. By having a creative design and being commercial is a very smart and positive attitude, because growing and expanding the business will provide more resources to develop the design. The companies are also interested to see how other markets will perceive their design. In this way, they can test themselves and the company's ability to function outside the domestic market. It can be considered a kind of competition. These companies take seriously the fact that they are international and want to keep it this way. It is the ultimate goal for any fashion brand in the end. The expression "Born Global" indicates that a business organization from inception, seeks to derive significant competitive advantage from the use of resources and the sale of outputs in multiple countries, fits with the mindset of all the companies that are researched. (Taylor 2016, 289-308)

These companies have made collaborations with well-known names of the show business and fashion industries abroad and that has helped them gain knowledge and experience about foreign markets and export. A thing that all three of them have in common is that they all agree that it is better to build a strong foundation in Greece at first and then try and go international.

Zini boutique offers modern designs, with high-end quality and high prices. Therefore, Greece seemed like a limited market to the company, so it tried to export from the start. The other two companies, PCP clothing and Vagrancy, said that the Greek consumers liked their products more than they had expected, so they have expanded domestically as well.

After the Greek crisis, although a lot of big fashion houses started losing profit, it was given a chance to the newcomers that had new, modern and innovative ideas to shine in the fashion industry. The Greek fashion industry has been trying hard to cope and follow with the international fashion industry, but the financial difficulties and the small local market have made it a challenging task. However, the Greek consumers are making more conscious shopping choices, supporting local businesses. The companies confirmed that the proportion of big brands in Greece has relatively declined after 2010, so it has been more room for new small Greek brands to succeed. (Brazioti 2013, 69-70)

The companies have an export of around 49 percent in their gross sales. Zini boutique exports 70 percent of its sales, while Vagrancy and PCP clothing around 35 percent. The companies have focused on exporting abroad and have worked hard to establish connections in their new markets. They thought that the Greek consumers would not pay the prices for the quality and the design that they were offering so they focused more on how to succeed abroad than domestically. That is also due to the lack of governmental mechanisms that could help financially a small atelier to turn into a big production label and so to export abroad. (Brazioti 2013, 67-68)

5.2 How to succeed

The success factors are simple, important and similar to any other industry; good quality and appropriate prices. Although the companies have presented different factors about their success, there is a general agreement that the secret lies in a good product with a high degree of fashion. This is the hallmark of those Greek fashion brands: good quality with reasonable prices that can be sold even to a luxury store. Of course the timing is important, as well as the products to meet the market demand, no matter what or where that is (Guercini 2016, 374-397). Another thing that is essential, is for the companies to position themselves in the market and to do so they need to have a good insight of their own company, know what it stands for and if it brings something new to the market.

Confidence in the product that is produced is also a key factor among all the companies. The style, that creates the identity of the company, is the most crucial thing and it has to be the same worldwide, although some adjustments of garment sizes are necessary (Mohd 2017, 140-145). Kuriakos Gouroutidis, the CEO of the Owl clothing company, claims that: "Our team chooses the patterns and fabrics each season to create a street wear that is both limited and iconic. Design is always evolving but customizing is stable. Owl , creates standard and limited productions of streetwear apparel also giving customers the option of customizing their clothes. Each garment is cut, checked , sewn , double checked and labeled by hand. This means that it is a street apparel company that offers something new, unique and personal to each individual".

Communicating the brand to the market is another factor that will lead to the wanted success. Marketing is the tool for the companies to get as creative as they can, so that they catch the attention of the consumers and put the company on the fashion map.

The internet is a media that offers the opportunity to reach a vast amount of consumers fast. By creating a modern website that is easy to access and shop, is the number one thing to do. Then, being present in the social media will give great opportunities to show who you are and what you represent at no cost. Newsletters

will keep the consumers aware of what the company is up to and to make it more appealing to subscribe, offer, for instance, discounted coupons. (Park 2016, 64-73)

Furthermore, by being a good supplier will give the company the opportunity to create international connections and relationships with new partners. As long as the company delivers right products, with right quality, at the right time, it increases the chances to establish itself.



Figure 4. Logistical requirements

But, it has to be taken into consideration the fact that mistakes will be made and being ready to face the consequences is a step ahead, because it will not create a panic situation and the company will know how to handle it efficiently. The Kraljic Portfolio Purchasing Model, for example, is a tool to monitor risks and maximize profits. It helps purchasers to maximize supply security and reduce costs and the company could use it in order to avoid large financial losses when purchasing fabrics and other materials for the products. (Sanjaykumar 2016, 1751-1779)

6 The importance of foreign markets

6.1 Choosing export markets

When it comes to choosing an export market the company should make some questions to determine if the chosen market is suitable or not.

The first thing to consider is the size of the opportunity that is about to be seized. It needs to be known the average income in the particular country, if it is possible to get a first mover advantage, if the consumers will be willing to pay for the products and if the fashion industry is booming in that country or it is still developing. (Xinming, 2016, 916-941)

Then, the demographics need to be studied, since a country with a young population means a growing economy, as well as focusing on the larger cities, where the majority of the population resides. (Gallego 2009, 306-331)

Getting to know the competition is among the most valuable pieces of information prior to expanding to a market. A way to do that is by getting to know the competitors through their business news, websites and press releases. After some information gathering, the company should ask itself if it can offer something unique in comparison to the competitor's products, in order to stand out and make people curious enough to try it (Kotlet 2010, 23-47). Furthermore, realising that the company will face obstacles is a must, so that it will not take the staff by surprise and delay any other processes in the meantime. A variety of obstacles that might occur are political unrest, problems with transportation and distribution systems, sanctions and trade embargo. (Sternad 2017)

Last but not least, it has to be conducted a research on the costs. For instance, when the market is located in the European Union then, there is no need for duty payment or custome charges, however there is the possibility of paying VAT. If the market is located outside the European Union then the costs will depend on the legislation of that country. (Ernst and Young 2013)

6.2 Markets for Greek fashion

Despite the economic crisis in Greece there are a number of Greek clothing stores that are successful internationally and have established themselves.

An example is the Vagrancy company clothing that leads the market in modern and edgy young people's apparel and has acquired an important place in the international fashion industry. Vagrancy has stores in different countries of Europe like Cyprus, Albania, Serbia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and The Netherlands.

Also, Zini boutique is a leading company in the Greek fashion market about female clothing. It has opened several stores since its establishment in the Greek market and has shown continuous progress and development not only in Greece, but also abroad. Zini boutique produces quality clothing with creativity and amazing taste. This is how the company follows and adopts international trends, however maintaining its own identity, and remaining successful outside Greece.

It is highly important to have essential partners, good products and organisational structures and strategy (Chang 2006, 34-45). Zini boutique has worked on these factors and is trying to market its clothing line in countries like Romania, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Egypt. Moreover, the company has expanded in international markets by supplying associate retail stores in Cyprus, Italy, Romania and Russia. The company's goal is to be a famous and successful clothing brand internationally.

The PCP clothing company, although it is relatively new, it is already internationally recognised for its funky designs and production of high-quality garments and mostly leggings. Its headquarters are located in Thessaloniki and it is one of the few Greek companies that has made itself identified for a particular product.

Vagrancy's owner said in a statement "There is no magic recipe when it comes to a brand's success. It is all about a long-term strategy and a unique product of sustained quality. International markets are very demanding and difficult to forgive in case of a mistake". He also added, "From the very beginning the company's dream was to expand outside Greece, and we soon realized that the local market behaved just like

the international one. Believing that your product is unique for any kind of market is an advantage".

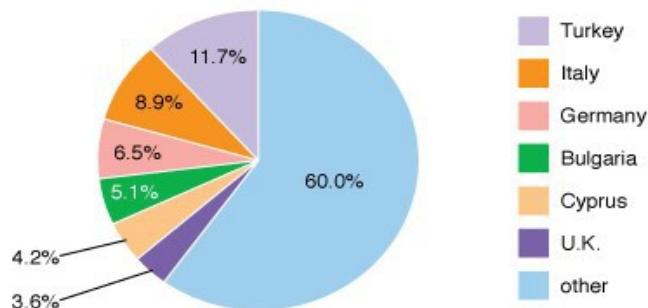


Figure 5. Major export destinations of Greek fashion industry (Workman 2017)

6.3 Choices when selecting a market

The process of choosing a market sometimes can be done randomly or by a contact from a distributor or agent and not always by choice. This is about countries that are more remote like Asia, Middle East, South and North America and Australia.

However, there is a significant amount of interest about the Greek fashion in letting buyers, from USA for example, to purchase collections of clothes directly from the companies. In an interview with the PCP owner, Pella Christina Papachristou, she said that the company defied all odds and went international because in her case there was a personal interest for Greek fashion that made her agent willing to carry the Greek brand. The agent had told her that at the time he had started to learn and speak some Greek, because he loved the language, the music and the history of the country. That gave the PCP company a great advantage to start its international journey.

Similarly, for countries like Ukraine, Poland and Czech Republic the exports are not large or existent at all, due to the fact that they are not major fashion countries and there is not enough demand. That means that it is the agent's or distributor's responsibility and amount of selling skills to promote and sell the brand on foreign markets.

When a fashion company picks a country to export its products it needs to take into consideration the fashion degree and fashion status of that particular country. Some of these countries are France, Italy, England and USA and the competition in them is enormous, but the Greek brands do not let this discourage them. Some of them have accomplished it while the others are heading towards that goal, which makes them successful anyhow.

All the companies are exporting to Cyprus and Albania. That is because Cyprus is a country where people speak Greek, so the communication of the product is much easier, and the people there have similar fashion interests with the Greeks. Albania is a neighboring country with people that have either lived in Greece and then returned back, so they know the Greek fashion brands and appreciate them, or belong to the category of those who travel all the way to Greece to make their fashion shopping because they trust the Greek quality more than the Albanian.

All three companies agreed on the fact that Italy and France are two of the most difficult countries to establish a fashion brand since they both fall in the same category of the most traditional fashion countries. From this information, that was gathered by questioning the owners and staff of those companies, it can be understood that when exporting abroad it needs to be taken into consideration the corporate culture and business environment of each country and not only the market and the consumers.

When choosing a market the role of the company's management is crucial. The majority of the people that have been contacted said the same thing; that it is important and should not be taken for granted for a company to travel and get to know the foreign markets that it will be active on. When the company gets to visit the international countries they are interested in, they have the opportunity to look at the latest trends that are popular and make new business contacts and create business relationships. After all, is more productive, inspiring and interesting to travel to London or Paris for example, than going to a city that lacks a fashion status. In cities like those, a company will thrive and get the right kind of knowledge it needs in order to succeed.

The cities are an important factor when looking for a market abroad. The fashion itself and the fashion trends are created and belong to metropolitan areas. After all, that is the place where one can find big department stores that host designs, that many smaller brands aspire to accomplish. The Greek press has reported about the success that these fashion brands are gaining internationally, which strengthens inevitably the brands' image within Greece.

The companies have as a main focus to establish themselves in one city and not several ones across the country when expanding in a market. This is because it is a lot easier to control the business and see how the brand is progressing in one city with several different locations. There is an example of a Greek company that was located in a few different cities in Germany and the management decided to change the distribution by only operating in the city of Berlin. The CEOs from all three companies agreed that although it is the most ideal thing to establish yourself in one major city, it needs to be taken into consideration that every country has its own conditions, with some having more than one fashion related cities.

In an interview, the CEOs of Zini boutique, Magda and Miltos, said that "We denied expanding in the country of Spain because two of the biggest cities turned the brand down, so we did not want to settle with other smaller ones. We had a goal and we were focused. A year later we tried again and here we are. It might take time but it is worth it in the end."

Especially when a company is looking for the right countries and cities to export their products, they need to know the demand that exists in those cities and monitor the fashion trends. Below are described four cities that the Owl company should keep in mind when it will try to expand.

- New York

For a company like Owl, which produces streetwear clothing, New York is a suitable and ambitious city and market, due to the fact that the Big Apple is the motherland of hip-hop, graffiti and streetwear. In New York was created the iconic streetwear label Supreme and the Owl company is a big fan of it and aspires to be as big one day. Furthermore, this city has created countless

trends all these years, as well as subcultures and aesthetics like street goth and normcore. Of course, New York Fashion Week is one of the biggest events in the fashion world which makes it an ideal place for business.

(Leach 2015)

- Tokyo

Tokyo is considered one of the most bizarre and different fashion cities. It is a city that has created some legendary streetwear brands like WTAPS and BAPE that hold global recognition and success and of course the legendary brand COMME des GARCONS, which creates breathtaking avant-garde clothing. The Owl company is also inspired by the latter company and it studies their collection carefully. Many popular retailers, like the POOL aoyama, make the city very interesting and the countless trends and subcultures cause so many brands and designers to want to establish themselves there. It is definitely a hip location and market. (Leach 2015)

- Paris

Paris is known more for its high fashion and luxury houses like Givenchy, Dior and Balmain and much less for its streetwear brands. However, it is a gateway to Asia and Australia. This is due to the fact that Japanese and Chinese distributors and agents travel to Paris to discover new brands and to check the trade shows. It is smarter for the Greek companies to go to Paris and make connections, than travelling all the way to Asia. The Paris Fashion Week is one of the most important fashion events, along with the New York Fashion Week, as well as its many showrooms that make it good for business. (Leach 2015)

- Los Angeles

This city has a reputation of being laid back and rebellious. That shows that streetwear is the most popular kind of fashion, although things are shifting since many high-end fashion brands are establishing themselves in this city. Los Angeles is the place where classic and also contemporary streetwear brands were born, like Undeafated and Fear Of God. (Leach 2015)

All the companies pay attention to how the other Greek brands select their markets. As said above, Owl has some role models that it follows on social media, and the staff has a good knowledge of the streetwear trends around the world. It is also wise to monitor how similar fashion brands locally operate (Delaney 2016). This should not be a difficult task to accomplish, since most of the competitors that Owl has, are located in the same city of Greece and they all have a connection between them.

The relationship of all four companies, including Owl, is a friendly one. All the CEOs are acquainted and are comfortable with talking to each other. They do not discuss important aspects of the companies, of course, or share crucial information, but they do discuss about their customers and markets.

Picking markets that are within the European Union is definitely a more convenient choice because there are limited trade restrictions (Barone 2016). Greece, in general, has done and still does more business with southern and eastern European markets and Cyprus. This is because the other countries like France, Spain, Sweden and Russia, do not seem to share the same fashion status with Greece. Russia, for instance, has a low demand in Greek fashion products, so companies like PCP, Vagrancy, Zini boutique and Owl do not attract the Russian customers. (Peshkova 2016)

Also, there are many trade restrictions that make the expansion very problematic (Barone 2016). However, Zini boutique has in its future plans to make an attempt to create a base in Moscow. The Russian fashion industry is considered an interesting future market. It has a turnover of 65 billion USD and it is rising continuously at a rate of 12 percent. (Amatulli 2016, 670-693)

As a result of the Greek financial crisis in 2009 the companies had to make changes in the way they operated. So, they started having a focus strategy rather than planning for an expansion abroad. Their focus strategy works like this: they examine cities and decide which ones have suitable markets for their brands in order to profit and succeed and they withdraw the rest that do not seem to fulfill their vision and goals.

Pella Christina Papachristou, the CEO of PCP clothing, stated that London is a city that she intends to expand her brand. It is a global marketplace that leads the rest of the fashion trends. It is also deliberately chosen since she has studied there, so she already has the connections to start with.

From the above statement it is determined that a market is considered big, when the fashion degree of the country is high in a global and financial perspective. So before choosing a new market, it is essential to make a financial analysis beforehand. Furthermore, when selecting a market it is necessary to build an online presence with e-commerce. This is possible by advancing the webpages of the brands and providing delivery.

Dimitris Kalpakis, the owner of Vagrancy, said that "The e-commerce is getting larger constantly and has no boundaries. It would be as well very convenient and easy if there would be e-retailers so that the launch of the brand in a new market would be faster. It is very cost-friendly since there is no need for promotion or further expansion to another city, because if any consumer would be interested to purchase our products, they could do it online, without physically being in our store. And of course it is easy nowadays to create your own webpage and the rest online stuff". (Molla 2005, 95-108)

6.4 The markets of the future

The fashion industry is an industry that rapidly changes not even yearly, but monthly. The products that the consumers see in fashionable department stores will already be considered outdated within a short period of time. The fast pace for this ongoing fashion has also affected the future fashion markets. (Vertica 2010, 165)

China is a leading market of the future. It is estimated (Euromonitor) that by 2019 the country's clothing market will be \$333.312 million, which is 24% higher than what it earned in 2014. (Sheng, Lu 2015)

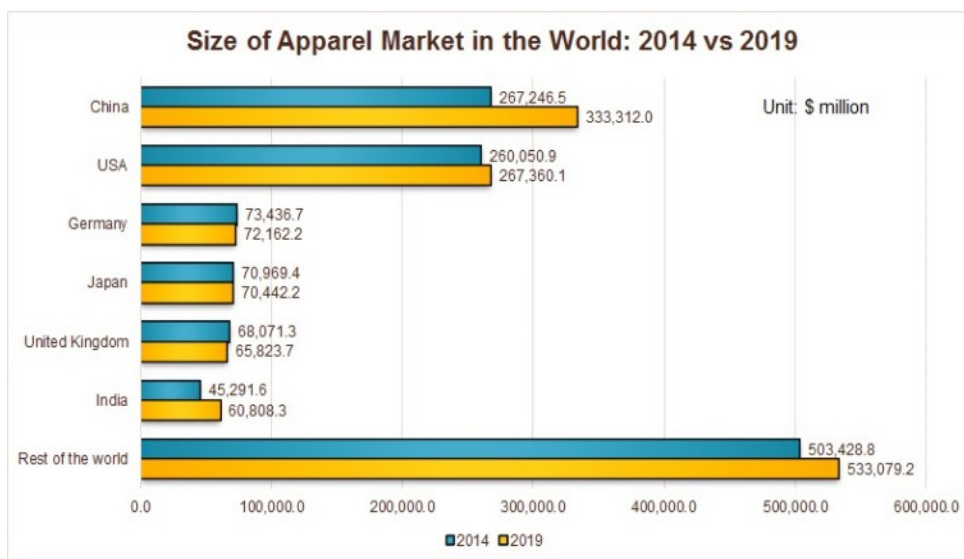


Figure 6. Size of apparel market in the world: 2014 vs 2019 (Euromonitor)

This is a very good figure for Owl to consider, as well as the rest of the Greek companies, since it is shown that China is becoming an extremely competitive market, even more than the USA. Most companies consider as the ultimate goal to expand in the USA and live that American dream, but the reality is different. It is a hard mission because the Asian fashion industry is much more different than the western one. But things are changing and being well informed is important for any company in order to plan ahead.

Market Share of Top Apparel Brands in China		Unit: %							
Brand	Company name (GBO)	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Heilan Home	Heilan Home Co Ltd	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.6	0.6	1	
Jack & Jones	Bestseller A/S	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.8	
Uniqlo	Fast Retailing Co Ltd	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.7		
E-Land	E Land Group	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6		
La Chapelle	Shanghai La Chapelle Fashion Co Ltd	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.5	0.6		
adidas	adidas Group	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5		
Vero Moda	Bestseller A/S	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5		
Only	Bestseller A/S	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5		
Metersbonwe	Metersbonwe Group	0.7	0.8	1	0.8	0.6	0.5		
Nike	Nike Inc	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.4		
Semir	Semir Group Co Ltd	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.4		
H&M	H&M Hennes & Mauritz AB	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.4		
Bosideng	Bosideng International Holdings Co Ltd	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.4		
Anta	Anta (China) Co Ltd	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.4		
Zara	Inditex, Industria de Diseño Textil SA	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4		
Peacebird	Ningbo Peacebird Group Co Ltd	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.4		
Cosmo Lady	Cosmo Lady China Holdings Co Ltd	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3		
Youngor	Youngor Group Co Ltd	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3		
Romon	Ningbo Romon Group Co Ltd	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3		
Ochirly	Trendy Group International Holdings Ltd	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3		

domestic Chinese brand

Figure 7. Market share of top apparel brands in China (Euromonitor)

Being a foreign fashion company that aspires to establish itself in China seems quite difficult. As figure 7 shows, no more than 1% of a market share was reached by international brands in China. Apparently, the domestic brands surpass the global ones.

That means that in order to succeed in the Chinese market, Owl has to have established itself to a satisfying level in Greece first, and maybe in other European countries, and then try and expand to the Chinese market.

Another future market is South America, which is composed of different countries. A survey has shown that in South America belong four countries, Brazil, Peru, Chile and Uruguay, that are among the ten most appealing countries for investment. It is said that their retail activities and shopping centers are getting stronger constantly. (Young 2017)

This is due to the fact that their economy is growing and their domestic consumption as well. Their sales ratings are 12% every year. Another reason is that there is no market saturation, at least for the time being, showing that the consumers are active and interested. As a result of the growth, shopping centers are flourishing in the main cities of the continent. (Young 2017)

Lots of international companies have shown interest to expand to those countries for two reasons. The first reason is the low level of market saturation that exists there and is about 40%. The fashion retail seems that is still quite successful and has potential, despite the economic crisis which has made a lot of businesses globally to cutback on their expansion plan and shut down stores. The second reason is the large population in those countries. In South America it is said that the majority of the population has started earning more money which has led to more consumption and thus making the middle class stronger. (Ambroqio 2012, 1-75)

There are a few examples of international companies that have invested and expanded in some countries of South America. Topshop is a British clothing company that has established itself in two major cities of Latin America, Santiago and Sao Paulo. Another brand that saw potential in expanding to Santiago was H&M.

Although this company is a huge one and there is no comparison with it and Owl company, at least for now, because this shows the importance of this future market. (Young 2017)

Although, there are more future markets like USA, Russia and France, China and Latin America would be an interesting consideration for Owl, since it is an innovative, fresh and different brand from what is out there in the fashion industry right now. Also, South America is one of the fastest growing markets, along with China, so they seem like the perfect examples. These future markets give to the international companies a chance to advance and expand their brands and show something new and fresh to the fashion industry.

6.5 Simple vs. challenging markets

All fashion companies aspire to expand their products abroad, but the most wanted and ambitious market is New York. However, it is considered to be one of the most challenging markets in the world because of their bureaucracy. PCP is the only company, out of all three companies, that is about to dive into this market.

The journey has started quite rough for the company since it was not fully prepared for the northern American customs duties. Pella Christina Papachristou, the CEO of PCP clothing, shared her story: " So, we created a coat with alpaca fur that came in two different colours. As we expected, it got stopped at the customs in USA and we had to fill in several papers. After that they started asking about the origin of the animal, where was the fur created, who produced it, which farm. I had no idea I should have an answer to all of these detailed questions. They finally asked what was the gender of the animal and that shocked me because I knew we wouldn't be able to answer it, since all the animals get shaved and their fur mixes with each others; and the producer sadly confirmed it. Then, as a result, they decided to reject the products. The only option they told us we had, was to ship everything back to Greece, take out few coats and resend everything back again. The humungous amount of money that we spent and the essential time that we lost it's a lesson learned that I will always remember." (from interview)

Besides USA, there are three European countries that have the strongest and most appealing markets; England, Germany, France. They are thought to be challenging because the interest of many international brands to establish there is great. Surveys have shown that the consumers of Germany and the USA prefer to purchase from local stores, which is a hint for any company, especially a small one, to fully prepare for certain difficulties that they are about to face if and when they will take this decision. The Greek fashion industry recently has shown an interest towards Australia, because the language is English, so it is easier to do business without major confusion and there are millions of Greek immigrants that are ready to support the Greek brands. Such an expansion, though, requires an adequate amount of resources to be accomplished.

It is easy to think that doing business with neighboring countries is less risky than expanding far away. All three of those companies have successfully expanded at their nearby countries like Albania, Italy and Bulgaria. That is because there are similar cultural traits and also because of the trade restrictions that are less complicated than in distant markets, especially if we are talking about the European Union. Cyprus is a fixed market, since the spoken language is Greek as well and the consumers are well aware of the major Greek brands and are open-minded to new ones.

Of course no market is easy and each company has a story to tell about it. For example, it is confirmed that doing business in Italy is a very difficult thing. The country has its own famous fashion industry and the competition is enormous and tough. Also, the industry there is more luxurious and the category that Owl belongs to is street apparel (Lion 2016). Vagrancy however, it is a street apparel brand as well and has achieved this expansion. On the other hand, Albania is a country that most of the companies are interested in expanding, as confirmed by all CEOs, because there is a demand for Greek brands, mostly due to the large amount of immigrants residing in Greece. Unfortunately, Albania has only one big city, Tirana, with important department stores that host prestigious brands, which means that it is hard to make sales in large volumes.

When it comes to the northern and southern Europe one might think that there are no big difficulties in making business, but that is wrong. Not because of the cultural differences (only), but mainly due to lack of trust when it comes to payments. Greece is the perfect example because it has lost its credibility in doing business since the crisis in 2009 hit the country. The northern countries especially are known for their punctuality and Greece would not be able to deliver.

If Owl will choose a market that is located considerably away, then it has to bear in mind that it has to do business in a different way than the one that is mentioned above when it came to EU and the neighboring countries. Markets like Asia and USA are challenging due to multiple reasons; very different cultures in general and also fashion-wise, the distance makes it hard to control the brand and many trade restrictions. The solution to this problem is a distributor. The distributor will have full control on the sales that will be made in the foreign market and the way of handling the brand. It sounds intimidating letting someone else operate your brand, but the key is to find a distributor that will be trustworthy and professional.

7 Business operation

7.1 Business models

Nowadays, the business environment is constantly changing, technology is evolving and the competition is tough. Owl is a relatively small company that is trying something new by expanding abroad. Therefore, using a business model would make the process more organised and focused by demonstrating how they are creating a good plan (Allen 2016). There are several business models for a company to choose from, when expanding to a new market, but choosing the right ones depends on the particular market that will be selected and also the development stage of the company.

A good way of starting is by finding the right agent with a valuable amount of experience and later involve the sales representatives of the company. Other types of business models are e-commerce and distributors. There is also the case of a company sharing joint ventures with its distributor in a different business. There is no perfect business model that can be suggested from any of the three companies. A new company like Owl has to keep in mind that there are advantages and disadvantages in all types of business models and that finding a fitting one needs research, although commonly an agent or distributor is a great start. (Kozlowski 2016, 151-169)

An agent and a distributor are two different people with different tasks and rights. (Schlegelmilch 2016, 43-61) Those differences are:

Distributor:

- own wholesale business
- own warehouse
- difference between selling price and wholesare price is his/hers profit
- legal owner of imported goods

Agent:

- representative of brand
- responsible for selling it to retailers and wholesalers
- handles exporter's merchandise and trades it on the market
- exporter is in charge of the agent gets paid commision/provision by exporter

Depending on the popularity of the company it is common that an agent will approach the brand and ask to represent it abroad. There are many positives by working with an agent like the experience that they carry, the valuable connections that they have and their overall knowledge on the industry. Financially, it is an excellent way to save money, especially for a brand like Owl which has no international experience. Another positive thing about an agent is that they make the deals and sales for the exporter, although the exporter still has the last word.

As expected, there are some negative things too. An agent usually represents many brands and that can be a clash of interests between both parties (Silva 2016). Other companies sell to distributors their products and then those distributors either assign their personal sales representatives to the market or they seize the whole legal responsibility. The sales representatives are considered important because they decide the stores where the products will be sold and also the position of the brand, so when a company has their own is best (Forkmann 2016). A distributor is used mostly for exporting in countries that are located significantly far away. This is due to the fact that those markets need a significant devotion in time and supplies. The distributor can provide a solution to this with the essential knowledge he already has. (Forkmann 2016)

Licensing a brand is a usual phenomenon in this industry, but none of the three companies have done it, because it is needed from the brand to already be very successful and financially to be in a secure level. A type of business model is setting up a subsidiary where the foreign market is located. However, this requires a large amount of resources in order to be created and so far none of the companies has achieved it. (Wirtz 2016, 36-54)

Vagrancy's CEO started trying to expand by visiting the countries and the main cities that he wanted his company to be present, got in touch with several retail stores that would be willing to buy his products, made a research about those retailers' style and if the clothes would fit their brand and finally tried to sell them what he offered. On the other hand, Zini boutique sold their products to two reference stores and then continued with a distributor and it turned out very profitable.

The owners of Zini boutique said that "When we took the company we had this vision of taking it to other countries and share our passion. We chose some markets that seem very appealing to us and started selling our merchandise directly to the retailers. We visited two stores that seemed to fit well with our vision and gave it a try. Both stores accepted our brand and after some time we got in contact with a distributor and the fact that we had already been selling to those stores was alone a big advantage, so of course we made the deal". (from interview)

Although it is the most common way to start an international expansion with the help of an agent or distributor, there are times that this option does not work out well. The reasons can vary from unsatisfying sales or bad marketing of the brand to personal reasons. That leads to replacement of the distributor with the company's own sales representatives. In the end of the day it is all about humans communicating with each other and sometimes it is difficult to find someone who fully understands a brand's vision and its goals. (Forkmann 2016)

7.2 Financing

Before a company decides to expand it has to make sure it has enough capital. A good amount of capital is important for delivering high quality and large production and of course marketing the brand. A way that many companies follow when they expand internationally is by taking place in trade shows, although they require an even larger amount of capital between 30.000E to 40.000E, according to Owl's CEO Kuriakos Gouroutidis.

A less expensive way of starting the expansion is by the company exporting to a retailer or a distributor. This, however, requires financing a considerable amount of products.

It is important for a company to keep in mind that it needs patience and time in order to gain profit and pay everyone in the business. The average amount of time varies from one to one and a half years. A long-term credit is the ideal solution, since the company does not need to pay back the loan for at least five years.

The economic crisis that has affected the whole world is an essential factor that has made all businesses extremely aware in researching carefully their future and potential customers' financial capabilities. This is called a credit risk and it is the possibility of a customer to not be able to pay back in time their credits or even not pay at all due to bankruptcy. (Ioan 2012, 385-390)

However, all three companies expanded abroad without borrowing any amount of money, which is a great achievement, especially in Greece where the economic crisis

has been severe. The CEOs of Zini boutique described it as an organic growth, which means the increase in a company's sales and profits that is a result of developing its own business activities, rather than buying other companies. (Irvin 2003, 10-14)

It is determined that when a company uses its own fundings it is more careful and economical with the choices of expansion it makes. All companies admitted that they try to bring down the cost when they were expanding, because the crisis had affected them at some level and they were conscious about it, but at the same time they wanted their business and products to maintain high quality and high standards. Shareholders have been a great help in the making of the expansion. Owl has followed that step and is very satisfied with the plans that are being arranged, as told by financial and sales managers. The most usual type of shareholders, that buy shares from companies that are in need, are investment companies and venture capitalists.

An example of a venture capitalist comes from Zini boutique. According to the company, a foreign producer lended to it long credits, with the possibility to pay them back whenever they could, without setting any time limit or interest. This was a great help for the brand because it started selling immediately and making profit, having the luxury to pay their producer in a reasonable amount of time. However, a deal like this is very rare, but Zini boutique is a family business that has been on the market many years, and the current CEOs inherited the company, by making modern changes, and also having already all the necessary connections to make things work well. PCP is similar to Zini boutique, because the owner's family was in the fashion business for generations and when she decided to create her own brand the connections and the capital were already available and positive. Nevertheless, having a certain amount of money is important but it is not the most important aspect. But human resources is of high significance too. The HR department is vital since it is the one that deals with all the employees of a company and handles everything about everyone. Especially when doing business in a foreign country and everything will be new, the right focus is needed as well as the right tools.

Before exporting there are three things a company must do: plan, market its products in the language of the country it is exporting as well as market samples of what it is producing (Nielsen 2011, 69-72). Zini boutique and PCP started expanding quite

early and fast, while Vagrancy and Owl are putting more work into it. Vagrancy's CEO attended trade shows and made connections with agents and distributors abroad, and this is how it started its international journey. Owl has the same ambition. Dimitris Kalpakis, the CEO of Vagrancy, said that the initial investment he had to make, was to create enough samples and pay the travelling costs in order to showcase them to the potential agents and distributors, as well as to the important people, media and bloggers that usually attend those trade shows.

It took three years for Vagrancy to reach a break-even point. The timing, though, depends on the companies themselves, markets and countries. The big dream for all of the companies is to have their own stores globally, but this needs a lot of hard work to make the brand popular and bring something new to that market.

8 Problems and solutions

8.1 The effect of exporting

The above case analyses have uncovered potential problems in addition to providing the foundation for potential solutions. It is very critical for any company to find out that their product will fit in the market that they have chosen, prior to expansion. The majority of the companies agreed that this has to be experienced "physically" and not through studies. This means that the CEO and managers need to pay a visit to the country, or countries, that the brand decides to start its international chapter at. Examining the new market and the brands that are most popular there, as well as the way the people dress. (Girma 2004)

Some of the Greek companies decided to study, review and analyse the foreign markets. Few have conducted interviews with potential consumers that are considered their target groups. In this way they have an insight of what those target groups prefer, fashion wise. Also, they consider the cultural differences that exist in every market individually.

For instance, in Japan the kimono is an important, historic and timeless piece of clothing, which has evolved throughout all these years. Modern kimonos are also considered very fashionable at today's western fashion industry, since a lot of brands have included them in their 2017 spring/summer collections. (from Style Blog web)



Picture 8. Picture 13: Modern kimonos (from Style Blog web)

African fashion is another example of a cultural difference. In Africa prints and patterns are seen everywhere. There is a huge variety of colours and lines that can be considered overwhelming. The fashion has evolved and African fashion elements are as well very popular today. Vibrant colours, patterns, colourful matching pieces everything is inspired by Africa. (from Style Blog web)



Picture 9. Picture 14: African fashion inspiration (from Style Blog web)

On the other hand there are companies that prefer to learn about the new markets by travelling to those particular countries. In that way they gain the knowledge they need in order to proceed further. Also, the agents and distributors that they partner with are another tool they use. Actually this latter one is the most important and reliable source they have so they tend to make sure the people they find are the best. (Woznick 2008)

The owner of PCP, Pella Christina Papachristou, said that through her agent she found out that in China it is important to make white clothing, because it shows that one belongs in a higher class. Also, darker shades appear the skin to look darker. These are crucial factors because they help the companies to create an appropriate and appealing clothing line for foreign markets.

Other factors that need attention before the expansion are: knowing the right channels for distribution, proper sales and of course the financials. These can be considered the top three but there are more factors that have to be considered like logistics, competition and economy. The bureaucratic side is the one that makes all companies worry the most since they can be complicated and slow the process of expansion. Those involve the legal affairs, signing contracts with foreign partners, customs system that exist abroad. This is where the agents and distributors play a role. (Woznick 2008)

Dimitris Kalpakis, the owner of Vagrancy, gave the following advice about companies like Owl that want to expand abroad: "The international experience is very valuable for any company. Valuable is also finding a good agent to guide the company towards the right path to success, avoiding as much as possible mistakes. It is important to know your market and be there physically. All in all, a good team, a goal-oriented owner and experienced partners are a recipe for success." (from interview)

Financials are a priority and knowing what types of businesses and terms of payments exist in other countries is a must. There are plenty of stories that every company can tell about their invoices gone wrong, so it is useful to pay attention. North and south Europe for example are very different markets, although they are

close to each other and one could expect them to be similar in business, but it is actually the opposite (Woznick 2008). A good network of professional contacts, on the foreign country and locally, is something that is needed for making the right choices. The fashion industry is an industry that everyone knows everyone and that makes it a strong one, since by just knowing the right people the success is almost guaranteed. One might think that by googling and trying to find all the information online is just enough, but that kind of thinking is wrong. In order to find out more about the foreign market most companies visit that country and observe (Woznick 2008).

In the case of PCP, the owner had already connections, through her father, so she knew where to turn for international guidance, but in general a company buys services from those international consultants. As mentioned above, PCP is about to expand in New York and in this case a venture was created with the distributor, that had as a result the full dedication and importance for both of them.

Adaptability is another factor about a company that is expanding and growing, since the demands will change. The service that will be provided has to be excellent and fast, no matter the country. When a customer orders something the delivery time needs to be exact and the product in perfect condition, otherwise that will be a financial downfall. (Woznick 2008)

Zini boutique, since the owners and CEOs have been in generations in this industry, knows and already has a great group of local advisors. They have been always present in the internalisation process along with other members of the company like the sales representatives, by visiting the foreign countries and meeting with the distributors, agents and the sales team.

The production manager of Zini boutique, in the interview, said that: "In order to check the different laws that exist in the foreign market that we have chosen, our team looks through the logistics and production. A good distributor that is well acquainted with that market can give accurate answers because they know the rules. It is a very timely process, but is necessary that everything happens in order and correctly. It needs patience." (from interview)

8.2 Risks of expansion

A certain amount of risk exists in every kind of business, but when going international that risk increases. The bigger the distance, between the local country and the foreign country, the bigger the expenses. It requires a broader knowledge on expanding abroad since there are issues, for example calculating the appropriate amount of sales volumes, that need to be known in order to avoid the loss of money and trust. One might think that by doing business with agents and distributors might be a certain way to success, this is not true. Nowadays, the fashion industry has become extremely tough and critical and the retailers ask for their products earlier which leads to a risk in the sales volumes.

Zini boutique's CEOs have said that "The past few years we have had very limited time to produce our merchandise and deliver it early enough. This is how it is when doing business abroad. We cannot have the same mindset when we are doing business in Greece. The retailers have different demands. This means that now we place the order before the selling season will be over and that leads to us making a good evaluation and estimation of our stock, that eventually might not be even right."

Except of risks, though, all CEOs confirmed that there are also consequences that a company has to keep in mind and it will undoubtedly face. These vary from legal matters between the company and the agents or distributors to the location of the brand. These risks however, are a valuable lesson for a company due to all the experiences it will gain that will lead to no repetition of the same mistakes.

Two of the most common risks that all three companies have faced are failing to keep/make loyal customers and facing credit risks. The way that the payment is conducted by each foreign country is different from that of Greece. In Greece the payment is being made in a period of a month while other countries might take longer or the opposite.

Dimitris Kalpakis from Vagrancy said "When I started doing business in Italy it didn't occur to me that I will face major troubles since our countries are so close to

each other and our cultures as well. I was wrong apparently. It took me more than a month to get paid about my merchandise without them letting me know beforehand, although I should have asked. Well, now I know. Don't assume, just find out." (from interview)

Nowadays, having your stock on consignment seems to be a quite popular demand. The companies agreed that it is very important for Owl to be aware of this payment form because it can be very risky and cause a loss of profit. This means that if the customer(stores) has 20% of the products on consignment and the seller(company) 80%, then the customer can return anytime those products or will pay according to the amount that is sold. After that, the customer will keep the products that are not on consignment, which is in advantage only of the new brands and not the seller's (Valentinia 2003). So, valuable advice for Owl, that comes from the other companies, is to agree on a good sales spot in a store and include all the stock value before signing anything.

When a company will accomplish establishing in a new foreign market then it has to be present there either by an agent or sales representatives. The payment factor is a crucial one and has to be handled by someone responsible, who knows the local language and is experienced with the culture and how business is done there. Especially when receiving large orders an agent or sales team has to be qualified to handle them. The economic crisis has made most companies worry about whether the buyers will be able to pay for their merchandise in time or no. The credit of those stores needs to be checked and an expert of the culture is the best for this job. (Valentinia 2003)

Another thing that is extremely important is working with the right people. Finding a trustworthy agent, for instance, should be a priority, otherwise breaking a contract with an agent that does not deliver good work would mean loss of money and legal complications that will hurt the company. A good agent is someone who understands the brand that he will work with, have already the business contacts of making the brand successful and have the experience and knowledge to properly market the brand in the foreign country. (Power 2008, 123-143)

Dimitris Kalpakis of Vagrancy said " It requires patience in order for the brand to get popular. I have tried to stay humble through my operational years, but when your company gets in the highest level, according to your planning, you should not get fooled. These peaks are dangerous because they make you think that this is all you have to do and the rest will be easy. I have seen companies, that after a few years of reaching that peak, completely fail. This is also a secret strategy of the stores in order to drop and acquire again and again new brands. It's important to know these details." (from interview)

Another warning is when the brand gets controlled by the distributors. The CEOs and managers confirmed again, that if the distributors get to handle completely and utterly how the brand operates and if something will go wrong, then the company will get damaged and a new start will be necessary. The company should be careful with the distribution of responsibilities and wait until some essential profit will be gained in the foreign markets.

Of course, at the end of the day, everything is about quality. Consistency is essential, because if a brand delivers good quality in the beginning of its operation and after it sees some profit starts getting lazy and neglectful, that means only a loss in profit and costumers. Unfortunately, things can never be perfect, so every company has to be prepared to deal with any kind of difficult situation. However, since Owl is a start-up, it should avoid at any costs these mistakes in the beginning of its expansion because that would end up by the brand losing its credibility and failing. (Schnurr 2016, 244)

Pella Christina Papachristou of PCP, having experienced a similar situation, said "One time we had to cancel six thousand pairs of our statement leggings because there was a defect. That was a great set back for the company. In the best case the products wouldn't have reached the stores but in the worst case they would. The last happened to me. I had to pay for the shipping back and of course work out the rest. By shipping it back to the factory in short notice it will take some time until they will give the okay, because there is not enough space all the time. I guess these kind of mistakes are part of the business and I have accepted that." (from interview)

The naming of the brand and its corresponding trademark registration is a detail that most owners forget. Most brands with catchy names get copied and that is a pitfall. These are the reasons and the meanings behind the naming of all four companies:

- PCP is the initials of the owner Pella Christina Papachristou.
- Vagrancy is inspired by the street style of the poor people but with a modern twist.
- Zini is the name of the grandmother of the current CEOs.
- Owl represents the wisdom that the company wants to spend through its clothes.

When a brand is named after their owners, which is the case quite often, there is not much risk to register it as trademark immediately since it is unique and could not apply to everyone, but it is good for the long term. (Schnurr 2016)

8.3 Frequent mistakes

Every company from the beginning of it until the end, will keep making mistakes and face difficult situations. It is something natural and the only solution for it is to accept it, not let the feeling of pride or shame interfere with the reality, and finally start coming up with solutions. Mistakes are also useful, because they teach everyone to not repeat them twice. All three companies spoke up proudly about their share of mistakes in the fashion industry and these are the advices they are giving to Owl in order for it to try and avoid them as much as possible. (from interviews with CEOs and staff of companies)

- Before even thinking of going international a company should have established itself in the local country. It is something that the new foreign business partners will take into account and decide if they want to do business and trust your brand. Owl has done an exceptional job so far in Greece with its popularity being at its peak.
- Although focusing on growth might seem the right thing to do, when planning to expand abroad, logically and realistically a company has to have

capital. That means that instead of trying to come up with growth and expansion ideas, the best and right thing to do is to focus on how profitable the company is. Expansions are very costly and having a profitable business is an important and vital factor.

- When a company reaches the point of deciding to expand abroad it might start planning on entering not only one, but several markets. This is very wrong and counterproductive. From their personal experiences all three companies agreed that there is real progress when a brand exports only to a specific market that is promising and suits the brand's image.
- Also, knowing your capabilities and not giving false promises to agents, distributors or retailers is a must, otherwise the credibility and trust will be damaged. When negotiating about orders you should give realistic dates and numbers and be consistent and not fail to meet all those criteria.
- The time that the expansion will be achieved is necessary for the company to be physically evident in that foreign country. This will prevent big mistakes and keep the operation under control.
- Before making any deals or signing any papers it is a must to know your customers and partners. Making business with the wrong people can be a catastrophic mistake for the brand.

(from interviews with CEOs and staff of companies)

9 Conclusion

The first thing that has to be done, when expanding a company, is to find good partners, agents and distributors. Furthermore, it requires devotion and time in order to visit frequently the foreign markets. A large amount of financial resources is essential, especially when the amount of orders and demand will be high. There is no space for disappointing the customers, especially in the beginning. Before partnering with anyone research has to be done beforehand to determine whether that person will be beneficial for the company.

After finding the right partners and doing well in the business the companies usually want to open their own stores. When a company reaches this point, it usually means that the distributor will not be having the previous amount of control over the brand. However, when the business increases, the demand will do too, and more staff will be needed to operate everything correctly.

Also, a company should be well informed about the competition abroad and the most beneficial location. Being updated is necessary for the overall operation of the company and the more powerful the connections the faster and more accurate the information will be.

A downside of new beginnings is the fact that there will not be any payments within the company for around one year. This is the first thing that the owners and staff should keep in mind.

Except the major fashion markets it is smart to focus also in future markets, like Asia. They will bring new challenges and opportunities that will evolve the brand. When picking a new market, it has to be kept in mind the difference in culture and potentially in fashion. This is where the right partners will be useful again. Working with someone who is an expert in that particular country will help to avoid mistakes.

It is wise to choose a market with a good economy and not always focusing on the fashion status. Russia has a profitable economy, for example, but it is not famous for its fashion industry.

This conclusion is also a synopsis of the overall experience of the three Greek companies and their expansion experience. Owl now has an idea about what it is going to be like and what steps should be followed and of course knows the rest of companies, so they could communicate and exchange advices.

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APPENDIX

The Interview Questions

1. How and what should a company find out before expanding to another country?
2. Which international markets have been easy and which difficult to enter?
3. What are the most important dangers to avoid?
4. Are the payment terms different from the ones from Greece?
5. How did you manage to raise enough capital in order to expand?
6. What mistakes have you made?
7. What difficulties have you faced during the expansion process when it comes to the foreign laws and policies?
8. Why did you decide to expand?
9. Where and how did you find your distributors, agents and partners?
10. How has the brand been perceived by the foreign costumers?
11. What is your export rate of your total turnover?
12. How you have achieved your success?
13. Has the brand been more successful domestically after expanding abroad?