

The high-tech climb of Marchetti, the "king" of e-commerce

From Bocconi to the idea for Yoox, now merged with Net-à-porter. A 1.3 billion euro empire

MILAN "Sometimes I feel like Peter Sellers in the movie *Hollywood Party*", Yoox founder, Federico Marchetti, once said about himself. For those who don't remember, it is a cult film from the 1960s in which an Indian ends up completely out of place at a super VIP dinner. Mr. Geek of chic (coined by *The New Yorker*) was in fact born as an outsider: "I was happy to work as an outsider and then I became an insider", said the entrepreneur, who has one daughter and is merging his creation with the French Net-à-porter. To tell the truth, Marchetti isn't much of a geek at all, a formula that in a typical California start-up bestiary represents someone who is poorly dressed and loath to follow academic paths. Just the opposite: Marchetti, born in '69 in Ravenna, is always on trend as the fashion industry would have it and created his idea while earning his MBA at Columbia University.

The famous dots that can only be connected in retrospect – those of Steve Jobs' lesson at Stanford – in his case, they all line up. The off-the-record anecdotes are as formidable as the official biographies are bare. Those who know him merely say that he is universally known as a "visionary" – in '99, the thought of selling clothing online was considered little more than a joke – but also as "determined" (the politically correct version). "Those who have worked with him – they say – have always had to know that ideas can come even at 4AM, so they have to be ready to hear their phone ring in the middle of the night". The entrepreneurial exuberance of someone who wants to change the world and on the other hand, someone less determined would have probably been crushed. Among the dots is surely his time in Bain ("I hated it", he summarised).

To a certain extent, it is a key phase: it is Bain that paid for a costly MBA at Columbia University in New York, a bill to be repaid, naturally, by working. It's '98. Marchetti comes from a brilliant path at Bocconi (fate would have it that he was there to accompany a friend who was taking the entrance exam. He passed, his friend did not). Before Bain, he had already worked at Lehman Brothers, but is "unsatisfied". He is already ruminating on ideas: the most unique is an attempt at making buffalo mozzarella cheese in Africa. Another idea is a slow food restaurant with a fast food atmosphere. It seems like a contradiction, but Eataly is succeeding with this formula.

Eventually, Marchetti returns from the Big Apple (grudgingly) with a 20-page business plan. It is '99. He thinks of the name, Yoox, because he wants a reference to genetics and "the yoox.com domain was not only free, but also understandable in many Western languages and Chinese" (here is the visionary). Someone at Bain throws the idea away, a step that vaguely evokes the time when HP dismissed Steve Wozniack's PC. An extremely difficult period begins. Dates: Marchetti's business plan is ready in November '99. In the middle of the following February, he cold calls (his father worked at Fiat, his mother in telecommunications), Elserino Piol, who listens to him and says, "OK let's do it". Except that the dot-com world is moving backwards. Rather, it collapses. Yoox is officially born on 21 March, 2000, a date remembered in history for the burst of the dot-com bubble. Nonetheless, Piol invests 3 billion lira immediately and another 6 over the next 3 months. Marchetti moves forward because "fashion was for the elite, Internet for the masses. Someone had to connect them". After Piol came Renzo Rosso of Diesel, who brings Armani on board. And then fate's footprint: he doesn't have enough money to be a re-seller of in-season stock so he starts with off-season, but doesn't indicate store prices. Brands are interested. And the rest is history: success, the listing in 2009 and now, the merger with Net-à-porter (yesterday Renzi sent his compliments on Twitter) where he will remain managing director.

Massimo Sideri

Left Column

The facts

The deal, announced yesterday, will see the creation of a group with 1,3 billion euros in revenues from the online sale of designer goods. It will be called Yoox Net-à-porter and will be chaired by Natalie Massenet (photo) with Federico Marchetti at the operative helm.

Johann Rupert's Richemont holding will have 50% of the new group, listed on the Milan stock exchange, but with limited voting rights at 25% to guarantee the independence of the company created from the merging of Yoox and Net-à-porter

Centre module

Photo caption: Federico Marchetti, founder and managing director of Yoox

1,3

billion – the turnover of the new company that counts more than 2 million online clients from all over the world

200

million – the amount of capital increase that will be launched into the stock market after the merger