



# Geek of chic carries all before him with Net-a-Porter deal

Corporate person in the news

**Federico Marchetti**  
Founder and chief executive, Yoox

Anyone seeking hints of the scale of ambition of Federico Marchetti, founder of virtual luxury retailer Yoox, need only check out his fashion sense.

Mr Marchetti, an Italian ecommerce pioneer, is partial to black turtleneck sweaters — a look that has become part of the 21st century fashion canon thanks to its being the uniform of the late Apple co-founder Steve Jobs.

Yoox this week took over Net-a-Porter, its bigger rival by sales, to create the largest online retailer focused on luxury brands.

The all-share deal, which Mr Marchetti called “the defining achievement of my career”, will create an online luxury goods powerhouse listed in Milan with €1.5bn in sales and 2m customers. This is equal to a 15 per cent share of the global online luxury market, according to Italian luxury association Altagamma.

It has also confirmed the reputation of Mr Marchetti, who will be chief executive of the combined group, as someone who saw that the future of luxury goods was online long before the big fashion brands that now line up to be Yoox’s clients.

Mr Marchetti, who has called himself a “geek of the chic”, earned a degree in economics from Milan’s Bocconi University before going on to



The Milan group will have sales of €1.5bn and 2m customers

get an MBA from Columbia University in New York.

After working for several years as a consultant to retailing chief executives and fashion designers in the US and Italy, he became convinced that luxury had a future online.

He founded Yoox in 2000, the same year that entrepreneur Natalie Massenet founded London-based Net-a-Porter.

Even as the internet bubble burst, Mr Marchetti stuck to his idea of putting together brands from his native Italy with the web to deliver

style to shoppers. Today, Yoox is a blue chip on the Milan exchange. It runs ecommerce sites for more than 30 brands including Giorgio Armani, Valentino and Ermengildo Zegna, along with the brands of Kering, the group behind Gucci and Bottega Veneta.

Yoox also has its own multi-brand sites that sell fashion, art and design. Mr Marchetti is the biggest shareholder with an 11 per cent stake.

A native of Ravenna, the Italian eastern coastal town famous for its Byzantine mosaics, Mr Marchetti has

The founder of Yoox, the virtual luxury retailer, has created the largest online retailer focused on luxury brands — Davide Lilliforpi

called the merger of Yoox and Net-a-Porter a “mosaic” too, combining two business models that though similar have little overlap. Yoox sells off-price on its multibrand sites, Net-a-Porter full price. Net-a-Porter is strong in the US and UK; Yoox is strong in continental Europe, Asia and the US, but not the UK.

The deal sees Richemont, the owner of Net-a-Porter since 2010, take 50 per cent of the shares but 25 per cent of the voting rights in the combined group to protect the independence vital to Yoox’s dealings with other fashion groups.

The structure recalls a deal Johann Rupert, Richemont’s chairman, agreed in 1999 when his Rothmans group merged with British American Tobacco.

The deal will also bring together Mr Marchetti and his longtime rival Ms Massenet, who will be executive chairman of the combined group.

Ms Massenet, a publicity-friendly figure and chairman of the British Fashion Council, will look after editorial content, corporate branding, and image and social media. These are “very important responsibilities that she does better than me”, Mr Marchetti says.

“She is a visionary founder. I am super, super, super excited to get started,” he adds.

Rachel Sanderson

