Benetton

by Jonathan Mantle retold by Susan Fearn

SUMMARY

The name Benetton is known for two reasons: it is one of the most successful clothing companies in the modern world and it is infamous for its shocking advertising campaigns.

The success story starts in northern Italy towards the end of the Second World War. Leone Benetton has a bicycle rental business in the town of Treviso. He wants his oldest son Luciano to study and become a doctor. After Leone dies, the family is poor and Luciano decides to leave school and get a job. He finds work in an traditional clothing store but soon has his own ideas and involves the rest of the family in starting a family clothing company producing colourful woollen sweaters for people used to wearing only dull colours. Within only 8 years the company has taken on employees, built its own factory and is producing 20,000 sweaters a year which it sells to fashionable shops in Rome and Venice.

Over the next ten years Benetton goes from strength to strength in Europe. Shops selling only Benetton sweaters open in many Italian cities and by 1974 there are stores in France, Germany and Belgium.

It is clear that at this stage the success of the Benetton business lies in the strength of the family. Between them the four Benetton children (Luciano, Giuliana, Gilberto and Carlo) have twelve children, but in 1975 Luciano meets and falls in love with the 20-year-old Marina Salomon who works in one of his shops. This causes personal problems but the company continues to go from strength to strength. After much research, Benetton opens its first shop in the USA, in Manhattan, New York, where it attracts some very high profile customers including Princess Diana and Jackie Onassis. In 1982 Luciano is introduced to Oliviero Toscani, the photographer who is to change of the image of Benetton forever.

Although Benetton is growing very quickly, they are still not big in America: they need a genuine international image and for this reason in the early 1980s they decide to sponsor Formula 1 motor-racing. This is followed by the advertising campaigns for which the company becomes famous. The photographs emphasize the international importance of Benetton by showing striking images of racial harmony. Even though these shock some people the campaign is successful in bringing the name of Benetton to the attention of people all over the world.

Luciano Benetton succeeded in turning the company he started in the 1950s into one of the world’s most successful businesses but he paid a high personal price. He spent so much of his life working and travelling that he lost touch with his family and friends. Would he do the same thing if he had the chance to start his career again?

ABOUT THE BOOK AND THE AUTHOR

John Mantle is the first outsider to research the family and the company in such detail. His other books include a biography of the British writer and disgraced politician, Jeffrey Archer and a book about the world famous insurance company Lloyds of London.

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

The story of Benetton is the story of one family’s progress from a small business in provincial Italy to world domination. One of the keys to their success has been the strength of the family and the determination of the original four brothers and sisters to remain personally involved and in financial control of the business.

One of the issues raised by the book is the moral responsibility of multi-national corporations in the post-war era. Benetton has deliberately, and often provocatively, associated itself with social and political matters that have no direct relation to its business of selling clothes. Its advertising campaigns, which have drawn the public attention to war, disease, death and racial issues, have sometimes threatened to damage sales figures and yet in the end have succeeded in publicising the name Benetton throughout the world.

But Benetton could not have succeeded if a rapidly increasing number of people in more and more countries of the world had not been willing to pay high prices for fashionable clothes. A clothing empire on this scale would have been inconceivable at any other time in history.
**Teacher’s notes**

**Communicative activities**

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopiable Student’s Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of the discussion and pair/groupwork activities, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

**ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK**

Students work in pairs or groups and discuss these questions.

(a) What do students associate with the name Benetton?
(b) What kinds of clothes are they famous for? Do any students in the class wear Benetton clothes?
(c) What other enterprises is Benetton involved in?

**ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION**

**Chapters 1–3**

Put students into pairs and ask them to discuss these questions.

(a) Why do you think the book starts with a day in the life of Luciano Benetton in the present day? Why doesn’t it start with Badore, northern Italy April 7, 1944?
(b) What factors do you think contributed to the success of Benetton clothes in the early days?
(c) Do you think it would be possible in the twenty-first century for a family to create a business like Benetton?

**Chapters 4–6**

1 Think about and then role play one of these situations.
   (a) Luciano and Marina trying to decide what to do about their future.
   (b) Luciano telling his wife Teresa about his affair with Marina.
   (c) Luciano reassuring his brothers and sisters that the change in his personal circumstances will not affect the business.

2 Imagine the conversation between Luciano and Marina after they had been attacked for the second time in two months.

**Chapters 7–9**

Students discuss these questions in pairs or groups.

(a) What do you think of the idea of a company like Benetton associating itself with a high-profile sport like motor-racing?
(b) What was the company’s prime motive? To sell clothes or to alert the world to a serious social issue?

**Chapters 10–12**

Imagine you are Luciano Benetton. Look back over the time since you started Benetton and make two lists:

- Things I’m happy about or proud of.
- Things I regret or am ashamed of.

**ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK**

**Benetton Trivia Quiz**

Students work in pairs or small groups. Give each group a copy of this quiz and set a time limit – say 3 minutes – for them to answer the questions without looking at the book.

Then give them a further 3 minutes with the book to refer to.

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**Trivia Quiz**

1. What was the name of Luciano Benetton’s father?
2. What was the name on the label of the first collection of Benetton sweaters?
3. What was the name of Luciano Benetton’s fourth child?
4. Where in the USA was the first Benetton shop opened?
5. What international sport did Benetton sponsor?
6. What was the name of Oliviero Toscani’s first advertising idea?
7. Who left Benetton to work for Citibank in 1990?
8. What was the name of the child Luciano and Marina had together?
9. What was the name of the European schools program which encouraged good relations between different cultures?
10. What sort of car did Luciano Benetton arrive in when he opened the new London superstore in 1996?
11. What was the name of the Benetton communications school?
12. What was the name of the place that controlled the Benetton stock at the factory in Ponzano?

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**Glossary**

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the ‘Before You Read’ sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

**Chapters 1–3**

- agenda (n) the list of subjects to be discussed at a meeting
- brand (n) a type of product made by a particular company
- global image (n) the opinion that people have around the world of an organization, etc
- knit (vb) to make clothing out of wool
- logo (n) a small design that is the official sign of an organization
- manufacture (vb) to make large quantities of goods to be sold, using machines
- media (n) organizations such as newspapers, radio and television that provide information for the public
- racism (n) unfair treatment of other people because they belong to a different race from your own
- range (n) a number of things which are different but of the same general type
- retail (n) the sale of goods in shops to customers for their own use
- site (n) a place where a building is
- ski (vb) to move on long thin pieces of wood or plastic fastened to your boots
- stock (n) a supply of a particular type of thing that a shop has to sell
- strategy (n) a well-planned series of actions for achieving an aim

**Chapters 4–6**

- ban (vb) to say that something must not be done
- billboard (n) a large sign used for advertising
- campaign (n) a series of actions designed to achieve a particular result
- foundation (n) the basic idea, etc that something develops from
- franchise (n) permission to sell a company’s goods or services
- pits (n) the place next to the track in car racing where cars can be repaired or take on fuel
- recession (n) a period of time when there is less trade, business activity and wealth
- research (n) serious study of a subject to discover new facts
- sponsor (vb) to give money to a sports event, etc
- superstore (n) a very large shop that sells many different types of goods
- technology (n) the use of electronic processes for storing information

**Chapters 7–9**

- authorities (n) the people and organizations that are in power in a country
- catalog (n) a book containing pictures and information about the goods you can buy
- condom (n) a thin rubber bag that a man wears over his penis when having sex
- nun (n) a member of an all female religious group
Activities before reading the book

1. Read the Introduction on page v, then close the book and fill the gaps with verbs and adjectives from the list below. You may need to change the form of the verb.

Verbs: build / charm / produce / shock / start / supply
Adjectives: extraordinary / hard / public / real-life / shocking / successful

Benetton: no name has such an ability to 1 (v).............. and 2 (v).............. .

Benetton is the 3 (a) ............... story of an 4 (a) ............... Italian family and the organization they 5 (v) ............... . Faced by poverty in a country ruined by the Second World War, the Benetton family 6 (v) ............... one of the most 7 (a) ............... businesses in the world. Today they 8 (v) ............... 8,000 stores in 120 countries. They 9 (v) ............... (also) some of the most 10 (a) ............... advertising images ever seen. This is a story of 11 (a) ............... work and success, invention and risk-taking – and of terrorism, 12 (a) ............... anger, and court cases.

Now open the book again and check your answers.

2. Why do you think Benetton likes to keep tight control of information about the company?

Activities while reading the book

CHAPTERS 1–3

Chapter 1
Put these events in the early life of Luciano Benetton in the correct order.
(a) Luciano left school and got a full-time job.
(b) Luciano sold newspapers on Treviso station before school.
(c) Luciano went to work in the Dellasiegas’ clothing store.
(d) Luciano’s father died.
(e) The Americans accidentally bombed the town of Treviso.
(f) The family moved to Santa Bona

Chapter 2
Are these statements True or False?
(a) Luciano wanted to change the way people bought clothes.
(b) In the 1950s Italians all wore bright colourful sweaters.
(c) Luciano sold his bicycle to get money for the knitting machine.
(d) The family sold their first sweaters through Dellasiega’s shop.
(e) Dellasiega’s store was the first shop to sell Benetton sweaters.
(f) The Tagliacozzo business refused to buy any Benetton sweaters.

Chapter 3
Answer these ‘Why’ questions from the seven sections of Chapter 3.
(a) England, 1962: Why did Luciano go on a 10-day tour of Britain?
(b) Belluno, 1964: Why did Luciano want the new factory to be beautiful?
(c) Cortina d’Ampezzo, 1966: Why did the shop in Cortina sell only small size sweaters?
(d) Padua 1967: Why did the two shopkeepers try to persuade Luciano not to open a My Market shop in Padua?
(e) Ponzano, 1969: Why did Lison Bonfils think that Benetton should open a shop in Paris?
(f) New York City, USA, 1970: Why did Luciano decide not to open a shop in the USA?
(g) Ponzano, the Veneto, 1972: Why did Benetton buy Sisley in 1974?

CHAPTERS 4–6

Chapter 4
Put these events from Chapter 4 in the correct order.
(a) The Manhattan Benetton opened.
(b) Luciano and Marina were attacked in their house.
(c) Luciano met the photographer Oliviero Toscani.
(d) Luciano moved out of the family home and moved in with Marina.
(e) The first Benetton annual report was published.
(f) Benetton opened their first shop in London.
(g) Luciano and Marina were attacked in their car.

Chapter 5
1. Complete these sentences.
(a) The reason Benetton decided to sponsor Formula 1 motor-racing was to ...
(b) To help the company to grow, Palmeri hired managers who ...
(c) By 1983 the company had factories in Italy and ...
(d) The reason Macy’s closed their Benetton section after only 6 months was that ...
(e) The idea that there was an Italian Mafia in Benetton came about because ...
(f) Luciano contacted Oliviero Toscani because he wanted him to ...

2. Who or what are/were?
(a) Tyrell
(b) Palmeri
(c) Invep and Olympias
(d) Bruno Zuccaro
(e) Macy’s
(f) Francesco de la Barba

Chapter 6
1. Are these sentences True or False?
(a) Toscani used professional models for the ‘All the Colors’ in the World image.
(b) The ‘All the Colors’ campaign won a magazine prize in South Africa.
(c) The ‘All the Colors’ campaign helped the company to expand in America.
(d) Palmeri wanted to sell 50% of the Benetton company on the stock exchange.
(e) When the Benetton car won the race in Mexico City, Luciano felt very lonely.
(f) Luciano was happy about the idea of selling shares in the company.
(g) Benetton’s advertising campaign in the spring and summer of 1986 offended Jewish people.

CHAPTERS 7–9

Chapter 7

Answer these questions.
(a) Why were pictures of clothes taken out of the new series of advertisements in 1989?
(b) Why was the photograph of a white man and a black man chained together taken down in Britain?
(c) What went wrong with the relationship between Luciano and Marina?
(d) What percentage of Benetton profits went to outside shareholders?
(e) What was the serious purpose behind the condom campaign?
(f) Which Benetton advertisement shocked the Pope?
(g) What was so shocking about the photograph of the new-born baby?

Chapter 8

Complete these sentences with the correct verb in the appropriate form.
(a) The new Benetton images showing ‘reality’ were ... in many countries.
(b) The campaign ... to damage the image as well as the sales of the company.
(c) In London a group of people ... against the image of the man with AIDS by going into a Benetton shop and throwing the clothes on the floor.
(d) Toscani did not understand why his reality pictures ... people.
(e) In Germany Benetton helped fight AIDS by ... large amounts of money.
(f) Palmeri’s rejoining Benetton allowed Luciano to ... into politics. He ... Treviso
(g) In February 1995 Benetton had to ... a fine of $32,000 because of its shocking advertising campaign.

Chapter 9

Correct these statements
(a) After the British Grand Prix at Silverstone, Schumacher was banned from racing for the rest of the season.
(b) In Germany Schumacher’s car caught fire.
(c) A group of Italian Benetton retailers tried to prove that Toscani’s advertising campaign had damaged their sales.
(d) In the test cases the media and the judge supported the angry store owners.
(e) By 1995 only 7% of the Benetton Group was owned by the four members of the family.
(f) Alessandro Benetton bought the Lotus car company.

CHAPTERS 10–12

Chapter 10

Complete these sentences.
(a) An image of three human hearts was used for ...
(b) The Benetton superstore which opened in London in 1996 was ...
(c) At this time Benetton decided that in future the business should have ...
(d) The leader of Corleone wanted a new image for his town, so ...
(e) After the 1996 campaign in Sicily, people began to wonder whether ...
(f) In 1996 the Benetton racing team ...
(g) Benetton Formula 1 was sold to Renault because of ...

Chapter 11

3 Match the names a–g with the appropriate descriptions i–vii.
(a) the Shopping Street
(b) Sportsystem
(c) Playlife
(d) Enemies
(e) Ansell International
(f) Carlo Spoldi
(g) the McDonald’s of knitwear

(i) the Benetton catalogue for spring and summer 1997
(ii) one of the people in charge of Fabrica
(iii) the Australian company that made the new Benetton condoms
(iv) the name a local newspaper gave to Luciano Benetton
(v) company owned by Edizione
(vi) the place where new Benetton collections are shown to agents and managers from around the world.
(vii) Benetton’s sportswear range

Chapter 12

Are these statements True or False?
(a) Toscani’s magazine Colours advertised Benetton and Sisley clothes.
(b) The largest Benetton superstore in the world was in Saudi Arabia.
(c) Ahmad Samha helped Benetton open new stores in Syria and Iraq.
(d) Only the wealthy people in the Middle East could afford to buy Benetton clothes.
(e) ‘Benetton USA corners’ were new Benetton shops in which sold clothes specially designed for the American market.

Activities after reading the book

Write one of these letters.
• A letter to Benetton saying why you would be a suitable person to work for the company.
• A letter to Benetton complaining about one of the advertising campaigns you have read about in the book.

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