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Viewpoints

From 'Made in Spain' to 'Thought in Spain'

By Antoni Flores, *President/Founder, CDN International*

In the 70's and 80's Europe was undergoing a period of strong industrial development and expansion, and the Spanish way of life was not too well perceived by our European neighbors. Today, on the other hand, with a well-developed industrial sector and a focus on services, Spain is admired and envied. Industrial products such as ceramics (Porcelanosa), democratic luxury (Puig, Lladró), footwear (Yanko, Camper, Pielsa), services in the "good life" food sector (Freixenet, Chupa Chups, Borges, etc.), have experienced spectacular development in the last decade.

In a short period of time, we have watched the rapid rise of brands such as Inditex, Mango, and Imaginarium, which are making strong inroads outside Spain in tough marketplaces like the US. Their success is based on a particular know-how that allows them to understand their client needs and offer products based on a way of life. Fresh, dynamic, evolved, innovative, democratic, adapted to their needs, and balanced between performance and price are some of the attributes that make them unique and successful.

In parallel to this enormous success and rapid growth, we have also seen the disappearance of some Spanish brands and iconic companies. Sectors such as consumer electronics, motorcycles, automobiles, computers, appliances, etc. have lost their importance in the economy, assuming a secondary role as manufacturing plants for multinationals. Globalization and market concentration, the technology slump, sector specialization, industrial clusters, etc. are all factors that can explain this decline.

In addition, global brands focused on the satisfaction of user needs beyond their technology framework are triumphing as well. Nike, Black & Decker, Samsung, Gillette, Decathlon, Ikea, EasyJet, Virgin, Smart, and Swatch, for example, are successful as a result of their capacity to understand and represent their client needs and lifestyles, apply them to products, and launch them swiftly into the market with accessible prices.

In a consumer society such as Spain, where primary needs are met and technological knowledge flows rapidly, success is dictated by the capacity to understand and build on consumer lifestyles.

The new "Made in Spain"

Can this scenario represent an opportunity for Spanish companies? Are Inditex, Camper, Imaginarium or Porcelanosa isolated cases? Or, on the contrary, are they the basis to structure successful companies based on this new positioning of "Made in Spain"?

Presently, manufacturing capacity and technology expertise aren't a problem; if you don't have it, you can subcontract it and find industrial competitiveness wherever it may be. It's a stretch from the typical "Made in Spain" mentality that was full of prejudice and affected the production of many local products. Business in Spain is now evolving from merely being "Made in Spain" to a more valuable "Thought in Spain".

Today we can export "Thought in Spain" and convert all the old clichés into competitive factors that are a hard act to follow by our competitors, from Asia or from anywhere else. It is a considerable step forward from our "Spain is Different" stance.

But in order for our companies to pass from the "Made in Spain" to the "Thought in Spain" concept, our companies must understand the hidden new needs of their customers; factories must adjust and become flexible logistical structures; our technical offices must become project management teams, and our commercial networks must be

able to offer the market very different value-added proposals.

Spain's ability to surprise the world has been more than proven; our art, events, fiestas and traditions are cultural references and one of our differentiating achievements. In a global and commoditized world, we must be able to convert this differentiating factor into a strategic advantage. No one else can do it the way we, as companies representing Spain, can.

Antoni Flores is an industrial designer, and president and founder of [CDN International](#). CDN was founded in 1998, and is a consultancy specializing in innovation, product optimization, and competitiveness. Among CDN's clients are companies such as Hewlett Packard, Bosch Siemens, Unilever, Pepsico, Amorim, Nepresso, Indra, Sagem, Azkoyen, et al. Antoni's work has been on display on several museums such as the MOMA and the Design Museum in London. He has participated in several congresses and has written innovation and competitiveness articles in the Spanish press and in international publications.

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Feedback on DMI Viewpoints and article proposals are always welcome! Please email jtobin@dmf.org.