



Dressed for success

With Petter Varner at the helm, Dressmann is on track to become the biggest menswear fashion retailer in Europe.

IMAGES HEIDI DOKTER

In Northern Europe, the name Dressmann is synonymous with high-quality, affordable, men's fashion. With stores in seven countries, the chain also has global reach through its online store that ships worldwide. Current CEO Petter Varner's father Frank opened the first Dressmann store in Oslo in 1967, and his keen sense of style is still reflected in the retail chain today. "Before he opened Dressmann," says Petter, "he owned a few stores called Varner where he sold fashionable menswear that he imported from London. Back then it was really cutting edge fashion—nobody had seen anything like it in Norway. The idea was to bring the latest in male fashion to the market at a reasonable price.

"We were initially really successful in Norway and that gave us the momentum to expand into new markets in northern Europe. The idea of being well dressed was our main focus, but it also had to be well priced. Our range consisted mainly of suits, blazers, ties and formal shirts. I took over the company in 1989 and at that time we wanted to grow, but the price of imports were really high. We sourced clothes from all over the world, and only bought enough for the short term, getting a new container every week."

The business model worked for a while, but the cutting-edge style the stores were famous for started to disappear, so Petter decided it was time to shake things up a bit. "I was 27 and fearless," he laughs. "I took the business focus >>

Dressmann

Name Petter Varner
Company Dressmann
Position CEO
HQ Billingstad, Norway
Employees 2,800



back to very modern fashion and also built on the great culture we had. I also wanted to put the focus on good planning—thinking a lot more about seasons and campaigns, more about product stories and product development, and also pushing the need to buy in a more professional way.

“It was a success—gross profit was up, we had better margins and higher volumes, and we also expanded our customer reach. We really grew in a fantastic way, which was lucky for me

because I was young and I’d just taken over the company. It could have turned out very differently, but by the late 90s I’d doubled our turnover. At that point we were only in Norway, but then we opened a store in Iceland and another one in Denmark,” says Petter.

In 1997, the company bought a chain of 47 stores in Sweden and converted them to the Dressmann brand. It turned out to be an extremely wise investment—it was an instant success, and in just five years, Dressmann was

the market leader in Sweden. Having conquered the market there, Petter turned his focus to the rest of Europe. “We then opened stores in Finland, Germany, and most recently in Austria. During this time, the idea has always been to strengthen the Dressmann culture, and to strengthen the ideal of giving the customer good quality products at a good price, because that’s always been the concept. I was recently on a business trip to Vienna and on my way home I was thinking about how successful we’ve been in

Austria; thinking about our good products, branding, storytelling, service, and our great culture—and the best thing is that it’s the same as when my father first started. Nothing’s really changed since the beginning. The foundations of Dressmann today were the same in the 60s.”

Plans for future expansion include stores in every country across Europe, and Petter also has his sights set on opening retail stores in the US,



beginning with his favourite place on Earth—New York City.

Over the years, the business has expanded its range to offer a special XL line, which has proven to be very popular. When Dressmann XL opened its first store in 2007, it meant that the stores could now not only offer a very broad range of well-priced menswear, they could also offer sizes from S, up to 9XL.

In another bold move, the company is soon partnering with Swedish football superstar Zlatan Ibrahimovic for the release of a sportswear collection. Ibrahimovic’s good looks, long hair and tattoos aim to reaffirm Dressmann’s position at the cutting-edge of fashion. It’s not the first time it has collaborated with the famous; in 2012 it signed a deal with rock royalty The Rolling Stones to produce a range of clothing inspired by the band’s music and iconic graphics.

For Petter though, the business is about more than just fashion—it’s about people, too. Which, as a self-confessed

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‘people person’, makes him the perfect leader of a team of 2,800 employees. “My leadership style is about believing in my staff and giving them the opportunity to develop and improve in their own way. I like to be a coach, encouraging, motivating, and challenging. I think the only way to succeed is with a team of great people—small or large,” he says. Petter motivates his staff by treating them all as if they have the potential to be the best in the world at what they do, and he gets an enormous buzz from cheering people on and seeing them succeed. >>



"I'm really close to my people and I just love people in general!" Petter enthuses. "I think the most important thing in life is to have the opportunity to work with other people. When one or two of my staff—or the whole store—achieves success, it makes me really happy. At the heart of it all, I'm a team player. I also think that there are a lot more possibilities that arise when people feel secure and there is a clear framework in which they can achieve success for themselves, as well as for the business."

Petter hopes that his solid framework will also create a safety net that will enable his staff to feel more comfortable taking risks. "I'm also a leader who loves to take chances," he explains, "and I love it when other people take chances themselves. Even if they make mistakes, it's important to develop and try new ideas, both for your own growth, but also for the

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company's growth. I'd rather see a few mistakes than no development.

"I also like structure, and for people to know what's expected. I will also always let them know what I think. If they have done very well, I will be extremely happy—I actually get goosebumps and get very emotional, because I know that they have worked very hard to get a result. I will celebrate with them and maybe even give them a bonus or some other reward. If it's just OK, then that's fine and I probably won't say much at all. If they haven't done the job properly,

I will be very clear, and make sure that they know that I'm not happy and that it's not OK. I believe that it's important for people to be disciplined—I like people to have respect for each other; turn up to meetings on time and be well-prepared. So I guess I'm a mix of giving people opportunities and also being their friend," Petter says.

It's due to his natural love of people that Petter has created a framework for the business that is based on human connection. "We have six core values that we live by at work every day: business-minded, passionate, make it easy, friendship, happiness and responsibility. Sometimes we >>

"Atlas Socks has been a loyal supplier for Varner Group since 1999. Our business relationship with Varner Group has always been a respectful, long-term, mutual business relationship that we want to continue for many more years." - Tugba Özüren, Member of Board, Atlas Socks

ATLAS SOCKS

In 1976 Mr Ali Rıza Özüren started to produce Atlas Socks in a little workshop. When his sons joined to the company, it grew into Atlas Socks LTD. It has since become one of the leading labels in the sector.

Today—thanks to many years of experience—the company is run by both second and third generation Özüren family members, who ensure both the production of high quality socks, and that deadlines are strictly adhered to. Atlas Socks' factory is equipped with the latest machinery and the company follows the newest technology closely.

Atlas Socks is one of the most modern and largest production plants for socks in Turkey.

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treat well. So I think that they are six really good values.”

Like any business, Dressmann’s relationships with its supply chain are vital to the success of the company. It has managed to create very strong ties with a small amount of key suppliers, enabling the business to focus on giving its customers the very best product and service that it can deliver. “Our relationships with our key suppliers are absolutely crucial and I think they will become even more so in the future, as we look for ways to achieve even better service for the customer. We only have a few suppliers that we use and it makes the relationship closer, it’s much less work for us logistically, and we know that we can rely on them.”

Looking to the future, Petter thinks that Dressmann is tracking well, embracing new trends not just in

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fashion, but in retailing in general. “We launched our Dressmann online store three years ago. Before the site went live we did some testing to make sure that everything was OK, and not too complicated—we wanted it to be simple and straightforward so that it’s easy for the customer to navigate, browse and buy. Since then we have had a new strategy and that’s to be aware of the future, and the digital revolution. We know that the customer wants more choice around when and where they shop and so we need to be in the digital space. We can see that in the future, online sales will be as

important as the retail stores, and so we are preparing for that. We want to be one step ahead of technology, but always with the customer in mind. For us it always comes back to the customer. I don’t really mind how the customers want to shop,” Petter says, “whether it’s in a store or online, just as long as they shop with us!”

Petter’s current goal is to transform Dressmann into the largest menswear fashion retailer in Europe. He sets high goals for his staff, so it makes sense that he would set such a lofty one for himself. ■



focus on being business-minded, sometimes the focus is on making it easy, but all six core values are with us all of the time, and it has to be this way. Business-minded is important, because we want to do good business and achieve success and make profits.

We believe passion is in the people and if our staff are passionate about what they do, then they will be successful and we will be too. Making it easy is really important for retail; you have to make sure the design of the store and also the staff who work

there make it as easy as possible for people to shop.

“We have almost 3,000 employees globally, many of whom are retail staff. So, if just one person here at our business headquarters thinks about making things easy, it affects all of the retail staff as well. Friendship is my favourite—I think that if you have friendship in a company then you will achieve success. Good friends help each other, good friends lift each other and friends are open and honest with each other. If you treat a colleague like a good friend then I think you will succeed. And then of course happiness is important too—happy people have a good time every day at work in the stores and they are more willing to treat people like you would treat your family or a friend. This includes our supply chain as well—all the people that we come into contact with, we

KNOWLEDGE, SERVICE, SOLUTIONS

At Lin Tekstil AS, we provide premium quality products with a strong commitment to environmental sustainability. Since 2010, we have been proudly supplying Dressmann with men's underwear and have been awarded the status of gold supplier to the company. Dressmann, as the Scandinavian market leader of menswear, has been a significant support to us with their innovative and reliable working strategies.

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SEAMLESS SERVICE

Two M of Sweden AB is converting its customers' ideas into garments.

Two M of Sweden AB is committed to providing its valued clients with the best possible experience when creating and ordering high-quality garments. The company was established in 2014 and is based in Borås, Sweden where it is run by discerning directors with over 25 years experience in the garment manufacturing sector.

The company imports more than one million garments annually, and they are dedicated to taking an idea, and developing it until the result is a finished garment delivered to a happy customer. They work very closely with their customers, who include Varner Group, Dressmann, Cubus, Carling, Vivikes. They also work very closely with their manufacturing partners, Sinoer Menswear.

The company specialises in creating men's and women's high quality suits, blazers, trousers and shirts and overcoats all to very high standards, at very competitive prices. The most modern manufacturing machinery is used for the construction of garments, and this includes the Lectra systemas well as a fully automated cut and line system.

Currently the company's manufacturing partner, Sinoer Group, has an annual production capacity of more than five million garments, and this includes a modern specialist shirt factory.

Two M of Sweden AB has the vision and the expertise to convert customers' ideas into

viable, high quality garments, that do extremely well in the market. Quality control is monitored by world-renowned companies, SGS and Intertek, and the company is dedicated to helping customers to streamline the process of scaling and growing their brand.

By utilising the extensive experience and expertise of its clothing production services, the company is committed to providing a clothing experience that will keep customers coming back for more. ■

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CUT ABOVE THE REST

Based in Zhucheng, China, Sinoer Group is expanding its global presence.

Sineor Group was established in 1993 and the company currently employs 6,000 workers, all dedicated to assisting companies in producing the finest garments possible. The extensive factory manufactures men's and women's suiting, such as blazers, trousers, overcoats and shirts. It is approximately 75,000 square metres, located around 100 kilometres from Qingdao International Airport, and it creates an astounding five million garments annually.

The production unit is very well equipped with modern machinery and has a fully automated cutting facility, incorporating an Eton production line. There is also a Lectra system to assist with the construction of garment patterns.

A multi-cultural operation, the sourcing, design and development team consists of personnel from Italy, Japan and China, so influences are gathered from around the world.

As the company trades with a diverse range of countries including the United States, Europe, Australia, Korea and Japan, there is a great understanding of how important it is to adapt to particular cultures and styles.

The company currently supplies Varner, Marks and Spencer, Topman, Gardeur, Gerry Weber, JC Penney, Perry Ellis, Tommy Hilfiger, Esprit, Uniqlo, Moss Brothers, and many other globally established top brands. It also has a strong partnership with Two M of Sweden AB, which is expanding the business across Scandinavia and beyond.

The factory has been inspected and certified by SGS, Intertek, and CSCC and is also ISO9001, ISO14001 and QHSAS18001 approved. The company is also proud to have been rated as having the 'Best Quality' by the Chinese Government.

Two new production lines for high quality suits have recently been set up by Sineor's Japanese technician, and the company have two showrooms in China and an office in

Qingdao. There is also an office in Sweden, close to Gothenburg International Airport, Two M of Sweden AB in Borås. ■

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