

Spanish fashion house Roberto Verino tailors success around ISO 9001

The Roberto Verino fashion house was reportedly the first in the Spanish fashion, clothing and textile sectors to attain ISO 9001 certification – in 1997 – an achievement described as a turning point in the company's history, and one that placed quality management firmly at the heart of its strategic approach. Today, Roberto Verino attributes much of its growth to the success of three key strategic pillars – ISO 9001, linked to supply chain logistics and an unusually high degree of employee participation.

Internationally renowned fashion designer Roberto Verino¹⁾ started his family textile business in 1977 in Verin, north-western Spain. Now centred in Madrid, the company has become a leading light in the Spanish fashion, clothing and textile sectors, focusing on the design, manufacture and marketing of clothes and accessories for men and women. It was also the first company in the sector to achieve ISO 9001 certification, awarded by AENOR²⁾, the Spanish national standards institute, in 1997.

The Roberto Verino brand has an excellent image for innovation and high quality. This image, together with carefully controlled distribution through a network of owned stores and franchise outlets in Spain and Portugal, has enabled the company to maintain a privileged position *vis-à-vis* its competitors, in terms of technology, employment, and in its ability to anticipate consumer taste, despite a climate of dizzying change in the fashion business.



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In response to this rapid evolution, the company has introduced a new ISO 9001-linked strategic plan calling for changes to its internal organization and product distribution, with the ultimate aim of sustained growth. Customer focus has been highlighted as the essential corporate value within the plan, (see Figure 1, overleaf), and one that must permeate the company's entire business structure.

As a result, Roberto Verino sees itself as a design, own-production and distribution-based organization, responding to demand by supplying its outlets with the product variety that customers desire, of the highest

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Window on quality: the Roberto Verino fashion store in Barcelona, like all others in its distribution network, operates an ISO 9001 QMS combined with an unusually high degree of quality awareness among employees.

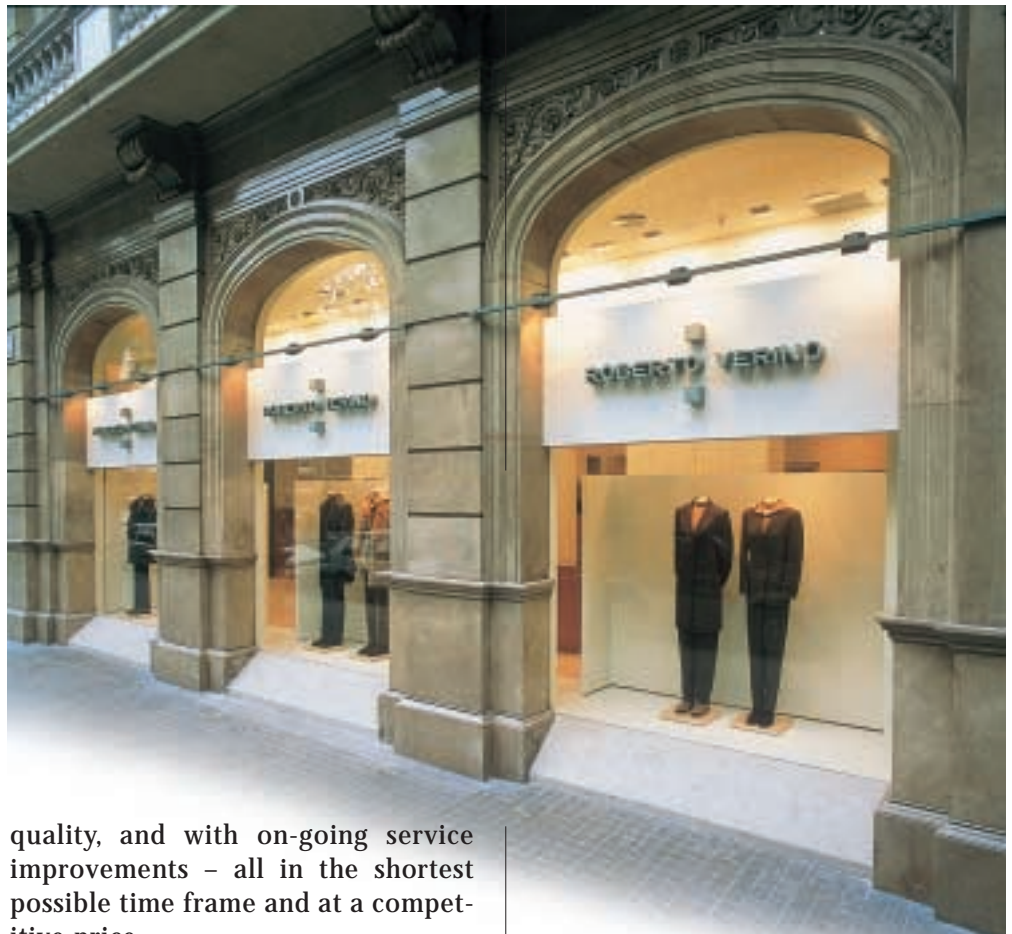
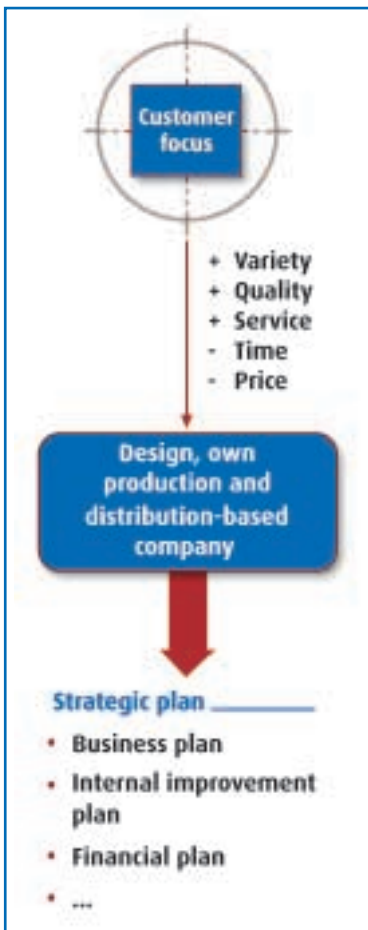


Figure 1 – Customer focus



quality, and with on-going service improvements – all in the shortest possible time frame and at a competitive price.

To meet these requirements, the company has operated a “Global Quality Management Plan” since 1994 built on two basic pillars:

- firstly, improving the flow of manufacturing and logistics, and
- secondly, quality management of the company itself and its product life cycles.

All of this is in turn founded on the essential involvement of all company personnel (see Figure 2). Thus it links the cornerstones of ISO 9000, supply chain logistics including Just In Time (JIT) processes, and employee participation.

The Global Quality Management Plan

Quality is seen as the essential approach at Roberto Verino. Thus, its Global Quality Management Plan has high strategic value and involves the entire organization in the devel-

opment of a corporate culture that treats quality as a day-to-day management tool driving current and future strategic planning.

The plan has three key elements:

- 1. Vision:** using quality as a competitive tool – calling for awareness of the current market situation and, in particular, of where the company is heading.
- 2. Implementation:** not just designing and planning, but putting ideas into practice and achieving results.
- 3. Participation:** only through the participation of all concerned is it possible to implement the management plan.

Once a new collection is ready for sale, it is essential that all work processes are fully integrated, documented and systemized – from the supply of raw materials to delivery at the final outlet. So the intention is not merely to document these activi-

ties but to reappraise them constantly, always looking for cost reductions, and improvements in quality, service and delivery.

Employee participation

Employee participation is fundamental to achieving a positive result. To this end, intensive training and awareness building has taken place to maximize understanding of, and involvement in, the global quality management system at all levels.

The company-wide scope of the plan is based on a series of basic cultural pillars:

- **Internal client focus** – embodying the concepts of internal supplier/client, respect, collaboration and speed of response. Both external client and internal client take on dominant roles and become fundamental management cores.
- **An attitude of continuous innovation and improvement** – personnel must see problem-solving and continuous improvement as the driving forces of global development.
- **Valuing the individual** – through involvement, confidence-building, ethics.
- **Involvement in shared projects** – the sense of belonging to a group and contributing jointly to a collaborative effort is of extraordinary significance.
- **Quality as corporate culture** – this concept can only be developed to the highest level through convinced, committed and responsible employees. The individual must be seen as the core value of

Figure 2 – Essential involvement of all company personnel



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Quality on the catwalk: Roberto Verino, renowned Spanish fashion designer and quality guru.



ISO 9000 is no fashion fad



Quality is very important for any organization but when you are a fashion designer and you own shops all over the world, quality, much more than a requirement, simply becomes essential. Aware of that responsibility, Roberto Verino decided to implement a quality management system based on ISO 9000, becoming thus the first company in the Spanish fashion sector to achieve certification.

In *La calidad como estrategia. La experiencia de Roberto Verino* (Quality as strategy. The experience of Roberto Verino), the strategic management plan developed by Robert Verino on the basis of his experience of preparing for certification is presented along with a description of the changes his company had to go through in order to adopt ISO 9000. The book provides a detailed description of the documentation produced through the process, including a copy of Roberto Verino's quality handbook.

It also includes chapters dedicated to the global quality management plan, improvement actions in the manufacturing process, the quality management system, continuous improvement, certification, implementation of improvement groups and the costs of non-quality.

The experience has helped to consolidate and strengthen the leadership of the company as well as increasing its competitiveness. Roberto Verino has acknowledged as "extremely positive" the impact of the certification in the company, being very satisfied with the results obtained from the implementation of the quality management system.

Quality is now a critical tool in the management culture of the company and everyone in Roberto Verino knows the exact meaning of expressions as "continual improvement".

1) *La calidad como estrategia. La experiencia de Roberto Verino* (Quality as strategy. The experience of Roberto Verino), (ISBN: 84-8143-275-X), by José Carlos Prado Prado, Arturo José Fernández González and Alberto Mariño Fernández, hard cover, 282 pages, price ESP 4 680 (28,13 euros), VAT included + postage and packaging.

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sustained change, and quality as a corporate value shared by all as an essential management tool for continuous improvement.

The company follows this policy of awareness, sensitivity and participation, as much for new personnel joining the company as a result of expansion as to consolidate the philosophy among the original workforce.

Improving manufacturing and logistics

Manufacturing and logistics were seen as the first priorities. Expansion of external networks, as a result of increased sales and greater involvement of sub-contractors, required considerable management effort with regard to identification, co-ordination, and production planning of suppliers, and particularly in quality control of products manufactured by these suppliers.

Since a focus on distribution is, in fact, a focus on customers, it is a matter of satisfying their demands by anticipating their needs. Thus logistics processes were reviewed, and speeded up where possible. Similarly, great efforts were made to reduce cycle times for production and delivery of garments by improving manufacturing processes, eliminating non-value-adding operations, re-designing and simplifying the flow of materials or information and, as a result of all these efforts, reducing batch size.

The objective at all times was to maintain a global vision of both process and company through a detailed study of the route taken by all garments throughout the manufacturing and logistics system. Cycle time became the main parameter for analysis and assessment with the aim

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of achieving greater system flexibility in order to respond more quickly to changes and cope with unexpected fluctuations in demand.

Actions included:

- flow planning and programming;
- reduction in preparation times;

- distribution within the factory;
- multifunctional capacity of personnel;
- standardization of operations, and
- cleanliness and tidiness.

Results have been very positive.

The quality management system

Roberto Verino has closely followed the ISO 9001 model in designing, developing and implementing a quality management system (QMS) which was certified by AENOR in 1997. As a fundamental step, the company introduced a voluntary system of employee participation in improvement groups and also offered complementary training to group members to equip them as quality monitors.

Major implementation milestones are outlined below:

QMS implementation

It was decided to implement ISO 9001:1994 because its design requirements are essential to a company like Roberto Verino. This was considered an innovative step in the Spanish fashion industry, since no other company in the sector had done so. The achievement marked a turning point in the company's history, and, because of its leadership position, proved to be a milestone for the industry itself.

The Roberto Verino QMS was the fruit of a combined effort. Firstly, in the creation of procedures and technical documentation, and secondly in systemization. Throughout the project, it was necessary to rationalize processes, harmonize the actions of individuals within the organization and create systematic procedures for each activity. Significant effort was also applied to training all employees in compliance with ISO 9000 requirements.

Certification was one more step in the shining path mapped out several years earlier. It meant that things

were being done well, although that was no guarantee for the future. It was necessary to continue further along the path, to reach new targets.

In this endeavour, Roberto Verino decided to extend the scope of its QMS to the product and store management and design departments and by updating and improving the old system. This new, extended QMS was re-ISO 9000-certified by AENOR in 1999.



High style, high quality: a glimpse of a Roberto Verino fashion store in Madrid.

Its documentation structure has been developed in pyramid form, so that documents at the top refer to those below, and the latter are in turn associated with the higher-ranking manuals. Internal documentation is divided into three blocks:

- the quality manual, which contains the quality policy – the senior management's commitment to quality and continuous improvement – and a basic description of the quality system, its operation, management indicators and detailed documentation;

- Documentation of centralized procedures, technical instructions, standardized operations and technical specifications, as well as the quality plans drawn up for specific situations.



Velvet for men: A trend-setting coat from the Roberto Verino 2001-2002 winter collection.

- Documentation of decentralized activities carried out at retail stores included in the "store quality manual" applicable to outlets owned by Roberto Verino.

The company is now working on renewing its QM documentation system, focusing more on processes, and on taking the maximum possible advantage of the thinking behind the new ISO 9001:2000 standard.

Implementation of QMS improvement groups

Improvement groups were set up in the company to monitor QMS maintenance and improvement. The first group was launched as a pilot project in 1999 with the objective of updating existing documentation, detecting and correcting possible flaws in procedures or technical instructions, checking correct implementation of these specifications, and strengthening employee involvement in the QMS.

The positive results led to the formation of two subsequent groups in 2000. Working meetings take place once a month. Participation is voluntary and members do not receive financial compensation for savings achieved, although symbolic rewards are given. Follow-up is made through meetings between the Improvement Group Committee and individual co-ordinators prior to each group session. These meetings have proved to be of key importance

in aligning group activities with achieving goals.

Company commitment to roll-out of the two-stage improvement group experiment has been extremely high, with the Human Resources and Quality Director taking on the promotion and management of the improvement group programme, with the full support of other members of the groups committee. The General Manager has shown great interest in the results achieved and has encouraged all to continue the good work towards the goal of continuous improvement.

Conclusions

Roberto Verino had been well aware of the need to develop a customer-focused quality culture, to ensure customer satisfaction. This perception has been fundamental to the Internal Improvement Plan in place since 1994, and which in turn is a key element of the company's Strategic Plan. It has devoted much time and effort to training personnel and making them sensitive to the quality philosophy. The company opted to implement ISO 9001, becoming the first company in its sector to achieve certification, and has constantly encouraged the participation of its personnel as essential tools for achieving continuous improvement.

Without doubt the rapid growth of the Roberto Verino organization and further strengthening of its leadership position in the market-place is a tribute to the success of its three key strategic pillars – ISO 9001, linked to Just In Time supply chain logistics and an unusually high degree of employee participation. ■

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