

Interview

Dr. Richard Gottwald

bonprix Chairman of Executive Board

IN VOGUE

With around 35 million customers in 30 countries, Hamburg-based bonprix is one of the leading fashion retailers internationally. Clothes that suit people are not only a question of size and style but also affordability; this is why bonprix stands for fashion that represents outstanding value for money.

bonprix offers its customers high-value shopping experiences with extensive service options and secure payment processing. The offer includes fashion for women, men, and children in a wide range of styles and sizes, and also accessories, home textiles, and furniture. bonprix believes that great fashion can be worn with a clear conscience. As a globally active company, the multichannel retailer therefore places great stock in both quality and in socially and environmentally sustainable business.

Milestone spoke to Chairman of bonprix's Executive Board Dr. Richard Gottwald. He's also responsible for the company's foreign sales.

> Milestone: Hi Dr. Gottwald, what are bonprix's overall goals for this year?

Dr. Gottwald: The situation posed by the pandemic hasn't been easy for several industries, especially the textile industry. Despite these challenges, bonprix was able to close the last fiscal year successfully due to our high level of adaptability and flexibility, broad interna-

tional positioning, and diverse product ranges. We were able to react with agility to market requirements, which would not have been possible without the excellent cooperation across all our divisions and countries. This has been a huge team effort and we've benefitted from excellent business partnerships in Germany and worldwide.

> Which business aspects are you looking to improve in the immediate future?

In relation to our business model, expanding digital competence is our highest priority. For example, we are increasingly taking advantage of the great potential of artificial intelligence (AI) applications. One example in this area is our so-called Learning Collection as a forecasting system for optimised product range designs.

Furthermore, we are investing in developing the content and internationalisation of our successful app. New features, a user-friendly navigation, even more personalised content, and expanded international availability will offer our bonprix customers more shopping convenience in the future.

> Where do you see bonprix in five years?

Looking back at our development as an international fashion company, I feel really proud of our achievements so far. We have grown profitably for the 12th year in a row. Our company is focused on managing and extending our complex international business model and we are aiming to continue on this path when it comes to financial success.

> How has COVID impacted bonprix?

When the pandemic started, we were confronted with major challenges, as was the entire market. The global pandemic caused a drop in demand and sales in some countries, especially in March and April 2020. Thanks to a large number of immediate sales measures and changes in services and adapted market and product strategies, we were able to compensate for this decline with positive effects and convince numerous new customers of bonprix. The noticeable shift from offline to online shopping had a supportive effect which stays on until now. Especially in markets with a weaker online affinity to date the so-called turbo-digitalisation had positive effects. Italy is a good example: bonprix recorded an increase



in sales of around 25 percent to over 100 million euros for the first time, as well as over 60 percent more new customers compared to the previous year in this country.

> What do you enjoy most about your senior role?

I feel humbled to carry the responsibility for a strong and prospering company with almost 4,000 employees. This is very fulfilling – it's also fun. I'm a big soccer fan and I like seeing myself as a team player who has got the captain's armband and is trying to provide even more to make sure we score as a team.

> What sets bonprix apart from your competitors?

bonprix is a vertical integrated fashion brand, we sell our own clothes and products. Unlike our competitors, our main business is online. We have multiplied our webshop concept in around 30 – mainly European – countries which is quite a unique example for expansion in online fashion.

> What is one example of how bonprix is implementing more sustainable solutions?

I am convinced that the future of fashion is circular, transparent, and climate-neutral and that sustainability will become the “new normal” in the industry.

For bonprix, sustainable fashion and climate friendliness are one of the core initiatives that we are vigorously pushing forward. To this end, we have set up and expanded our own CR department and just this year presented our new CR strategy “positive choice”. In recent years, we have already achieved a lot: we have founded the joint venture factory CleanDye in Vietnam, in which fabrics are dyed with CO₂ for the first time in the world, without any water consumption or toxic chemicals. More and more sustainable materials – from organic cotton and cotton made in Africa to recycled buttons – and products are used in our range.

In the coming years, we therefore want to and will go much further. We pursue the vision of becoming climate neutral by 2030, creating a transparent supply chain to fiber production and offering 100% sustainable products and packaging. This means, for example, that we will significantly increase the proportion of sustainable fibers in the coming years and, together with our main suppliers, choose processes that save natural resources. [➔](#)