

**CoB Ventures into Global Field Case Study**

San Polo 2725 Furniture Design Venice

By Charles H. Matthews, Ph.D.

f u r n i t u r e d e s i g n v e n i c e

## SAN POLO 2725



### San Polo 2725 Quick File

Company Name: San Polo 2725 Furniture Design Venice

Founded: May 2000

Founder: Cinzia M. Giovine

Education: MA Design, University of Cincinnati, 1998. Degree in Architecture from the University of Venice, 1980. Registered architect and a member of the professional society Ordine degli Architetti di Venezia since 1981.

Description: Designs, manufactures, and markets hand crafted, high-end Italian furniture

Contact information: [sanpolo2725@rialto.com](mailto:sanpolo2725@rialto.com); [www.rialto.com/sanpolo2725](http://www.rialto.com/sanpolo2725)

### University of Cincinnati Small Business Institute® Quick File

Program Name: Small Business Institute® and Field Case Study Program

Founded: 1972

Director: Dr. Charles H. Matthews

Program Description: Provides confidential faculty-guided, student-based business counseling for 25 to 30 business each year

Contact information: [ecenter@uc.edu](mailto:ecenter@uc.edu); [www.ecenter.uc.edu](http://www.ecenter.uc.edu),  
[www.sbi.uc.edu](http://www.sbi.uc.edu).



**Fostering  
Entrepreneurial  
Education Together**

### The MBA Student Team

Jeff Blumenthal <[blumenthal.jh@pg.com](mailto:blumenthal.jh@pg.com)>

Tony Gatto <[tony.gatto@sdrc.com](mailto:tony.gatto@sdrc.com)>

David Hering <[dave.hering@mts.com](mailto:dave.hering@mts.com)>

Elizabeth Mathews <[math420@fuse.net](mailto:math420@fuse.net)>

Now it its 28<sup>th</sup> year, the College Business' (CoB) Small Business Institute® (SBI) program has built quite a positive reputation in the Greater Cincinnati area. That reputation is now spreading overseas!

Over the past 18 years that I have been the Director of the SBI Program, it has been my pleasure to oversee 2000 plus students working with over 400 tri-state ventures on many exciting faculty-guided, student-based consulting projects. In brief, CBA students working in teams, spend 10 or 20 weeks collecting a history of the ventures, identifying problems and issues confronting the companies, and making recommendations for the

owners to consider implementing in their firms. It is a learning experience for the students and great opportunity for the companies to receive an analysis of their operations. Past surveys of participating companies reveals that nearly 80% of the firms made one or more changes in how they do business based on the reports.

Local companies interested in participating in the SBI Program generate a number of phone calls, faxes, emails, and the occasional walk-in every month, so it wasn't unexpected when there was a knock on my door last summer in the late afternoon. The young woman said that she was interested in talking with someone about the new venture she was in the process of launching. She mentioned that she had heard about our field case study program and wanted to know if a team could help her with her business plan.

She introduced herself as Cinzia Giovine and with just a trace of an Italian accent, she explained that she recently graduated from U.C. with a Master's degree in Design and was in the process of starting her new venture called San Polo 2725. Combining her background in architecture and design, she quickly described how she would synthesize art and functionality in original furniture designs, but felt she could benefit from some business counseling. It sounded like a perfect fit for our program.

As I reached for an application form for her to fill out, I asked where her business was located and without skipping a beat, she replied Venice, Italy. I thought "uh-oh, this will be hard to send a student team to work on!" After all, the students are responsible for arranging their own transportation to the client's workplace. We chatted some more, I offered some reading suggestions, but with her plans to head back to Italy that summer, I was afraid that a student consulting team would probably not be feasible.

As the summer grew closer to fall, I kept staring at the completed application in my file contemplating how we could do a long-distance field case study. I had recently traveled to Naples, Italy to deliver a paper at an Entrepreneurship Conference and kept thinking there had to be some way to make this happen. What would be the roadblocks? Could the student team and the client benefit from the experience?

A visit to Ms. Giovine's web site and several emails later, I decided we had to give this a try. I met with Dr. Chamu Sundaramurthy, Associate Professor of Management in the CoB, who would be supervising the fall field cases as part of her MBA class and told her I had 10 great cases all ready to go for her students including a very interesting, "...uno delle analisi di una ditta sara' eseguita in Italia." ("one business field case will be in Italy.") Despite my attempt at Italian, she was at first skeptical, but the more we talked, the more it made perfect sense. It combined all the elements of competitive analysis, strategy, and entrepreneurship with the added international and technology components that would be valuable to the student team. Everybody was on board and we were off and running with our first international field case study.

Jeff Blumenthal, Tony Gatto, David Hering, and Elizabeth Mathews formed the MBA student team that accepted the challenge of this unique and interesting field case. They did a great job managing the time and distance hurdles – scheduling local meetings and

coordinating emails, phone calls, and faxes back and forth with Ms. Giovine. Team member Tony Gatto noted that, “The international opportunity was a very enjoyable and challenging project. Besides the fact that we were dealing with an industry with many different challenges, we also dealt with a company competing from a different culture.”

By coincidence, MBA student Jeff Blumenthal added a personal understanding to the case study. His wife is from Italy and he speaks Italian. “We really felt like we were able to add value because the client needed someone with a U.S. perspective. We were able to give input and ideas that Cinzia had no other good means to receive, and that was really meaningful to us. We were also able to access useful information to which she had limited or no access.”

“It was a great learning experience for us as well,” added Dave Herring. “We had the opportunity to learn about different aspects of a foreign country from both a cultural and a business context including attitudes, business style, culture, and finances, for example.”

Although an extremely positive experience, the team also noted that not being able to talk face-to-face was a challenge. “Wording from e-mails can become distorted,” noted Dave Herring. “Questions which could be asked in person if ‘it felt right’ are left out altogether on e-mail or a phone conversation.”

In the end, the MBA team produced a 40+ plus report outlining San Polo’s background and history, the industry competitive landscape including strategic group maps for San Polo and its competitors, proposed mission statement and objectives, along with a detailed business plan including marketing, financial, and pricing recommendations.

In December, I received an email from Ms. Giovine saying how pleased she was with the work the UC MBA team had done, “...I am very happy with [the report] because not only have you organized my thoughts, but also you have given me directions and fresh ideas.” A few weeks later, I received an invitation to the opening exhibit for San Polo’s furniture design debut 16 January 2001 in Cologne, Germany. Complete with photos of her original designs, it was clear that she was successfully able to combine her architectural, design, and international experience into an exciting line of new furniture offerings. Although I wasn’t able to go to the opening exhibit, it was great to know that the MBA team had a positive hand in making it happen.



SanPolo 2725 Cologne Exhibition Invitation

Overall, I hope we can do more international field cases in the future. It is a triple win for everyone. The students benefit from the exposure to commercial, cultural, and international business components of the exercise. The ventures benefit from the guidance of the students and faculty team. The university and business community

benefit from the cross collaborative effort that brought a DAAP graduate and current CoB MBA students together for everyone's mutual benefit. As we look toward the future of global business and the role of technology in a shrinking world, I look forward to doing more international field cases and perhaps grow to include an opportunity for the team to travel abroad to see continue the process as well. Ciao!



### **San Polo 2725 Furniture Design Venice**

#### *Creative Philosophy*

The components of SAN POLO 2725 collections are meant to complement the comfort of your habitat. You will enjoy the way these unique objects fit in with your cherished possessions. In the incomparable cultural environment of Venice, Cinzia Giovine designs these little pieces of furniture, which reflect the singular architecture of this city. Like precious Venetian buildings, the furniture of SAN POLO 2725 is the result of a refined compositional syntax of planes and lines that combine in innumerable variations.

