



## Italian Ingenuity

# and Flair Define GEOX

I want you to meet Magic GEOX. As one of his good friends, Mr. Gary Champion, tells me, Magic GEOX is a super hero who fights smelly feet. You never know where his adventures may lead him – you can read about them in his special comic strips online at [MagicGEOX.it](http://MagicGEOX.it) - yet he always has a chance to talk about GEOX shoes and explain their breathable technology - how it works and the great benefit it delivers – to GEOX shoe wearers the world over.

Magic GEOX absolutely greets all the children as they enter their section of a GEOX Shop. "We have large prints explaining the technology in the kids areas and the message is entirely in Magic GEOX's hands," Gary says.

"Children love it; they understand it and like the fact that their shoes are special."

Besides all this, Magic GEOX is an *Italian* superhero. Who wouldn't love that?

Actually, Gary also tells me that his company's kids shoe collection is the "ice-breaker" in every new market they enter. "The reason is children are very active and sweat more than adults," he says. "Parents want to provide their children with the best footwear - that solves the foot-overheating problem - and keeps their children's feet dry all day." Once their kids start wearing GEOX shoes, the parents follow suit, and the entire family becomes loyal customers, happy with the breathable

benefits as well as the quality. "That's when the brand settles in a market," Gary says.

Nothing like a little Italian charm to seal the deal. Yet it's a whole lot more.

Mr. Gary Champion is the newly minted COO of Italian company GEOX, makers of "the shoe that breathes." The number one Italian footwear company and the second in the world in the lifestyle-casual sector, GEOX is available in 68 stores worldwide - 20 million pairs of shoes were sold in 2008 alone. GEOX products are also sold through 1,000 GEOX Shops and more than 11,000 independent retailers. In North America, GEOX counts 55 GEOX Shops and is available at independent

retailers as well as department stores like Nordstrom, Bloomingdale's, Macy's and Lord & Taylor. And in 2009 GEOX plans to open another 130 stores around the world, 10 of which are set to open in North America.

"In the U.S. at the moment, the children's line is the strongest, followed by a very rapidly expanding women's collection," Gary says. For GEOX, the children's market is very strong everywhere. "Children call the brand by name. GEOX clubs have even been created in some schools! On the other side, parents are happy to buy GEOX because it takes care of their children's feet. This is very relevant for parents when they shop for their children."

Popular, for sure. The company counts the children of Angelina Jolie, Kate Winslet, Sharon Stone, Courtney Cox, Kelly Ripa, Cindy Crawford, Russell Crowe, Hugh Jackman – and President Obama – GEOX fans!

GEOX produces breathable footwear for children from ages six months to 14 years. The baby and toddler collections are appropriate for kids ages six months to two years, then the junior collection takes over from ages three to 14 – into adult sizes. The company also manufactures breathable outerwear and clothing for children ages three and up.

The company calls Montebelluna (Treviso), in northeast Italy, home. Established 14 years ago by chairman Mario Moretti Polegato, the headquarters hosts the brains of the brand: design, technology and product research, finance, marketing and PR, management, logistics – and the children's department. Three research and development labs house 15 engineers who study body heat movement to further improve upon the GEOX technology. GEOX assembles product in 28 countries selected on the basis of production specialty: loafers in some parts of Brazil, sandals in India and so on.

Mario Moretti Polegato is also the inventor of the breathable rubber sole, the GEOX patented technology that allows feet to breathe and keep cool and dry all day long, using a perforated rubber sole combined with a waterproof membrane that lets air flow through. "The humidity which is produced inside a shoe as a consequence of activity, over-heating and sweating, is released outside the shoe through the holes in the sole," Gary says. "The membrane is made of a special material consisting of millions of tiny channels that are big enough to let vapor through but keeps water - which has molecules 700 times larger than vapor – out."

Gary has been with GEOX for a little more than six months, navigating the growth of an extremely well-established brand worldwide, one that communicates a very specific message. "The Italian design and, most of all, the breathable technology have been very well received and understood both by the parents and the children," he says. "What we need to do now, most importantly, is fine-tune the product to suit the needs of the North American market." Additionally, structural changes in the management team made way for a member to be fully dedicated to their kid's footwear business in the United States.



## focal point

The GEOX sport shoes are among the company's best sellers. With all the shoes, "Color is key. Kids love the colors we use and how the upper designs really look fun." GEOX recently focused on the girl's shoe line, expanding the color palette of their latest collection to include darker shoes for back-to-school, brighter colors for those who prefer them to pink. "We pushed more on the 'Italian creativity' button and came up with some great new products," Gary says, which include a wider range of mary janes in new color combinations, ballerinas that can match Mom's look, light-ups - one of their best performing groups - sporty sandals and several other styles from casual to dressy. "This covers the need for a specific shoe for different occasions - from playground, to classroom, to holiday party to ice-cream with friends."

GEOX received a vote of confidence from retailers during the most recent WSA Show for the new and colorful Spring/Summer 2010 collection, confident that GEOX is the brand that



will keep their customers returning even in the current economic climate. "The collection is now balanced in sku count between girls and boys," Gary says. "Our product development team really looked at delivering new outsoles, new upper designs/categories and used a powerful color palette. Based on this feedback, we are happy to say the 'wow factor' is in our collection."

Retailers also responded favorably to Ascari, the new super lightweight collection for boys, asking for a quick delivery. Buyers were also interested in getting more of the Eclipse sneaker from the Spring/Summer 2009 collection and GEOX is accommodating, offering them with new upper designs. "We kept our prices unchanged since last year and actually reduced the price of some of our skus to be more competitive," Gary says.

For Gary and his team, the real difference compared to other companies is that GEOX designs a line for children that's dedicated to them, instead of making smaller versions of an adult collection. "We have a design department at our headquarters in Italy that works solely on the children's line."

Indeed.

"Only lately have we introduced some skus that mimic the adult collection, in order to increase the variety we offer...because when you start to become accustomed to breathable shoes, you always want to wear them!"

I'm sure Magic GEOX would agree.

-written by Janet Muniz 

