



Mikhail Kusnirovich and Sochi 2014 president and CEO Dmitry Chernyshenko celebrate Bosco Sport's merchandise launch

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

As one of eight national partners for the 2014 Sochi Olympics, Bosco Sport is playing a key role delivering Russia's first ever Winter Games. **Luke Harman** finds out why an Olympic sponsorship is so important for the apparel brand's ambitions.

BOSCO SPORT is a strange beast. Straddling the sport and fashion divide, with a foot planted firmly in both industry camps, there are few global comparatives to speak of. Ralph Lauren, Prada Sports and German label Bogner are the nearest, but none come close to imitating the distinctiveness that Bosco Sport promotes.

But it is this uniqueness, and a conscious reluctance to differentiate between being either a sports line or a fashion line, that has hampered Bosco Sport's emigration as a global sportswear manufacturer. That is until now.

With less than two years until the 2014 Winter Olympics open in Sochi, Bosco Sport has unveiled its official clothing and footwear range, part of the terms of its \$100 million Games sponsorship, marking the beginning of a push by the Bosco di Ciliegi umbrella company to market its sports lifestyle collection internationally.

"From the very beginning it was important for us to be associated with Sochi," Mikhail Kusnirovich, founder and chairman of the Bosco Group, told *SportBusiness International* in Moscow last month. "The Olympics are one of the biggest brands in the world and to be involved with the Olympic Movement was one of our key marketing objectives."

Unlike the seven other Sochi 2014 national

partners, many of whom have grasped the opportunity to support the first ever Russian Winter Olympics and showcase their services on a national level, Bosco Sport plans to utilise its Sochi partnership as a launch pad for showcases much further afield.

Last month's store opening at Westfield Stratford City in London, situated in a prime Olympics footfall location, is the first step on the brand's quest for greater international recognition. It is not simply about brand awareness though, for Bosco Sport prides itself on its products being a representation of the Bosco values - happiness, colour and joy - and the heart of the Russian nation. It is this for which greater international recognition is required, something that can be achieved through an Olympic partnership.

Bosco Sport's collections are bold and vibrant. The Sochi 2014 range, which will also serve as the official Russian Olympic team wear, features a striking patchwork quilt design which will ultimately render the brand unforgettable. But the key component for Bosco's expansion is retail power. Association and awareness is important, but for Kusnirovich, the sales opportunity that comes off the back of an Olympic association is the overwhelming priority.

"We are looking to expand to new areas of the world where we can not only sponsor a team and promote our style but also open up our retail space," he adds. "We are already at the top of sports marketing [as a national partner to an Olympic Games] but if we can then sell thousands of tracksuits and t-shirts too, it means we are somebody."

"As well as opening new stores in Russia, we want to open stores in Europe and parts of Asia. We are also very interested in the Latin market. We are the main sponsor of the Spanish Olympic team and we want to use this as a key touch point."

With preparations well underway for the 2016 Games in Rio, there is an ideal opportunity for Bosco Sport to fulfil its Latin exposure ambitions. In the present day however, bolstered by over 100 retail outlets in Russia, as well as a scattered few in neighbouring Ukraine and now London, the brand's growth figures make for impressive reading.

In 2011 Bosco Sport accounted for six per cent of the Bosco Group's annual turnover. In 2012 this figure will increase to seven per cent with forecasts for 2014 suggesting the apparel division will account for 15 per cent of the Group's total income.

Whether or not Bosco Sport will continue to develop at such a rate upon the conclusion of Sochi 2014 remains to be seen. Regardless, the Olympic Games have provided a sponsorship opportunity for Bosco Sport which it intends to leverage for many years to come.