

Interview

Where Men Can Treat Themselves

An Interview with Sven Gaede,
Chief Commercial Officer, Alfred Dunhill Ltd.



Sven Gaede

EDITORS' NOTE *The recipient of a business degree from Kingston University and an MBA from INSEAD, Sven Gaede began his career in commerce with Marks & Spencer. He worked for Booz Allen Hamilton for four years, and served as the Gap's European Finance Director. Prior to being named Chief Commercial Officer of Alfred Dunhill in August 2005, Gaede served for five years as CEO of British menswear brand Hackett.*

COMPANY BRIEF *Since its launch in 1893, Alfred Dunhill has been a watchword for English luxury. Through a network of more than 200 boutiques around the globe, the brand (www.dunhill.com) offers a wide range of leather goods, timepieces, writing instruments, and ready-to-wear and bespoke menswear. Alfred Dunhill is owned by Geneva-based Compagnie Financière Richemont (www.richemont.com), the world's second-largest luxury goods company.*

For years, Dunhill has been thought of as a stodgy sort of shop, but things have changed drastically. What happened?

Since [CEO] Chris Colfer joined us about two and a half years ago, the brand has changed substantially. It has become a lifestyle brand. It's no longer just about individual products; it's about the entire brand, which comprises accessories like leather goods; hard products, such as pens and cufflinks; and menswear. So we're presenting Dunhill as a lifestyle brand. Our

stores now appeal to a much broader range of people, in terms of both geography and age, and we have new products in our stores on a more regular basis. Men need a place where they can treat themselves; there are relatively few stores that cater exclusively and unashamedly to the needs of men. For discerning gentlemen around the globe, Dunhill is now a real haven. When you come to Dunhill, you get three things: Britishness, a complete and unashamed focus on men, and a business that caters to all of your needs across accessories and clothing. Those three factors combined make us unique in the market.

In addition to ready-to-wear suits, you also offer bespoke tailoring services.

In many of our locations, we have a bespoke tailor who can make a handmade suit for you from scratch, exactly to your specifications and size. He measures you, cuts the fabric, makes the alterations, and does the final fit. We believe very much in the integrity and the credibility of our brand; our reputation rests on it. So we're very careful to stick to the traditional ways of manufacturing bespoke suits. We also offer custom shirting. You can have a shirt customized to your needs, or you can have a shirt made from scratch.

You have new stores around the world.

We have about 200 stores worldwide, and we're planning to open a lot more. At the moment, our business is quite Asia-focused, but we have great opportunities to reestablish the brand in Europe, the Middle East, and America.

You have also opened clubs. What are they like?

This is one of the exciting ways we have underpinned our focus on becoming a lifestyle brand. We're going to open three "homes" – in London, Tokyo, and Shanghai. These homes will look as Alfred Dunhill's home might have looked like in these geographies. The London home will open this summer. Our home in Tokyo will be opened in December, and in July or August, we'll open a new home in Shanghai. These homes will represent what the brand is all about; they are not just retail environments, but will also incorporate ancillary services such as a club, restaurant, spa, and barber shop, as well as bespoke tailor services and Bentley chauffeur services. So these homes really represent the Dunhill lifestyle.

Do you have to be a king to be a member?

You don't have to be a king, but you do have to be invited to join. The aim of the club is to capture people who understand what our brand is all about – people with lifestyles that are in keeping with the Dunhill lifestyle, if you will.

Will you open a club in the United States?

Yes. We need to reestablish our brand in the United States and underpin our overall growth with something that reflects what the brand is all about today. So we're looking to open a "home," perhaps on a smaller scale, in New York – probably in 2009 – that replicates some of the elements we offer in London, Tokyo, and Shanghai. It will be more than just a retail space and may comprise a club, spa, restaurant, or barber shop.

What are your plans for growing your business in America?

We will relocate our store from Fifth Avenue to Madison in the summer and after that we are looking at different options to increase our presence across the country including retail and wholesale channels. The Dunhill brand has great potential in this market. There are a lot of American Anglophiles who want to wear great British clothing and carry and wear great British accessories. We also want to expand our wholesale business in the U.S., and work closely with department stores to develop the brand and complement our retail presence.

What do you like most about Dunhill yourself?

I love the brand's appeal. Relatively few brands really cater to all of a man's need at this level. If I'm looking for a great pen, a great suit, or a great bag or wallet, I can go to Dunhill. It's one of the few environments in the world where a man can feel pampered and not ashamed of treating himself to something he wants and feels he has earned. I also love the Britishness with which we execute the brand.

Is Dunhill trying to bring back that old-fashioned sense of class?

Absolutely, but in a contemporary way. And as I've said before, there are relatively few places where us guys get a chance to treat ourselves or allow ourselves to be treated. We hope that customers worldwide always think of a Dunhill environment as the one place where men can unabashedly treat themselves or be treated to a great gift by their partner. ●