

business

# Brunello Cucinelli Implores Tech Sector to ‘Humanize the Web’

- The executive visits Dreamforce 2017 to address the tech industry, asking it to keep humanism alive through all the innovation.

By Adriana Lee

**Brunello Cucinelli** came to Dreamforce Wednesday with an imperative for the tech community: Humanizing the web must be a priority.

The luxury fashion designer and mogul has often talked about the need for elegance, dignity and kindness in today’s increasingly mechanized and innovation-obsessed world. This time, he brought his message straight to the country’s leading technology hub, at one of the region’s largest industry events.

With his trademark verve and thought-provoking insights, Cucinelli charmed the audience at his fireside chat with Salesforce chief executive officer Marc Benioff. But he also conveyed a serious concern that seems timely in the age of artificial intelligence, machine learning and computer vision.

With the growing number of screens in modern life, he said, “we need to manage and govern the web, so that these technologies are used ‘graciously,’ and do not deprive us and our children of the soul we were given.”

The opportunity to address the Dreamforce audience came from a social event,

Brunello Cucinelli at Dreamforce 2017 with Marc Benioff.



a dinner where Benioff heard Cucinelli’s take on the modernized world and how to maintain a human approach to doing business today.

For instance, Brunello Cucinelli’s company, which donates as much as 20 percent to charitable efforts, prohibits

employees from working overtime.

“We start working at 8 a.m., and we stop at 1. We have a pretty long lunch break; we have our pasta,” he said onstage. “It is forbidden to work beyond half past 5 p.m. It is forbidden to send e-mails on Saturdays and Sundays.” Treating people as human

beings and respecting employees’ lives and downtime away from work is a critical aspect of Cucinelli’s operation.

“Dignity, maybe, comes before bread,” he said. “If I give dignity to you, you will be more responsible tomorrow. You will be more creative in turn...Dignity engenders creativity. And you’ll have a company that grows in a staggering manner.”

The sentiment could have seemed quaint for a jaded tech sector, except that it came from the head of a 456 million-euro empire. The Brunello Cucinelli brand has grown in all markets, and the company expects double-digit growth in revenues and profits this year.

The company went public in Milan in 2012, but Cucinelli explained that this almost didn’t happen. “I had some investors [say] I needed to grow my revenues 50 percent a year, and I said, ‘No. I don’t want to go public then, if that’s the condition,’” he explained.

Of course, Cucinelli did want to grow his business, but he wanted what he called “gracious growth” or “gracious profit” of about 10 percent. That would allow him to “lead a normal life.”

That life has turned out to be rather extraordinary, and it gives him a perch to address technology’s visionaries and show them that success, creativity and innovation doesn’t have to have a human cost. And he hopes that these “guardians, custodians of this new millennium in front of us,” as he calls them, bear that in mind as they shape the future.