



With economists predicting low growth and economic stagnation, along with mounting uncertainty currently characterizing sentiment toward the Euro zone, the international business and investment community, as of recent, moved away from the stereotype grouping of Italy with Greece, Spain and Portugal in terms of the sovereign debt problems facing those countries. While we, in an educated and fact based fashion (May 9, 2011 [White Paper](#) and [Presenting Italy: Feb 11 2013 Summit](#)) argued this as incorrect, the Italian Business & Investment Initiative was established in 2010 by Fernando Napolitano, a 20 year veteran of Booz Allen Hamilton, to shine a light on the vibrant Italian economy just beneath the surface of a challenging financial climate – led by Italy’s five million Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and innovative start-ups.

Although Italy is widely known to the rest of the world for its “Four F’s” – Food, Fashion, Furniture and Fast cars – the entrepreneurial spirit pouring out of the industrial regions of Italy makes the country one of the best kept secrets in the venture capital investment world. These companies, known for their niche specialization and the quality and reliability of their products, employ 90% of the Italian workforce and constitute the backbone of Italy’s export-led economy, contributing 80% of the country’s GDP.

Under the leadership of Fernando Napolitano, the Italian Business & Investment Initiative has assembled a team of experts from the most influential American and Italian academics, media, politicians, corporate institutions – such as Intesa Sanpaolo-Start Up Initiative, Innogest SGR and Mind The Bridge of San Francisco– and their senior leadership, each bringing a different competency to the table, to ensure these innovative companies reach the next phase in their evolution. In addition, IB&I has partnered with organizations such as [BAIA](#) and [SVIEC](#) from Silicon Valley to provide additional capabilities and networking on the West coast. Last but not least IB&I cooperates with [NIAF](#) (National Italian American Foundation) on broader topics related to the relationship between the United States and Italy.

[Fulbright BEST](#), is the first step of this innovative and achievement based strategy. It is a unique scholarship whose objective is to create high-tech entrepreneurs in Italy. Constituted with the US embassy in Rome, targets Italian high tech PhDs who have an innovative business idea deriving from their scientific research. Over the last 6 years, 60 Italians went through this scholarship and 26 high tech start ups have been created in Italy. IB&I is the logical second step. Based in New York, it has created a web of relationships with the local business community to facilitate SMEs and many other vibrant high-tech start ups to internationalize. Our series of biannual events in New York provides the U.S. venture capital and private equity investment communities with a platform through which to learn about Italy’s dynamic and SME sector, to be introduced to some of the most exciting small businesses in that sector, and ultimately to make investments into them. IB&I has also launched in New York on Feb 11 2013 the summit “Italy Meets the United States of America” whose objective is to facilitate a direct dialogue between Italian leadership – government, corporations, civil society – and US investors and opinion maker. This will be a yearly summit.

These investment opportunities not only spur growth in the US and Italian economies, but also clearly showcase the talent and innovative thinking that demonstrates Why Italy Matters to the World.