

The Business of Saving the Planet One Shoebox at a Time

By Madeleine Streets



The Clever Little Bag, created by Puma in partnership with Fuseproject, reimagined the traditional shoebox to make it more sustainable.

CREDIT: FUSEPROJECT

In 2010, Puma ditched shoeboxes in a splashy corporate move that ushered in reusable shoe bags called the “Clever Little Bag.” Nine years later, more footwear companies are continuing to roll out sustainability initiatives of their own. This is in response to customers expecting businesses they buy from to have greener practices. Meanwhile, those very same shoppers purchase more items online that need to get shipped (and sometimes returned).

“The beauty of doing projects with packaging is that no matter what line of product you have, whether they are sustainable or not, all shoes and all products can benefit from sustainable packaging,” said Yves Behar, CEO at Fuseproject, the industrial design firm behind Puma’s bag packaging.

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to be based around the reduction of packaging material and shipping optimization, making packaging smaller so you fit more in a shipping container,” said Sean Murphy, chief marketing officer at L&E International. “That way, you are reducing costs and improving your environmental impact at the same time.”



L&E has made packages for leading footwear brands, such as Adidas and Asics, which aim to use less material and reduce waste.

CREDIT: L&E

Cost is a frequent concern for brands and retailers due to the limited availability of newer, sustainable materials. Some companies are happy to absorb this cost for the added environmental benefit, but, for others, the drive to be more sustainable is more of a marketing tactic than a true corporate commitment. Although customers are beginning to demand more sustainable packaging from companies, the industry has been slow to introduce it at scale.

But Fuseproject’s Behar believes that through government regulation and large-scale industry commitment, these costs could be cut. Mass adoption would increase the manufacturing of sustainable materials and lower the cost per unit. In combination with smarter design, this would mean smaller, eco-friendly packages at a lower price point.

“Costs are an excuse. There is a bit of a chicken and egg situation. As long as we use cost and quantity commitments as a way to not go in the right direction, we will not find ourselves improving the sustainability of the packaging that we use,” Behar said.

Even for companies that are investing in sustainability, there is the challenge of good aesthetics. In addition to using recycled textiles, eliminating dyes is important as they are one of the biggest sources of pollution associated with the fashion industry. But this can result in a less visually appealing end product.



To encourage customers to recycle their packaging, some Lumi products come with directions printed inside to remind and guide consumers.

CREDIT: LUMI

“Most brands are interested in crisp, colorful prints because they look better and therefore may perform better from a marketing and experience standpoint,” said Stephan Ango, co-founder of Lumi, a packaging company that specializes in e-commerce. “This means that the brand needs to be able to stand out and provide value in other ways.”

That value could be through committing to offset the carbon footprint of each e-commerce order. At Rothys’, the brand partners with The Envira Amazonia Project, a conservation initiative that protects nearly 500,000 acres of tropical rainforest. Meanwhile, Lumi focuses on consumer education through media channels, such as its YouTube show “Shipping Things” and podcast “Well Made.” For L&E, material innovation is still key.

“I like to design and engineer packaging out of plastic and into paper whenever possible,” said Murphy. “As a company, however, we say that we’re material neutral, so we use plastic responsibly — but try to move on.”

Watch the video below to see how sustainable brand Allbirds is succeeding:



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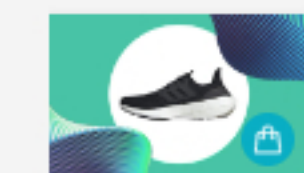
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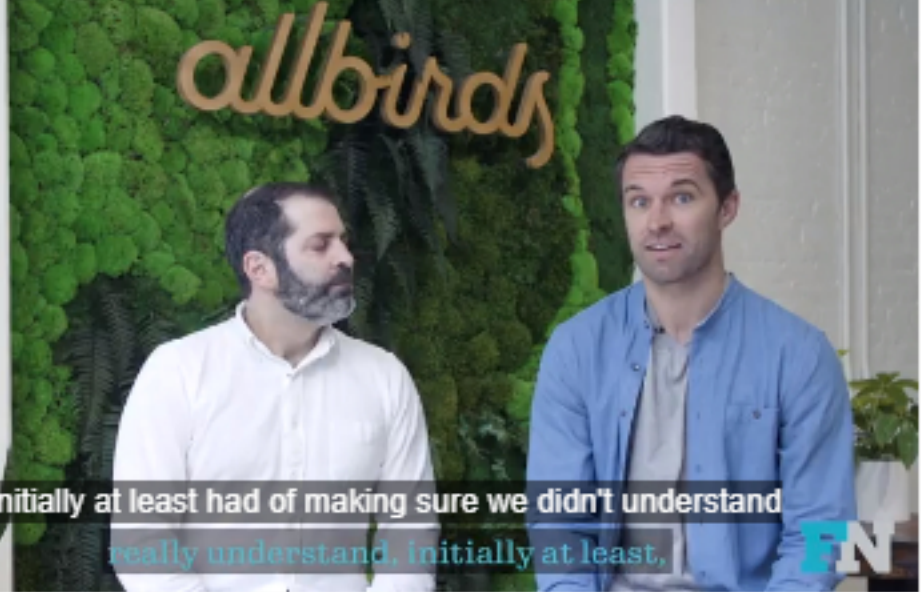
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