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This Business Is Selling All Kinds of Sustainable Products In One Digital Destination

By Madeleine Streets



CREDIT: BUHO

Consumers increasingly want environmentally friendly products, with a recent CGS survey finding that 68% of respondents said sustainability was an important factor in their purchasing decisions. But to find these products, shoppers often have to scour multiple websites.

Buho, an e-commerce site dedicated to sustainable and ethical wares, is hoping to change that.

"I was in Vegas for market appointments, and I realized that it had been about five years since I was last in the fashion industry. But not much had changed," said Maria Casey, CEO at Buho. "I was astounded by how much brands needed to improve in the sustainability field. Then I looked at my own life and realized that if I wanted to buy everything sustainable and ethically made, I would have to go to seven different stores."

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Casey's solution was to launch Buho, an e-tailer for footwear, apparel and home goods that stocks only brands that meet her sustainability requirements. Footwear offerings include products from Nisolo, and Castaner; in all, there were about 60 brands featured on the site at the time of publication.

Products can be searched by type or by "values," such as "Ethically Made," "Vegan" and "Locally Made"; all products must fit into at least one of these categories. The company keeps a spreadsheet of its featured brands and actively looks for new partners to fill gaps in inventory; it is currently searching for more vegan brands.

"The ethical aspect of their marketplace was a major component of us continuing the conversation and ultimately deciding to onboard them as a new partner," said Amanda Roesch, partnerships senior associate at Nisolo, a sustainable footwear brand. "They also cater to both men and women. It can be a challenge at times to find outlets to showcase both sides of our line."



Casey was inspired by her time in the Peace Corps in Bangladesh, where poor working conditions and waste were common in apparel and footwear production.

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In addition to stocking brands with a commitment to the environment, Buho partners with The Better Packaging Co. to ensure all packaging is fully compostable; the foam used to protect delicate items is made from cornstarch and disintegrates in water. Shipping is done through the carbon-neutral programs of UPS and USPS to minimize the carbon footprint associated with e-commerce.

A common concern is that manufacturing new products, even if sustainable, doesn't resolve the issue of existing items going into landfill. To address this, Buho has an upcycling rewards program, through which customers can send in lightly used clothing and footwear via prepaid labels and receive a \$10 credit toward their next \$50 purchase.

These items are then either donated to Dress for Success, Catholic Charities Humanitarian Aid or kept to be turned into reusable fabric. The company is raising funds to open a factory in 2020, which will engineer a new yarn from the materials that don't meet the charity partners' standards.

"Sustainability to me means living a life that minimizes my global footprint and setting this up in a way that has longevity, that my daughter and future generations can carry on," said Casey. "It's about changing our daily behaviors to be more conscious of the impact of what we're consuming, what we're using, what we're driving, so that the planet can actually be beautiful for years to come."

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



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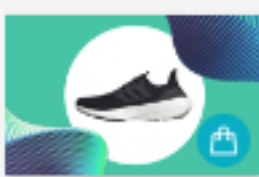
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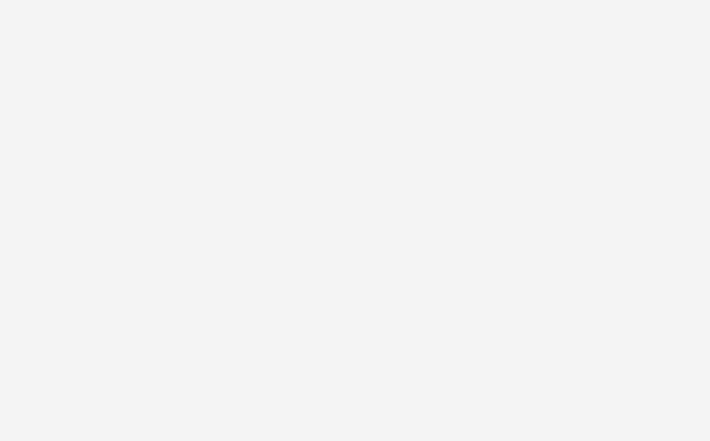
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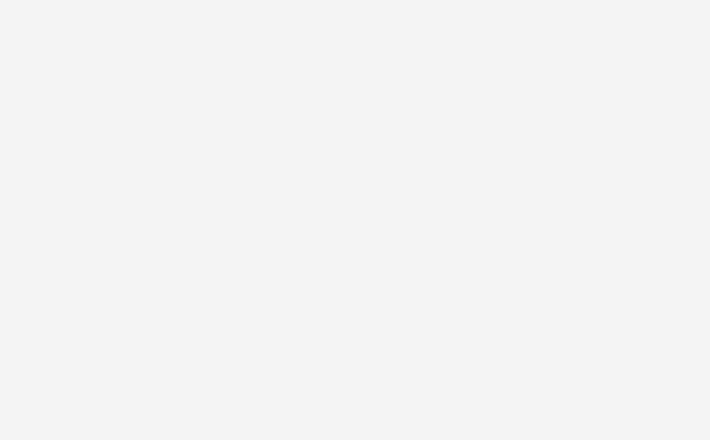
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