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Create Tomorrow's Vintage

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Founded by Maria Erixon Levin, Joakim Levin, and Palle Stenberg in Gothenburg in 2001, Nudie Jeans Co is a Swedish denim company recognized for its work with sustainability, both environmentally and socially. Kevin Gelsi, Nudie Jeans's Circular Product Manager, describes how Nudie Jeans Co, with its denim selection made from 100% organic cotton, its transparent production, and its repair, reuse and recycle program, both provides and maintains a tradition that is true to the history of denim and its characteristics.

Going through life sitting on our asses does not get us far because change requires commitment. Although technological advances are fueling the retail arena with innovation, high-tech solutions to structural problems will only get us so far. Before we put a Band-Aid on to stop the bleeding, we clean the wound. Cleaning up our mess is a good start, but it is different from patching up what can be fixed. If we want to be around tomorrow, we need to do both. Apart from tech innovation, we also need business model innovation, with strings attached to the systematic flaws and misconnections of textile value chains. To reclaim the 'sense' in the up-to-date nonsense over producing world of fashion, we believe in rewiring the textile industry. Supported by technological developments and made reality by a behavioral transition.

The notion of a high-quality product made in a fair way is one of the spiral coils of our DNA, and we believe that this constitutes a crucial foundation of materializing circularity. The packaging and deliverance of that idea, and the explorative approach of constantly going our own way and doing something different, has made us who we are. By making the

noise of our sewing machines echo in the stitches of every repair we have ever made, turning well-worn and mended denim into something uniquely beautiful, like a second skin, we are paving the way for sentimental value. The essence of which ticks one of the biggest boxes on the list of requirements for the future of consumption, characterized as *relevance*.

When we started repairing jeans, some fifteen years ago, we knew nothing of the inherent potency of the seed we had planted. It grew organically at its own pace: What had initially been a basic instinct for fixing what is broken eventually turned into our most obvious promise ever—*free repairs for life*. Back then, we only had hemming machines for adjusting length sizes. However, the creative in-store crew members started to experiment with them, repairing their own jeans, something which led to regular customers asking for the same thing. With inspiration from Maria's father's old repair shop for tires, the bits started to fall into place. Later on, following word-of-mouth and some amplified community building, our conceptualization of the *Nudie Jeans Repair Shop* was officially sculpted in 2012. The purpose of our existence had obtained new meaning, and the reasons for dropping by one of our stores had changed.

From a lifecycle perspective, prolonging the life of a product comes first, according to the waste hierarchy. For us, this also became a gateway into additional circular solutions, like trading in postconsumer Nudie Jeans garments, which later enabled the sale of *Reuse Jeans*, thus providing a supply of patching material for the repair service and fabric streams for recycling programs. We have gradually realized the importance of consumer engagement, the reciprocity of the dependency in the relationship with our users. From decent products, with personal value and beneficial service offers, come trust and loyalty, two of the major ingredients in our recipe for repeat customers. To engineer reversed supply chains, retail needs to incentivize the consumption patterns which lead to broader interactivity and put the key pieces of the puzzle in place, whereby consumers, apart from doing their shopping, play the additional role as the previously missing suppliers of postconsumer garments.

Keeping an eye on the rearview mirror as we gaze into the future, it is clear we need to keep digging where we stand, to scale and develop the circular activities that are ongoing for us. Various barriers need to be

overcome, or preferably erased: To do so, in the global market of today, technology is key. Policy initiatives, like the EU Commission's proposal for digital product passports, have the potential to hurry up this process. Making accessible traceability and product-specific data mandatory will not leave stakeholders much choice but to adapt and invest. Exactly what to expect around the corner cannot be predicted: However, as we are inevitably and continuously sketching the outlines of our future, fragments of a preview are constantly being revealed to us. We can already see plenty of startups offering new services, which if utilized responsibly, can save retail from its own abyss and become a part of the solution. If the industry succeeds in linking logistics with advanced product and material management, in an omnichannel-like manner, where online resale platforms, AI-sorting entities and textile recyclers are interlinked, for example, the harmonization of our resource efficiency methodologies can be optimized. In the same way that we need biodiversity and ecosystem services, we see the demand for diversity in retail driving the mechanisms in the infrastructure facilitating a holistic circular machinery, in order to curate the recovery of a healthy balance in the textile industry.

It is a little too late to '*nip it in the bud*', especially for fast fashion giants facing the massive challenges of business model adjustments. Technological advances have mitigating properties, but they will not dig deep enough to deal with the root cause of the infection plaguing this industry if decision-makers are not willing to get their hands dirty and pay the price. We believe the path we have chosen is right for us, but we also understand that it is not the only one. It reminds us a little of that opening scene from the film *Interstellar*. Spoiler alert, but you initially believe you are watching retrospective interviews with old farmers talking about being overwhelmed by unbearable living conditions and sandstorm invasions: However, this is a lens into the future. In the movie, their traditional cultivation methods still work while the environmental circumstances for life are in grave danger. What we mean here is just that being 'old school' is not so bad in some ways, and that it might be more significant than ever to bear that in mind moving forward. The age of workwear, as we know it, has passed, but we still need clothes that work, which is why we are stepping into the future by breaking up with the modern fashion industry, because we are not here to create landfills. We are here to *create tomorrow's vintage*.

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