

Part II

Strategy and Leadership for a Sustainability Transition

New Business Models to Make Fashion More Sustainable

Let us tell you a little more about the fashion industry. It's the second most polluting, only after oil. Even more staggering is the way we as humans evolved. We consume 400% more clothing today compared to 20 years ago, and the average garment is only worn seven times before it gets thrown out. Overconsumption and the disposal of unwanted clothing has become a global problem. A circular economy could be part of the solution. At MUD Jeans, we take the most popular fashion item, a pair of jeans, and make these in a way to be recycled after use. Apart from discarding leather labels (100% vegan), MUD Jeans introduced the innovative concept "Lease A Jeans". Customers can rent their denim through the Lease programme and pay a one-off membership fee of €29,- and then €7,50 a month. After a year, customers can keep the jeans or swap them for a new pair, continuing paying the monthly fee.

When we introduced the lease model in 2013, it was big news. The Guardian, the Wall Street Journal, The Huffington Post, they all wrote about this small Dutch company turning the circular economy into a brand building experience. A few years ago, we already reconsidered how fashion should be produced and how it could be consumed.

Production-wise this is way more challenging than a traditional clothing company; we had to really think through our waste streams, logistics, design process and recycle process. But since the circular economy is in our DNA this is what we do. Consumption-wise we had to encourage consumers to change their shopping behaviour. Leasing a product requires a different mindset; the relationship to a brand no longer ends as soon as the purchase is complete.

While we are slowly building a community of like-minded people that search for brands that stand for something bigger than just the product, we suddenly noticed an increase in the number of people that want to change their lifestyles; fewer material possessions but more meaningful experiences that help them live better. Millennials in particular are seeking out this minimalist lifestyle. This group marks a quarter of the population and the majority of the workforce.

Team MUD always kept on the positive side, being creative with small budgets, focusing on storytelling and its trans-seasonal collection. The simple lesson learned; keep believing in your mission. Don't change it. Even though others may think you're trying to accomplish the impossible!

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