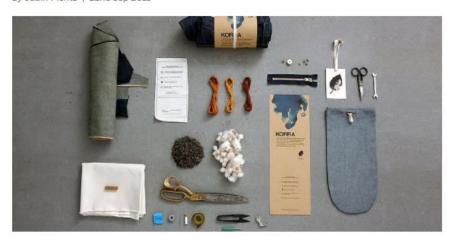
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How the Goodpeople at Korra are building a sustainable and conscious business around denim

By Jubin Mehta | 22nd Sep 2015



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Shyam Sukhramani has spent more than 17 years at Levi Strauss & Co. After his last two directorial stints in the company at Hong Kong and San Francisco, Shyam decided to relocate to India. The time was 2012 and the ecommerce boom was on. Shyam joined Sher Singh as the Chief Merchandising and Marketing Officer. Hardly a year into the stint, Sher Singh was acquired by Myntra and left Shyam with two choices - to carry on at Myntra or start something more close to his heart. He chose the latter.



In the entire startup race, only the employees suffer "In this extremely fast paced startup and technology world, employees are often at the receiving end," Shyam told me over a phone call. The mania from Silicon Valley has percolated and accelerated its way to India and many a times, there is hardly a focus on the long term. All the discussions around a tech bubble have returned and it might all just settled down again but from an entrepreneur's point of view, building a business to

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The hard choices

Korra has some interesting aspects to it - they don't mass manufacture; everything is stitched after order. There is no assembly line; every pair of jeans is stitched by a tailor from start to finish. All their cloth is organic and conscious; the aim is to keep all inorganic practices at bay. They use second hand machines which tend to have longevity and can be repaired. "We are not looking at scale right now. It is very important to build healthy processes before ramping them up," says Shyam.



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Along with Shyam, Korra is headed by Himanshu Shani, Mia Morikawa, and Rajesh Jaju. Himanshu founded CellDSGN in 2003 and established the label 11.11 that retails from its own store and premier independent stores across Europe, US, and Japan. Mia is the artist and creative director of 11.11 who joined the CellDSGN team in 2010. Rajesh is an apparel retailer and distributor in Delhi since 1992 who has helped to establish brands like Levi's, Flying Machine, US Polo, Ed Hardy, and Elle. The four of them form the core team at Korra.



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Korra doesn't believe in assembly lines for the sheer joy of making something with the hand. "If a tailor is making a pair of jeans from end to end, there is an immense sense of satisfaction involved," says Shyam. Korra also makes with longevity in mind. If there is a problem with a pair, Korra aims to repair and give back the cloth to the consumer. "Instead of giving three choices to the consumer, we'd rather ask the consumer to pause, devote some time and give us information so that we can make it right the first time," says Shyam.

Despite all these choices, Korra manages to stitch and ship an order within a day. Korra has a team of 20 tailors at their Delhi unit who custom-make the jeans. A customer can also ask for sizes like 31.5 or 29, sizes which are typically not available.

Sustaining and the road ahead

Completely bootstrapped, Korra has been surviving and thriving for the past three years. The average price range for a pair of jeans is at INR 3500 and online is their primary mode of customer acquisition. "We have built a healthy community on social media and our channels Instagram and Facebook bring in a lot of orders. We are also present on Myntra and Amazon and will explore other modes but our website will remain the primary mode," says Shyam.



It has been a challenge to stick to the choices Korra has made but then they are challenging the economic principles of industrialisation and mass manufacturing which have been built over the last century. Nothing stands for ever though. With changing times and increasing consciousness, there is a growing segment of people who like to see where their food is coming from or how their clothes are being made. "Our ethos is very important to us and we are confident about the path we have chosen," concludes Shyam.

In the race towards standardisation and speed, companies like Korra are a pleasant alternative that give a different perspective to doing business. One can expect more and more such initiatives growing roots in the coming times.

Website: Korra

