

IT ONLY TAKES A SMILE

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It's hard to conceive that you yourself are the minority. That even with 613 Facebook friends and maybe 99 Insta followers, you merely fit into a small percentage of people that sort of mean something to the greater world. Mostly because your tidy socio-economic existence insists you remain in a subset of fast consumption, buying what you want when you want, not acutely aware that 80 per cent of the world are living on less than \$10 a day.

That's OK, you can't berate society for playing to a life that was paved for them. We love to buy stuff; big things, small things, sexy things, surfing things, we drool all over shiny newness and we've got cute little credit cards to clean up the mess behind us. Stuff just makes us super happy, until it gets old, then we get sad, then we buy more stuff. But, believe it or not, the paradigm is actually starting to shift. We care about where our dollar goes and, most importantly, who it's going to and how it's being used. So, what if there was a way we could maintain our super-neat get-ups while supporting sustainable giving at the same time? Soren Molineux and the team at Smile Clothing let you do just that. Every time you receive, you give, which is surely something to smile about. >>

The Smile goodwill extends to Australia, as well as abroad.
PHOTO: SMILE CLOTHING



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“Everyone wants to help out where they can and business should be no different. Even the smallest efforts magnified by the general populous will make a massive difference.”

Soren is a nice guy, doing nice guy things on a daily basis with Bali as his centre. But, ask him and he'll refer to himself as, "Average, just lucky enough to have found something I believe in that hopefully makes a small, but valuable, difference at the same time". He writes to me from Varkala in India, where he is currently searching for some waves after completing Smile's latest clothing drop to New Delhi, taking the amount of garments dropped so far to over 5000.

Soren's life might sound dreamy to some wave wanderers; built outside convention, he wakes up, grabs an espresso, makes one with the Indian Ocean and sets to work at their factory. Sure he's conjured himself a home in in one of the world's most popular surfing destinations, but it's not exactly an ideal life. He'll be the first to tell you that starting a small company, let alone social enterprise, has it's trials and tribulations. But, it's about more than a lifestyle for this Sunshine Coast surfer and former investment banker. "After spending a considerable amount of our formative years on the open road, often in places where school uniforms were not plentiful, or in some cases not available at all, people we met along the way have offered us meals, warmth and smiles against a background of hardship." It was on one of these trips that Soren really saw purpose at work after gifting some of his T-shirts to children that he had brought from home. Something he credits the beginnings of Smile to years later.

"I guess this made us all have a collective consciousness that if we can do a small thing like Smile to create sustainable giving of uniforms to children in need, not only are we able to give back to communities around the world, but also assist education by ensuring as many kids as possible can go to school."

As a social enterprise, Smile Clothing was born off the back of the One For One model, a premise Soren identified in US-based TOMS shoes back in 2008, a company that would match every pair of shoes purchased with a pair of new shoes given to a child in need. Likewise, every purchase of a Smile garment will automatically provide a child in need with a brand-new T-shirt or school uniform. It's simple really, Give First – Wear Second. Smile came to fruition between 2008 and 2009 and has now made clothing drops to communities in Indonesia, Cambodia, Kenya, India, Sri Lanka and remote Australia.

Solving the problem, one smile at a time
Right now, there are one billion children living in poverty worldwide, with 121 million of

those children out of education. In many cases it's because children lack school uniforms and the necessary resources required to attend school. I couldn't justify the amount of money I spend on clothes and obsolete things I don't really need. This is maybe why Smile seduces my softer consumer side, by providing an on-trend aesthetic so I can be both a modern-day gal and contributing to something with a greater purpose at the same time. After all, Smile Clothing is built on the desire to add to the world, not take from it, and Soren believes the future of commerce has to be about more than simply trading. "It has to have a human element and has to care a little. We know that our model does not answer all the world's problems, but we feel that if we can simply play our small part we are putting our best foot forward. The One For One model allows people to give at the same time as to receive.

"Everyone wants to help out where they can and business should be no different. Even the smallest efforts magnified by the general populous will make a massive difference. We think that people in general are good at heart. They want to be a part of something good and help out where they can. With this in mind, we thought if we can be the conduit between everyday people from our walk of life and children in need then it is a win-win situation."

It's still early days for the guys at Smile, and granted their dreams are big, with a goal to inevitably sell 100,000 garments, which will mean 100,000 garments donated. "We do not want to limit ourselves to a specific number of donations given, more just an overall effort to increase our exposure in the mainstream population, to allow more people to help us give."

Soren and the team, which is also made up of Bede Carmine and financial partners Shaun Denaro and Jesse Kirley, have a greater message than simply clothing children in need. As a business, they hope to encourage the same model of sustainable giving throughout the global economy. "This economy of scale is what we are currently aiming for, just to spread our message to more people in all corners of the world," says Soren.

"Another goal would be doing it sustainably full-time. And last, we set our goals on playing our part to encourage forward progression in the world of social enterprises. To increase awareness of 'non-standard' business models that incorporate giving into their modality. We have already seen such progression on this front over the past 3-4 years, and I truly feel like this is the way things are moving worldwide. If we can not only play a part in this, but add to it as well, that would be an enormous outcome. To inspire other people looking to start a business and to enable them to think a little differently."



PHOTOS: SMILE CLOTHING



THE CLOTHING

In essence, sustainability is about meeting the needs of today, without adversely impacting on the needs of tomorrow. Let's be honest, the majority of our clothing comes from China. If you've paid attention, you'll know that prices have dropped considerably over the past two years out of a competitive attempt to capture majority market share, or in layman's terms, "get all the dudes and all the dollars". What does that mean? Probably that the ground people responsible for the very production of that product are subject to some of the poorest working conditions conceivable. With the Smile Clothing business model, the cost of the item donated is built into the product you buy, making Smile not a charity, but an example of sustainable philanthropic capitalism.

Made in Indonesia, with direct involvement and control from the founders, the Smile Clothing range is surprising. The online shop plays host to a tight collection of basic day wear for both men and women, formed around a relaxed, aquatic theme that are highly wearable, 100% cotton and will totes look the cutest worn with white Birkenstocks. Think a similar aesthetic to that of Luke Stedman's label minus the top button and hipstertude. I only say it's surprising because I mostly associate any kind of altruistic clothing with the word "ugly" and "ew, that's a nice idea, but I wouldn't wear it".

But, not here, I'm on this band wagon. Smile Clothing makes relatively affordable basics that are comfortable and have that cool sort of understated vibe about them. And, aren't we all about that cool sort of understated vibe?

Sure, they could increase their women's range, but surprise to all the men in my life, here's that Christmas present I promised and forgot to get you, and I guarantee you'll be smiling about it!

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Visit smileclothing.co and have a look around the online shop or read up on Smile Clothing's recent clothing drops on the blog. Sign up to the newsletter or just follow @smileclothingco on Instagram. 🐦