

Allbirds as the world's most comfortable shoes

[Business](#), [Marketing](#)



As a travel blogger, I'm in constant search for comfortable shoes. I feel confident saying that I've tried most shoe brands that claim to be excellent quality with superior comfortable. Sure there have been some shoes that fit my needs and others that left me thinking I would have been better off barefoot, but the hunt for that right shoe lived on. Not only has comfort been an area of concern for me, but so has sustainability. Being on my feet most of the day, I tend to wear shoes out pretty quickly, often to the point that I can't even donate them because they are so worn out. Unfortunately, these factors left me on the search for that perfect shoe. In January of this year, I overheard a conversation between two of my MBA classmates who were discussing "Google shoes".

My first thought was, "what happened to self-driving cars, now Google has moved to shoes?". Having sparked my interest I asked what shoes they were referring to and they informed me that Google is not yet making shoes but that they were talking about Allbirds, "the shoes that has taken over silicon valley". Once class ended I of course ran to my computer, looked up Allbirds, saw the tagline "the world's most comfortable shoes," and within minutes placed my first order. Talk about impulse buy. Since receiving the shoes five months ago, I've worn them in 2 countries, 5 states, and to countless MBA classes. With confidence I can say, they really are one of the most comfortable shoes I have ever laced-up and they provide that feel good feeling because of the mission of their creators. In this paper, I will examine the story of Allbird's founders, the history of the company, the company's mission and execution of social responsibility, and discuss what I have learned from their story.

Allbirds founders, Tim Brown and Joey Zwillinger, set out to help save the planet by making it greener, one lace-up at a time. Tagged with the company slogan, “ the world’s most comfortable shoes,” Allbirds is a San Francisco based start-up founded in 2014. The company Allbirds, designs and manufactures sustainable and environmentally friendly footwear through the use of merino wool, eucalyptus tree fibers, castor bean oil, and recycled plastic bottles. Before diving deep into the creation of the company and it’s mission to be socially responsible, it is important to examine the company’s founders because it is after all, the founders values and passions that drive the business.

The first founder is Tim Brown, a New Zealand native who had little experience in the fashion and football industry until Allbirds. He spent his career playing soccer around the world as a professional player for New Zealand’s national team. He even had a shoe sponsorship with Nike. When ask about his soccer career, Brown is very clear that it was never about the actual game for him. In fact, in an interview with Esquire he stated, “ I didn’t really like soccer, but playing for New Zealand was deeply meaningful” (Forester, 2017). This speaks highly to Brown’s person in that he driven by meaning and purpose rather than profit, fame, and or glory. When his soccer career came to an end after eight years, Tim unsure of what his next career move would be, did know that he wanted to again find something with deep meaning. This search would eventually lead him to the desire to create something from merino wool, a sustainable resource. After years of research and brainstorming, Tim decided he wanted to disrupt the footwear industry. Still not 100% sure of what his exact product would be, he teamed up with

renewable expert and engineer Joey Zwillinger. Zwillinger, an MBA graduate from The Wharton School of Business who spent his career as a consultant at Deloitte and as VP of Industrial Products at Solazyme. Just as Brown, Zwillinger saw Brown's proposal of a partnership as a way to bring meaning to his career and to "create better things in a better way" (Allbirds).

Brown and Zwillinger spent several years trying to craft the perfect shoe from merino wool and were determined to make every aspect of the shoes' creation environmentally friendly and sustainable. Finally they felt comfortable enough with the wool shoe prototype that they had created and they launched a Kickstarter campaign with the goal of raising \$30,000 in 30 days. The partners did not meet their goal, they exceeded it! Within five days of the campaign launch they raised \$119,196. According to their Kickstarted page, on day five they decided to close the campaign, not because they didn't want more money (of course they did), but because they wanted to focus on delivering the best possible product to their generous backers on a scale they felt comfortable (Brown). In the high intensity of founding a start-up and the excitement of nearly raising 4x your goal within five days, I can only imagine it took some will power to walk away from what was potential a lot of money that still could have been raised. This again speaks to the duo's desire to create a great product rather than chasing after fortune. Spending the time perfecting their prototype paid off, and eventually they fundraised more than \$7.25 million dollars in capital to launch Allbirds.

Just as Brown admits he didn't really like soccer, he and Zwillinger both admit, " we don't even like shoes. As good as that would be for a PR sort of story" (Forester, 2017). Brown informs that he created a shoes company because of the lack of a middle market in this industry as well as what he viewed as a saturation of average product that lacked innovation (Findling, 2017). With nature as their muse, Allbirds has set out to disrupt footwear industry by eliminating the use of typical synthetic materials used to make use and instead creating a line category of shoes inspired by only natural materials.

The mission of Allbirds is to prove that comfort and an attractive design doesn't interfere with sustainability. The company seeks to create footwear that can be utilized by runners just as it can be utilized by fashionista(o)s. By appearance the shoe is as simple and minimal as can be with no logo and no unnecessary details. Each shoes is created with 60% less energy than what is used to create it's synthetic competition. Brown states that his line of shoes is so environmentally friendly that at the end of your time with it, you can bury it in a garden and it will disappear (Forester, 2017). Even the packaging the shoes arrives to consumers in was thoughtful crafted to be an all-in-one. Instead of using unnecessary cardboard for a shoe box and then sending the shoes in another piece of cardboard, Allbird shoe packaging is 90% post consumer recycled cardboard that serves as a shoebox and a mailer. This past year Allbirds earned their B Corp certification, responding, " The environment is our greatest stakeholder. How we treat it is just as important as the bottomline" (Allbirds).

Not only is the product itself conscious of the wellbeing of all stakeholder but so is the company. Allbirds has partnered with Soles4Souls to donate any shoes that are returned and pass inspection to be considered lightly used. These returned shoes are then sent around the world to community who need them most, giving lightly used shoes new life (Allbirds). These lightly used shoes come from customer returns. Allbirds stands by their products so strongly that they give customers the opportunity to try their shoes for 30, and if you don't like them they will return them without question. I can attest to this claim as I unfortunately had to return my first pair due to sizing. I am between sizes and decided to order my smaller size with the thought that wool shoes would stretch. After wearing them for two weeks and realizing they weren't going to stretch I emailed the company, not with the intention of returning but just to ask what size they recommend. I was planning on donating the first pair I had bought. After emailing, I received a response within 2 hours informing me they would express ship a new pair with a size up and if I could kindly return the old pair. Believe it or not, I receive the new pair before even return the old pair. Talk about trusting your customer!

Ultimately there is a lot to learn from this company and it's founder, all of which relate back to our topic of the semester, it is a responsibility to be socially conscious in a business's purpose. At the end of the day, yes the bottomline matters but " when any profession becomes primarily about making money true identity and it's interest start to diverge from what is good for society as a whole". Throughout through research of Allbirds, every interview, campaign, and marketing message was centered around being an environmentally responsibility citizen. Even the descriptions of the products

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on the Allbirds website, focus more on the impact these shoes have rather than cheesy marketing slogans. It was very evident that the founders take their mission of creating the best product in the best manner seriously.