OCEAN SOURCE FLIP FLOPS: EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE BUSINESS MODELS AND SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAIN OPTIONS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ocean Source Flip Flops is a start-up based in the Phoenix metro area working to create a lifestyle brand with the goal of producing flip flops from recycled materials. Ocean Source’s mission is to reduce the amount of ocean plastic by creating a unique shoe using materials recycled from marine debris. Through purposeful messages, Ocean Source Flip Flops also aims to empower a new type of consumer; one that is aware of the origin of the product’s materials, conscious of the plastic pollution issue, and pursues a more mindful lifestyle. This project’s aim was to identify sustainable, responsible and achievable options to manufacture the flip flop. It focused on researching supply chain management practices relevant to Ocean Source’s mission and operations.

The project, and Ocean Source’s mission, intended to tackle the issues of marine debris. One of the many sources that has been associated with such pollution and animal’s harm is abandoned, lost or discarded fishing materials, also called ghost gear. Ghost gear consists of commercial fishing nets or fishing lines, which can have detrimental effects on marine ecosystems. Because this material has the ability to be recycled, research was focused on sourcing fishing nets to upcycle into the flip flop.

The project also worked to address concerns in our current economic system. The traditional business model is based on profits as the driving principle and measurement of success, in which environmental and social impacts are ignored leading to unsustainable practices. Recommendations prepared for Ocean Source’s business model challenge this system because it is based on a more progressive and sustainable models, including the circular economy model as well as School of Sustainability’s Transformational Sustainability Enterprise (TSE) framework. Recommendations included take back programs, shoe recycling, and company model certification.

The primary research revealed that numerous companies use recycled plastics and marine debris to create new products. These findings prove that it is possible to upcycle such materials and provided a basis of understanding for the processes it entails. Because Ocean Source would be formed and managed in Arizona, the materials would be sourced regionally to limit the amount of emissions released from transportation, therefore regional organizations handling ghost gear were identified and contacted.

The major challenge of this project was finding fishing nets to test out for production. Research and outreach found that organizations collecting or using nets are located in coastal cities. In the future, it might be more productive to be based where possible partnerships can occur. This implies that Ocean Source would either need to be based in a coastal city, or that local upcycled material, such as recycled plastics, are used to make the shoe instead of fishing nets.

More research and outreach is necessary to obtain a sample of fishing net. Because no sources were found in Southern California, investigations should be focused on the Northern California Coast, Gulf of Mexico, the East Coast and Pacific Norwest. It is important to consider the trade-offs this type of sourcing would have, in terms of sustainability and transportation. Further research should be conducted on other aspects of the shoe processing, such as dyes and adhesives. Viewing these processes from a sustainability perspective, will require environmental, social and economic aspects of these procedures to be addressed. These include energy consumption, chemicals used, and social conditions of workers.