

Fashion as a Means of Humanitarian Aid  
A Resource for Prospective Entrepreneurs

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### Abstract

The following paper is intended to provide prospective entrepreneurs, who desire to incorporate humanitarian aid into fashion-oriented startup ventures, with information regarding current business models and prominent companies. A discussion of approaches to humanitarian relief and their effectiveness will assist prospective entrepreneurs as they assess the best manner in which their individual startups may serve people in need. Three commonly utilized models of aid to be discussed include employment-based, tangible goods-based, and monetary donation-based that exist with the intentions to provide relief for causes such as food, health, clean water, education, clothing, job creation, and freedom. Through the compilation of case studies of TOMS Shoes, Krochet Kids, and Hello Somebody, the author identifies extractable lessons for prospective entrepreneurs, including concerns of product development, method of distribution, marketing, and consideration of causes to support. The objective of the paper is to develop awareness of matters to consider throughout the initial phases of preparation and execution so that prospective entrepreneurs may increase their chances for success.

### Fashion as a Means of Humanitarian Aid

Food, shelter and clothing are the basic needs of humanity. While the blessed American nation abounds in luxuries, many impoverished people groups struggle to attain basic essentials. Parents struggle to feed their children, communities devoid of proper homes remain exposed to the elements, and individuals walk barefoot over miles of harsh terrain to retrieve clean water. Many businesses within a variety of industries, including the home décor industry, the food and beverage industry, and the entertainment industry devote portions of their missions and allocate percentages of their profits to providing relief for numerous different humanitarian causes. The fashion industry in particular provides relief for numerous humanitarian causes. Apparel and accessories represent desirable choices of product for prospective entrepreneurs because they allow consumers to proudly display their support while also advertising for the brand. When consumers purchase products from socially proactive businesses, they experience the satisfaction of helping those in need while simultaneously satisfying their own need for clothing. This honors thesis explores the manner in which TOMS Shoes, Krochet Kids International and Hello Somebody utilize different business models to provide humanitarian aid through fashion, with the intention to provide prospective entrepreneurs with concepts that will increase their chances for startup success through greater preparation and awareness of possibilities.

### **Rise in Ethical Consumerism and Demand for Humanitarian Aid Products**

Confirmation of the impact of ethical consumerism, with 40% of polled consumers reporting that they purchased a product based on a company's social

responsibility, encourages prospective entrepreneurs to pursue humanitarian aid-based startups. Stengel (2009) notes:

There is a new dimension to civic duty that is growing in America—it's the idea that we can serve not only by spending time in our communities and classrooms but by spending more responsibly. We are starting to put our money where our ideals are. (2)

In today's fast-paced society, many consumers may not feel the freedom to give an hour of time serving in a local soup kitchen or the finances necessary to commit to extended personal trips overseas to aid underprivileged people groups. Despite time constraints and limited resources necessary to personally go and serve, consumers now realize the power of their wallets and the ability to simultaneously give to worthy causes as they purchase everyday products, from coffee to clothes to Christmas decorations. Because of this realization, interest has grown in products whose purchase will directly lead to humanitarian aid. Increased consumer demand for humanitarian aid-based products provides motivation and incentive for the start-up of new businesses that follow models of social conscience. While prominent in current discussion, rising trends do not represent the start of a brand new social responsibility movement, but rather, an extension of a movement begun decades prior to today.

Prospective entrepreneurs should understand that, despite increasing attention in recent years, ethical consumerism does not represent a new concept in business. Under the umbrella of "corporate social responsibility" or CSR, Carroll and Shabana (2010) noted that consumer desire for ethical business practices possesses "roots" that "extend before World War II" (p. 86). According to the authors, corporate philanthropy, or "the

support of good causes,” was identified as a core idea of CSR and continued to be a prominent factor in business practices throughout the 1960s with the rise in concern for civil rights, women’s rights, consumers’ rights and the environmental movement. In addition to the original causes supported, many current efforts of CSR now focus on the potential for worldwide humanitarian impact. There is extensive information available from a global perspective to prospective entrepreneurs from which they may learn not only from current business practices, but also from past successes.

Prospective entrepreneurs may note that, with the rise of globalization and readily available information, ethical consumerism continues to rapidly mature as social responsibility elevates to the forefront of consumer interest and demand for socially conscience products increases. Attention to ethical practices has grown to a new level of consumer awareness and magnitude (Irving, 2002). Through the use of search engines, social media, and easily accessible information, consumers possess the unprecedented ability to discover the ethical imprint of desired products, such as business practices, employee working conditions, and environmental effects. As scandals arise or socially good initiatives thrive, awareness of the events spreads quickly through viral activity and global outreach. Simultaneously, businesses possess greater ability to promote, advertise and showcase social responsibility. Increased awareness and attention on ethical behavior allows consumers and producers to spread the message of flaws and triumphs with rapid speed and distance. With growing presence in market focus, prospective entrepreneurs should recognize the manner in which globalization brings ethical consumerism to a new phase of development.

Examining new developments in business model types, prospective entrepreneurs will recognize that the rise of consumer interest brings CSR to a new stage as society demand changes the manner in which startup ventures prepare their business plans. Aware of consumer trends and desires, many “B Corporations” have arisen that are defined by “a new corporate structure that requires enterprises to build into their foundation strong social and environmental standards for their operations” (Irving 2002). Upon the identification of not merely consumer interest, but also consumer expectation, recent startup companies that desire to provide humanitarian aid develop creative business models that prioritize relief. In the cases of TOMS Shoes, Krochet Kids International and Hello Somebody, the utilized business models became major components of company branding. Whether employment-based, tangible goods-based, or monetary donation-based aid is offered, prospective entrepreneurs should carefully consider and clearly define their business models as they build the foundation of business operations and company branding.

### **Employment-Based Aid**

#### **Definition**

Employment-based aid seeks to provide sustainable systems of revenue to individuals in impoverished communities. This business model is designed to not only provide humanitarian aid to individuals through monetary salaries, but also to provide personal empowerment through developed skills and confidence in one’s ability to provide for one’s needs. Opportunities to rise within the organization create incentive to work diligently, contributing to a sense of personal accomplishment. Some humanitarian aid companies provide employment through the production of goods distributed directly

to the local community, while others through the production of goods to be sold to the American public. Upon the identification of consumer desire to relate to aid through awareness of specific relief provided, marketing of social goodness attempts to connect consumers to individuals who personally created the products, bridging the gap between developed and developing nations. Contrary to aid that provides one time giving or assistance on individual projects, employment-based aid provides continual and consistent humanitarian relief through regularly earned salaries. With prominent success in sales and humanitarian impact, Krochet Kids International is a prime example of employment-based aid.

### **Krochet Kids**

**History.** The story of Krochet Kids International (KKI) encourages rising entrepreneurs because it illustrates that preparation for a successful startup does not necessarily require vast experience or extensive years of training. In 2003, Kohl Crecelius and Travis Hartanov first appeared in the news of a local paper in Spokane, WA, for their small business of crocheted beanie hats (Millsap, 2003). Joined by their friend Stewart Ramsey, the business began as a means to raise money for a hot air balloon ride to prom, but the purpose soon grew beyond the scope of small town high school fanfare (Crecelius, 2013). As the trio departed to three different colleges, the friends continued to maintain their craze for crocheting. Mission trips to various developing countries with limited employment opportunities provided the maturing men with the realization that their craft could provide more than mere funds for special occasions. Crocheting could change lives. Moving forward, the men did not allow limited business experience or

international relations to affect their passion and drive to create a humanitarian aid-based startup.

The story of KKI continues to inspire rising entrepreneurs through the encouragement of potential success despite simple beginnings as the three young men gathered a supportive team and initiated production. During the summer of 2007, the trio traveled with seven other individuals, equipped with 15 bags of yarn, hooks, and passion to the country of Uganda with “no idea what we were stepping into” (Gustines, 2012). In 2008, the Krochet Kids, as dubbed from the original news article, invested money remaining from their high school prom fund to cover the \$1,000 necessary to achieve its legally recognized non-profit status and began the sale of their humanitarian hats (Gustines). Young entrepreneurs who doubt their personal aptitude may learn from the story of Stewart, Travis, and Kohl as they did not hold doctorates of international business, 10 plus years in the field of product development, or even multiple experiences in startup ventures before they pursued their dreams. With a good idea, plan, support, and drive, young entrepreneurs may make a profound impact on the world through the creation of humanitarian aid-based companies, just as KKI continues to do in Northern Uganda.

From the selection process of Northern Uganda as KKI’s first crochet location, prospective entrepreneurs of employment-based aid models learn to examine the history of potential production communities in order to determine feasibility. The founders of KKI did not select Northern Uganda by chance or simply based on personal interest. Uganda remains riddled with civil unrest and two million individuals have been displaced into government compounds with few employment opportunities. Without hope for

sustainable income, the women must rely upon the government for support, a government that does not possess the ability to help its entire people (Crecelius, 2013). The scarcity of available jobs and profound need of the Northern Ugandan people creates high feasibility for the employment-based aid model. With little competition, KKI does not struggle to find eager workers for hire. Like KKI, prospective entrepreneurs should deeply consider the history of the country to determine the potential for growing success using the employment-based aid model.

With continued expansion, the history of KKI reveals the potential for non-profit companies to reach sustainability, encouraging prospective entrepreneurs to persevere despite the struggle to raise donations. The non-profit reached a point of self-sustainability only three years after the company began. Prior to that time, a relatively small sum of \$250,000 from donations managed to fund the efforts of the company (“Krochet Kids International,” 2012). In 2012, KKI was able to donate over \$1 million based on product sales. In addition to these resources of aid, Chase Bank supplied the company with an additional \$500,000 in December of the same year after placing second in the American Giving Awards (Connelly, 2012). Although initial monetary offerings of support remained low, through the sale of quality products and growing consumer interest, the non-profit was able to raise the necessary funds to sustain the company. Starting with humble roots, KKI experienced continual growth with business expanding into Northern Uganda and efforts branching out to Lima, Peru. Prospective entrepreneurs should note the manner in which sustainability has allowed KKI to effectively complete its mission to change lives.

**Mission.** The mission of KKI to equip women with valuable life skills that build empowerment motivates prospective entrepreneurs to provide workers with money management training to properly handle offered salaries. Beyond the desire to provide jobs and stable salaries through crochet jobs, KKI does not “want crocheting to be the final answer to poverty for women, just the gateway to opportunity” (Hood, 2011). Through holistic training programs that cover family budgeting, saving, loans, business training and other valuable skills, KKI empowers women to pursue their individual dreams. In addition to training on how to help themselves individually, the women of the community are taught how to pool resources and distribute loans to each other for the start of small businesses, such as goat herding and the creation of convenience stores. Through proper training and encouragement to pursue dreams, the impact of KKI’s aid provides not only relief for the physical needs of food and water, but also for the inner needs of confidence, dignity, and empowerment. Learning from KKI’s example, prospective entrepreneurs should not only provide workers with salaries for today, but also money management skills and confidence to prepare for tomorrow.

Examination of KKI’s vision reveals to prospective entrepreneurs the benefit of selecting a role model as a source of mirroring, comparison, and personal accountability through referencing the specific role model to question how he, she, or it would handle given situations. The company’s vision reveals the belief that “actions rooted in love bring lasting and powerful change. Our model for love is that of the ultimate servant: Jesus” (“Our Mission,” 2013). The company is based on biblical roots for the inspiration to serve and to love. Identifying this specific model to mirror brings accountability for KKI’s actions as the company may compare its behavior to that of Jesus. When making

decisions on how to best aid their workers, KKI may ask, “How would Jesus show love, where would Jesus place emphasis, and what would Jesus do?” Prospective entrepreneurs may benefit from the selection of pre-existing models, company cultures, inspirational stories and common figures to emulate as founders communicate goals for a startup’s identity. Use of specific role models becomes beneficial as entrepreneurs attempt to clearly distinguish the vision of the company to employees, potential investors, and consumers. If the entrepreneurs do not directly state intentions, they will struggle to achieve goals and recognize when the culture strays from initial desires.

**Product.** Based on KKI’s growing offering of product types and styles, prospective entrepreneurs obtain confirmation that the diversity of options broadens consumer outreach. Although current product lines of KKI center on items such as crocheted hats, scarfs, and printed t-shirts, the nonprofit refuses to become stagnant as designers intend to expand and include additional accessories such as sunglass cases, clutches (small purses) and others (Gustines 2012). As a means to continue growth and development, the non-profit desires to branch out to new consumers who may not need a warm winter hat, but will gladly purchase other forms of accessories. As KKI recognizes its need to appeal to a wider consumer market, prospective entrepreneurs should remain continually open to inspiration for new product concepts that may increase consumer interest. With each form of merchandise, prospective entrepreneurs should consider trend analysis as they develop goods consumers will appreciate and desire to purchase.

Observing from KKI’s precedence, prospective entrepreneurs of employment-based humanitarian relief companies must realize that products need to meet consumer demand for fashionable designs in order to sell and make profits that ultimately aid

workers. Examination of KKI's product statement reveals that they "believe in quality, handmade products that not only bring comfort and style but serve as a vehicle for social change" ("Our Mission," 2013). Prior to the mention of the humanitarian aid factor of their products, the statement reveals the need for "comfort and style." In order to sell goods that fund aid efforts, the founders understand that their products must remain desirable in the marketplace and up-to-date with trend analysis. Even though KKI exists as a nonprofit, the company functions as a business and products must appeal to intended consumers. In the design of attractive products, prospective entrepreneurs should consider the appeal of not only design, but also, special features that connect consumers to the aid their purchase will provide.

Because KKI personalizes the aid between consumer and aided worker, prospective entrepreneurs identify the manner in which created connections through identification of specific product crocheters and access to online worker profiles appeal to consumers' hearts. Every KKI hat possesses a hand signed label of the woman who constructed the individual piece (Melago 2012, p. 15). Utilizing the information on the label, consumers may then view the KKI website to learn the story of their particular worker and even send thank you notes with encouraging words of appreciation or affirmation. Almost as vital as the crocheted products themselves are these hand-signed labels attached to them, exemplifying the need for entrepreneurs to make aid as personal as possible between the worker and consumer. This element of KKI's business plan sets it apart from other non-profits or humanitarian aid labels as consumers possess the unique ability to obtain information about the specific recipient of the aid provided as a result of their purchase. People want to know where their money goes, and KKI provides that

special opportunity. Without the label, KKI's beanie hats become just like any other and lose the personalized attachment. As rising entrepreneurs prepare to develop fashion-based humanitarian aid brands, they should brainstorm methods that can link consumers to those in need in order to bridge the gap between privileged and underprivileged people groups.

From positive media reactions to KKI's product offerings, prospective entrepreneurs ascertain the value in producing fashionable products that receive attention from fashion trend sources, leading to greater exposure and promotion. Within a spread of fashionable knit hats, the December 2012 issue of *InStyle* pictured KKI's mustard yellow beanie called *The Betty* ("Color Pop," 2012). Compared to the other featured accessories, the *Betty* remained one of the least expensive products and the only provider of social goodness, making it a relatively desirable selection and an attention grabber for the reader of the magazine. KKI's adherence to fashion trends allows it to gain recognition from popular consumer research sources, like the prominent *InStyle Magazine*, and ultimately receive free advertising. Confirmation of the hat's status as a fashionable piece and provision of the link to KKI's website encourages consumers to make purchases. The promotional benefit of following trends closely emphasizes the need for prospective entrepreneurs of fashion-based humanitarian aid startups to establish stylish brands, and potentially partner with notable pre-existing labels.

KKI's collaboration with Vans, a prominent footwear company, prompts prospective entrepreneurs to seek opportunities to co-brand with widely recognized labels for support and promotion. The recent cooperation with Vans produced a slip-on shoe, partially covered by crocheted yarn, and labeled with the name of the aided worker

(Wasilak 2012). The collaborated efforts received attention from not only EcoFabulous, a website that promotes socially good products, but also notable fashion magazines like Lucky, Vogue, and Marie Claire (“In the News,” 2012). The creative project received great attention from not only these sources of trend research, but consequentially from the consumers who read them. Rising entrepreneurs will note that collaboration with a well-known brand in possession of an existing base of brand loyal customers causes curiosity to stir in consumers at large who notice the product online and in-stores, leading them to seek more information about the unfamiliar label.

**Distribution and Sales.** Prospective entrepreneurs may benefit from KKI’s example of increasing product availability to consumers through its growing number of distribution channels. When the company first began, sales took place exclusively through a “makeshift Web site” (Gustines 2012). In the years since start-up, the website has received many aesthetic improvements and numerous retail locations joined the distribution effort, such as Nordstrom, 5 Pound Apparel, organic grocery stores like Whole Foods and a variety of surf shops like Mainland Surf & Skate. KKI’s range is not limited to the US, as locations also distribute products to the United Kingdom. Increased availability through direct distribution to in-store locations increases opportunities for promotion to consumers unfamiliar with the brand. While these individuals would not know to search for KKI online, introduction to the product in-store may peak interest and lead to selection for purchase. The growing number of retailers advances the company’s consumer outreach as it raises potential for sales. Consequentially, the increase of distribution outlets leads to the increase of opportunity and sales.

With increased availability of products, prospective entrepreneurs will notice that KKI experienced exponentially increasing sales growth since the first year of business. Sale of only 2,000 units in 2009 grew to 7,000 in 2009, 25,000 in 2010 and 102,000 in 2011. Reports of sales for the year of 2011 reveal nearly \$2 million worth of product sold, an increase of 285% since the previous year (“Krochet Kids International,” 2012). While many start-ups focus on web-based merchandising through the influx of internet access and reach towards potential consumers, prospective entrepreneurs should not limit the effectiveness of direct distribution as defined by sale in retail locations. The correlation of increased distribution venues to increased sales of KKI products encourages entrepreneurs to consider expansion of methods of availability as they market their goods.

**Marketing.** In the examination of KKI’s marketing strategies, prospective entrepreneurs will recognize attention to the personalized connection made between consumers and aid beneficiaries. When consumers purchase a crocheted hat from KKI, the names of its Ugandan or Peruvian crocheter are hand written onto the label of the product (Crecelius 2013). The simple signature of the woman reminds the consumer of the aid offered because of the purchase and continues to make an impact on the heart of the buyer long after the payment transpires. Bridging gaps between continents makes the plight of developing nations more real to consumers through signatures that may be touched and online profiles that detail the lives of the individual women. Like social media, the connection to workers causes the consumer to feel more unified and identified with the aid provided. In the development of marketing plans, prospective entrepreneurs

of employment-based aid companies should learn from KKI's primary strategy as they appeal to the hearts of consumers.

Rather than focus on the labels of the hats, advertising assistance from Bing.com focused on the inspirational story of the company as a whole and provided a surge of response from consumers, reminding prospective entrepreneurs to advocate their individual stories to appeal to consumer emotions. The televised commercial of the company marketed KKI as an inspirational name, causing consumers nationwide to believe in the story of the company (Elliot, 2012). The story of the three founders remains one of love and of adventure. With a desire to become part of the story, consumers flooded the KKI website and made thousands of purchases. Through the initial phases of promotion and marketing, KKI understood the need to not only tell the story of the individual women, but also the story of the company itself while they seek to provide humanitarian aid.

**Humanitarian Aid Provided.** KKI inspires prospective entrepreneurs while the company continues to provide profound monetary amounts of aid to Uganda and Peru. As of 2012, the company provided jobs for 160 women in Uganda and Peru who otherwise would remain without stable incomes (Gustines 2012). Without the use of donation, statistics reveal that, from 2012 to 2021, KKI will possess the ability to provide \$9.5 million in aid to Northern Uganda ("Krochet Kids International," 2012). The statistics of aid provided signify the success of the company in its mission to provide employment and monetary support. The extensive nature of KKI's accomplishment in achieving its vision confirms the feasibility of employment-based aid and empowers rising entrepreneurs to continue through adversity. While the financial aid of KKI may be

measured quantitatively, prospective entrepreneurs may also view the humanitarian efforts of the company qualitatively.

The case study of KKI encourages prospective entrepreneurs of employment-based start-ups to recognize that salaries not only provide financial support, but also build empowerment through one's ability to become self-sustaining. One story of life change comes from a woman named Beatrice who rose from poverty to attain the ability to send her children to school and to start her own business. Similarly, another woman named Teddy was able to start a goat herding business through information learned in KKI's financial training and savings programs (Gustines 2012). These women, through employment and education offered by KKI, were able to not only use salaries to provide for their families, but were also able to experience restored dignity through the ability to pursue individual goals and dreams. Because aid may be defined by more than physical provision, prospective entrepreneurs of employment-based aid companies should consider opportunities to build the esteem, confidence, and self-worth of their workers.

**Conclusion.** KKI exemplifies an employment-based model of humanitarian aid with the addition of training programs to encourage inner empowerment of the women and hope for continued growth beyond the company. From the story, mission, success, and structure of KKI, prospective entrepreneurs may learn the value of strong conviction and purpose. With non-profit status, the company began with great need for donation, but soon reached a point of self-sustainability through the sale of a desirable product and effective aid. The efforts of the company have truly provided life change for many women throughout Uganda and Peru with hope for continued growth and reach as KKI thrives. Overall, the lesson to be learned from the example of KKI remains the great

potential to provide for not only basic physical needs, but also to provide personal fulfillment and realization of dreams.

### **Tangible Goods-Based Aid**

#### **Definition**

In contrast to the provision of employment, fashion-based labels that provide tangible goods are intended to relieve struggling individuals through the direct distribution of physical items such as clothing, water, and medicine. Specific goods may also include gifts such as soccer balls, coloring books, and dolls for children. The provision of physical necessities contributes to increased health, illness prevention, education, community development, and other identifiable causes. The business model of many fashion oriented companies that provide tangible goods revolve around an exchange model, where every item purchased by a consumer raises enough funds to provide a similar item to individuals in need. While companies may record the statistics of tangible goods distributed, statistics of the qualitative inner gratitude of recipients remains immeasurable.

#### **TOMS Shoes**

**History.** The story of TOMS Shoes reveals the need for prospective entrepreneurs of humanitarian organizations to identify true needs in the world and to develop appropriate methods of resolution. Description of TOMS Shoes founder Blake Mycoskie, in reference to his life before the company, reveals him as “young, motivated, overflowing with entrepreneurial spirit,” but “without an idea” (Zimmerman, 2013). Before TOMS, Mycoskie worked on the start-up of four other endeavors including an online driving program that took advantage of hybrid cars and green resources, yet none

fulfilled his ultimate desire to make a significant worldwide impact (Mycoskie, 2012). While Mycoskie's previous endeavors remained socially good in regards to the environment, they did not affect people's lives directly. Before one may create a business that changes lives, he or she must first identify a problem that truly hinders lives, which is exactly what Mycoskie did when he began TOMS Shoes.

Learning from Mycoskie's example, prospective entrepreneurs should remain open to inspiration at any time. In 2006, 29 year old Blake Mycoskie received the idea that led to his revolutionary company, TOMS Shoes, and immediately began his work. While learning to play polo on vacation in Argentina, a country he had visited on his travels in *The Amazing Race*, Mycoskie noticed the impact of the lack of shoes on the feet of impoverished children. Combined with his observation of the common shoe of the people, the Alpargata, Mycoskie was inspired to provide relief for these needy children by selling their native shoe to people of the United States (Clinton, 2009). Despite location, purpose, or focus, prospective entrepreneurs must learn to remain open to inspiration at any time. Even though Mycoskie was on vacation, he kept his eyes open to the needs around him and the way he could initiate change. With the intentions of giving away a pair of shoes with every pair sold, the One for One Movement was born.

Prospective entrepreneurs should seek to emulate Mycoskie's fervor as he immediately began to passionately pursue the realization of his vision. With half a million dollars of his own capital, Mycoskie began to develop samples of the shoes with shoemakers in Argentina and brought his first inventory back to the United States in a simple duffle bag (Zimmerman, 2013). Not wasting time, Mycoskie acted upon his inspiration immediately. He did not wait to return to the United States or to raise money

from investors. Mycoskie's entrepreneurial spirit and belief in the vision of his revolutionary business model drove the young man to actively pursue the realization of his profound idea. In the development of idea, prospective entrepreneurs must make the most of time, pursuing leads with fervor, passion, and bravery in the face of risk.

Although doubt often follows when one begins to pursue a new startup venture, prospective entrepreneurs who possess genuine passion and belief in their cause must mirror Mycoskie as they persevere through hesitation. The young entrepreneur possessed little experience in fashion, shoes, or accessories, yet he continued to pursue his vision (Mycoskie, 2012, p. 9). Despite any doubts of inadequacy that may have crossed his mind, Mycoskie pressed forward. Prospective entrepreneurs must realize that startups require risk and rejection may occur. In order to become successful in the launch of a new humanitarian aid-based venture, entrepreneurs must believe in not only themselves, but in the story behind their startup so that confidence in the plan may overcome the discouragement of initial challenges.

From Mycoskie's interaction with his first distributor, American Rags, prospective entrepreneurs identify the power of a product's story. In Mycoskie's first meeting with an American Rags buyer, "she realized that TOMS was more than just a shoe. It was a story" (Mycoskie 2012, p. 10). Soon after gaining its first retail customer, *Los Angeles Times'* reporter Booth Moore published a story on the new business and 2,200 orders were placed online in one single day (p. 11). In the early phases of development, TOMS already possessed market attention simply through the power of its story. From the positive public relations and promotion received, prospective entrepreneurs clearly view the need to express the story of humanitarian aid products. The story of need and relief

stirs interest amongst consumers and immediately separates socially good products from existing competitors. While the identification of a profound need, entrepreneurial passion, and the development of an inspirational story contribute to a successful startup, hard work must also follow.

Upon the examination of practices after the *Los Angeles Time's* article, prospective entrepreneurs will discover that the TOMS startup required intensive hours of labor and a fast-paced work ethic to accommodate the rapid influx of interest in the brand. Unfortunately, at the time of the release, only 160 shoes were even in existence. Mycoskie required immediate assistance from interns to inform consumers of unavailable stock and from manufacturers to quickly begin production. The story of TOMS reveals that the creation of a successful humanitarian aid business does not end with entrepreneurial spirit or inspiration. If committed to a plan, prospective entrepreneurs must possess the willingness to invest time, attention, and heart into the endeavor.

**Mission.** The mission behind TOMS Shoes is to provide better lives for children and their communities. Although assumption causes many consumers to attribute the name Tom to its founder, the TOMS identification remains short for “a better tomorrow” (Murray 2011). Through the One for One model, TOMS Shoes gives a pair of shoes away to a child in need for every pair of shoe purchased throughout the world, whether through online merchandising or retail consumption. Providing protection against diseases and the elimination of a prominent barrier to education, TOMS effectively provides hope for the promised tomorrow.

From the mission of TOMS Shoes, prospective entrepreneurs learn that many tangible goods, such as shoes, provide deeper benefits than comfort. While many view

the mission of TOMS Shoes as the simple provision of shoes, the implication of reduced medical difficulty and additional opportunities act as the main motivations of the provided aid. Living in regions of harsh terrain and limited transportation other than walking, millions of children worldwide contract diseases through infections that enter the body through cuts and scrapes on the feet (Murray 2011). Some diseases directly affect the ability to function not only physically, but also mentally, preventing the ability to work a stable job or provide for one's future. Prospective entrepreneurs may note that the simple provision of shoes does not just provide comfort for walking, but also protects against diseases that would radically hinder a child's future.

Through continued analysis of the effects of the lack of shoes, prospective entrepreneurs discover that in addition to medical vulnerability, it directly affects children's ability to rise above poverty. Barefoot children are not permitted to attend school and therefore struggle to receive the education necessary to advance in economic level (Timmerman, 2011). Uneducated individuals are limited by the employment they may take and available opportunities to change the trajectory of their lives. In the development of business plans intended to provide humanitarian aid, entrepreneurs should consider the implications of aid in addition to the obvious tangible needs resolved. TOMS Shoes removes the barrier to education as shoes grant access to proper schooling and hope for tomorrow.

The execution of the mission of TOMS as a for-profit business allows the company to provide humanitarian aid in ways improbable for non-profits counterparts, encouraging prospective entrepreneurs to carefully weigh the positives and negatives of possible legal statuses. Overall, the personal mission of founder, Mycoskie, is "to create

something that's going to be here long after I'm gone" (Zimmerman, 2013). The creation of a for-profit business that will remain desirable to investors and stockholders provides stability that may remain beneficial throughout the ups and downs of a company, even after the passing of the founder. The flow of profits into the business creates opportunity for growth, expansion, savings, and even additional humanitarian aid above initial promises.

The for-profit model of business allows TOMS Shoes to sustain itself financially and provide profound amounts of humanitarian aid. Mycoskie notes that "If you take the option of starting a for-profit business that gives back a large part of what it brings in versus a straight charity, you're going to help a lot more people with the for-profit business" (Zimmerman, 2013). Lack of dependency on donors or grants provides freedom to make a profit and give where needed. Despite initial interest in the non-profit title, prospective entrepreneurs should deeply consider the option of establishment as a for-profit given the ability to use excess resources for increased aid. As an example of this concept, although TOMS Shoes exists as a for-profit business, it remains true to its mission of humanitarian aid.

**Product.** TOMS Shoes produces a unique style of shoes that remains easily identifiable to the modern consumer, encouraging prospective entrepreneurs to develop designs that will create strong brand recognition. Following the style of the Argentinian alpargata made of fitted fabric around the users' feet, the shoe is characterized by a distinct diagonal line across the top of the foot, creating a look unlike any other design previously seen on the mainstream American consumer market (Wilson, 2012). Even without view of the TOMS label at the heel, it becomes evident when a consumer wears a

pair due to the stark contrast from designs of other companies. For many consumers, the name TOMS is not only the name of the company, but also the term for the style of shoe in the mind of the American consumer. The style creates immediate brand recognition as the look of the shoe brings to mind the name and mission of the company. Prospective entrepreneurs of humanitarian aid-based companies should strive to develop products with identifiable appearances in order to develop brand recognition as well as recognition of the mission.

From the effect of TOMS Shoes, prospective entrepreneurs learn that the association of the identifiable product design with social goodness creates an effect similar to that of a logo on a luxury brand. The product itself acts as a “potential status symbol” as consumers are easily able to showcase their ethical purchase (Gale, 2011). Just as a Louis Vuitton aligns a consumer with high class and economic stature, TOMS align consumers with qualities such as generosity and goodness. When consumers purchase products at elevated prices in order to provide humanitarian aid, they naturally desire to showcase the purchase and to discuss how they contributed to life change. When complimented, consumers tend to promote discussion of the story behind the product and create awareness of the cause. Due to the uniqueness of TOMS Shoes, the product acts as a statement piece, attaching consumers to social goodness in a desirable manner.

TOMS Shoes continues to design new styles that attract new and return customers through brand loyalty and belief in the cause, demonstrating the value of the adaptability of fashion to potential entrepreneurs. While the initial product of TOMS remained fairly standard with a handful of color choices and one basic form, the inventory quickly expanded to provide various styles of slip-ons, wedges, and boots manufactured from

numerous materials ranging from canvas to burlap to corduroy to crocheted fabrics to leather, etc. (“TOMS,” 2013). For first time customers, the availability of numerous designs provides merchandise to fit many different preferences. Those who lack appreciation for the original alpargata style may value the Americanized lace up versions of tennis shoes and boots. The level of available products and the continual addition of new merchandise encourage consumers to return for multiple purchases. Prospective entrepreneurs should consider products that may be easily adaptable to accommodate a variety of customers as well as shifts in market desires. TOMS exemplifies successful design development as they continually expand available goods at a range of varied prices.

TOMS Shoes, while more expensive than a pair of flip flops, generally remain under the \$100 price point, motivating prospective entrepreneurs to maintain affordable prices to the middle class consumer. Product pricing ranges from a \$29 pair of Pink Tropic Tiny TOMS for little girls to a \$100 pair of Black Perforated Leather TOMS for men (“TOMS,” 2013). The range of pricing gives consumers the option to purchase the originally standard style around \$44 or splurge financially for newer models constructed of more expensive materials. While the prices may appear steep to frugal customers, the cost of merchandise includes not only the second pair of shoes for impoverished children, but also the expense of distribution and the personnel required to provide humanitarian aid. Learning from the inventory of TOMS, prospective entrepreneurs should strive to provide a variety of products that meet the need of new and returning customers, both through assorted merchandise, diverse pricing, and contribution to multiple humanitarian causes.

Dependent upon the success of startups focused on particular causes, prospective entrepreneurs may seek opportunities to expand their contribution to humanitarian aid through added relief projects. Despite the success of its initial product and the temptation to focus on shoes alone, Mycoskie intends to grow and expand the product line in order to provide humanitarian aid beyond feet alone. With the success of its shoes, the TOMS management team decided in 2011 to develop a line of sunglasses in order to provide relief for impoverished individuals struggling with visual impairment (“TOMS,” 2013). Using profits and brand recognition received through its shoes, TOMS Shoes is intended to continue the efforts of humanitarian aid through the sale of name brand sunglasses ranging from \$88 to \$169 under its unique One for One business model. For every pair sold, someone is provided with sight. Nearly 285 million people struggle with visual impairment, with 90% living in developing countries without hope for correction, making visual impairment the 7<sup>th</sup> largest health disability in the world. Individuals struggling with sight possess restricted opportunities for education and employment. TOMS Shoes provides aid as minor visual impairment is treated immediately with eyeglasses or medical attention and more extensive damage is treated by surgery within a few days of discovery. Eye examinations and treatment dramatically alter the trajectory of an individual’s life. Although TOMS Shoes could simply accept the success of shoe sales and allow profits to add up, the company continues to seek opportunities to aid and relieve struggling people groups. Expansion and continued identification of causes support TOMS Shoes’ mission to provide life change by encouraging consumers to provide practical aid through common purchases. If able to reach a level of success in

fashion-based humanitarian aid, prospective entrepreneurs should consider their ability to provide aid to causes additional to original intentions.

**Distribution and Sales.** Through the example of TOMS Shoes, prospective entrepreneurs learn the principle that as distribution expands, concern for the humanitarian need does as well. In the beginning of TOMS Shoes' story, sale of the unique shoes took place online and in American Rag (Mycoskie, 2012). Online sales allowed the company to distribute to consumers throughout the nation. With the influx of consumer interest, TOMS Shoes now sell not only in the United States at well-known retailers like Nordstroms, Journeys, and Saxon, but also in countries throughout the world from Singapore to Denmark to Greece ("TOMS," 2013). The global span of TOMS Shoes' consumer market not only indicates brand recognition and high sales, but also the spread of awareness for the plight of shoeless children. TOMS Shoes' success in shoe sales identifies the rise of awareness for humanitarian aid and the manner in which consumers worldwide may give through ethical purchasing. In the consideration of the reach of TOMS Shoes, prospective entrepreneurs may draw inspiration as they view a small start-up that grew to achieve worldwide renown.

While most accessory brands need only to focus on the distribution of products for purchasing, TOMS Shoes must also consider the distribution of shoes for humanitarian aid, reminding prospective entrepreneurs of tangible goods-based startups to prepare for the distribution of aid. Identified as "Shoe Drops," with founder Mycoskie as the Chief Shoe Giver, the spread of shoes to impoverished children requires planning and preparation. In order to determine communities that would benefit from TOMS Shoes, the company utilizes giving partners from humanitarian aid organization that

possess the qualifications to select areas of poverty and provide information concerning estimates of need (Bartter, 2012). TOMS Shoes employees do not simply travel to countries in need and give away shoes when they see children in need. Detailed preparation and planning prior to distribution trips create organized schedules of appointments with varying communities in need so that families may gather to receive shoes. The company values the experience of pre-existing organizations with contacts in countries of need and understanding of the best means of distribution. Prospective entrepreneurs may learn from the example of TOMS Shoe as they reach out to experienced organizations for the distribution of humanitarian aid. With the help of giving partners, the shoe drops have led to profound change in not only the lives of the children, but also the lives of shoe distributors.

Prospective entrepreneurs may consider the option to invite consumer to take part in the distribution of tangible goods to individuals in need. Reactions from the TOMS Shoe drops depict a deep sense of blessing for one's circumstances and gratitude for the opportunity to help a child in need. Mycoskie notes in his book that the experience of the first shoe drop radically changed his life, bringing about tears of overwhelming emotion. With drops taking place several times a year, it has attracted volunteers and received a place on Travel and Leisure Magazine's top 20 life-changing, socially conscious tourist trips ("TOMS," 2013). As entrepreneurs struggle to overcome the adversity and hardships of start-up companies, the distribution of tangible goods provides motivation to continue as it affirms the mission and bigger picture. Although TOMS Shoe drops take place several times a year, one may easily imagine that each one brings about renewed passion as new children receive shoes for the very first time.

**Marketing.** Conversation about the impact and story of TOMS Shoes acts as a prime result of marketing the One for One Movement, encouraging prospective entrepreneurs to develop models that consumers will want to discuss in casual conversation. Zimmerman (2013) reveals the benefit of TOMS Shoes One for One business model as she states,

Let your product give consumers a story to tell. *Hey, cool shoes. Thanks. They're TOMS Shoes. They give away a pair to kids for every one they sell....* Buyers feel so good about their purchase they want to tell others about it. (p. 13)

When consumers contribute to humanitarian aid, they desire to spread the word about their responsible purchases. The simplicity of TOMS Shoes' models creates a quick story that may be shared within moments to a friend at dinner, professor in the classroom or even a stranger on the bus. Prospective entrepreneurs should develop means of providing aid in simple, recordable ways, whether utilizing a one-for-one model, percentage figure, or finite amount such as donating three cups of water per purchase. The ease of tracking does not just provide basic accounting or the ability of consumers to understand specific aid. Simple business models of aid create short stories that can be told in passing. Stories drive consumers. Stories drive sales. Stories drive aid. The main source of marketing for TOMS Shoes remains the word of mouth that derives from the simplicity of its story.

Additional marketing for TOMS Shoes revolves around its annual "Day Without Shoes" campaign, informing prospective entrepreneurs of the benefits of developing nationwide awareness events that promote concern for the cause. ABC News describes the event as a day "which encourages people to live in someone else's shoes – or the lack of them – for a day" (Murray, 2011). When people walk around campuses, workplaces,

and stores without shoes, it attracts attention. Attention raises questions, questions lead to answers, and answers provide to the awareness that the lack of shoes for impoverished children in developing nations directly affects their health and opportunity for education. Promotion of the cause itself, asking people to remain barefoot for a day in order to walk as a shoeless child, simultaneously promotes available means to solve the problem, buying a pair of TOMS Shoes. When celebrities like Heather Graham of *Gilmore Girls* and the Jonas Brothers joined the campaign in 2011, the cause and product TOMS Shoes received further attention. Pictures and videos were posted online through various social media sites, spreading the word to millions of followers and fans (Murray). When considering beneficial forms of marketing social goodness, prospective consumers must not limit the power of annual events encouraging awareness. When the need is broadcast, the solution to the need also receives recognition. Rather than spending thousands upon thousands of dollars marketing the product alone, humanitarian aid companies should focus on the purpose behind it.

**Humanitarian Aid.** The humanitarian aid provided by TOMS Shoes inspires prospective entrepreneurs to determine significant needs within the world. In reference to the specific health effects of a barefoot lifestyle in developing nations, Mycoskie identifies that podocniosis, or ‘podo’ exemplifies a significant foot disease that affects hundreds of thousands of people (Zimmerman, 2013). Continuing discussion, he notes specifically that past volcanic activity in Ethiopia contributed to the development of dangerous silicone within the soil that, when transmitted to the body through cuts on individuals’ feet, causes the lymphatic system to break down. Exposure in this manner leads to the swelling of the feet in a manner similar to elephantiasis, leading to physical,

mental, and social impairment through ostracization (Zimmerman). Because many Americans take for granted the availability of shoes, many overlook the negative effects of life without them. In many developed nations, sidewalks, roads and plush grass generally protect the feet when strolling for a quick barefoot run to the mailbox. If one walks barefoot within the United States, the worst expectation remains dirty feet and the potential for minor cuts, discomfort, or heat from sun baked cement. Comparatively, developing nations possess vast dangers that possess life-altering implications. The provision of a simple pair of shoes provides protection from the elements. Although many underestimate the impact of shoes on a child's life, Dr. Larry L. Thomas, Chairman of the Tropical Health Alliance Foundation, states that in Ethiopia "Children dream of having their first pair" ("Giving Report," 2011). The children want to run without hesitation. They dream of kicking a ball without stubbing toes. Because children's feet grow so quickly, impoverished families do not possess the ability to provide protection at every phase. They must wait until they are older, but by then it may be too late. The humanitarian aid provided by TOMS Shoes treats not only the health of the child, but brings about the realization of a dream come true.

TOMS Shoes provides children with the ability to attend school and to receive an education that may allow them to rise above poverty, demonstrating to prospective entrepreneurs that many tangible goods possess implications in addition to the solution of medical needs. An article published about the company notes that "TOMS Shoes helps keep those children's feet healthy, and healthy kids can attend school. And once they're in school, a real future takes root - all because of a simple pair of shoes" (Zimmerman, 2013). In many countries, children are not allowed to attend school without proper

footwear. The prevention of education limits a child's ability to grow past the circumstances of his or her birth. Despite desire to grow or change, without shoes and education, the child remains without hope. Zambian doctor, Dr. Fwasa Singogo explains in TOMS annual giving report that "shoes simply mean everything to a Zambian child. I am called doctor today because of the shoes my father bought, which motivated me to keep going to school and to work hard. Shoes were and are still a luxury in this country..." ("Giving Report," 2011). The story of Singogo exemplifies the work of TOMS Shoes. Even though she was not helped personally by the company, her story may become the future for a child currently running around with a pair of TOMS Shoes. Prospective entrepreneurs must never devalue the efforts of aid provided. While giving away a simple pair of shoes may not mean much to the average American consumer, it radically alters the future trajectory of a child in need. For TOMS Shoes, protecting the soles of children's feet goes beyond immediate aid as it provides the opportunity for not only health, but also education.

Prospective entrepreneurs discover through statistics of humanitarian aid provided by TOMS Shoes that a strong idea and business plan possesses the ability to experience consistent growth and significant impact worldwide. On the first Shoe Drop in 2006, 20 TOMS employees traveled to Argentina to distribute 10,000 pairs of shoes to children in rural areas (Clinton, 2009). Since that time, Shoe Drops have increased in frequency, size, and location. Aware of need throughout the globe, TOMS Shoes strives to reach as many countries, communities, and children as possible. Including the United States, according to ABC News, TOMS Shoes donates aid to 25 different countries (Murray, 2011). Meeting an astounding goal, in September of 2010, the company delivered its 1 millionth

pair of shoes (“Giving Report,” 2011). Years later, the number of aid has increased even further. Each pair signifies a life that received joy, hope, and most importantly, love. The story of TOMS Shoes reveals to prospective entrepreneurs that it is highly possible to change the world. Audacious goals to change lives of millions may be met. TOMS Shoes has become a worldwide phenomenon, with level of notoriety and aid reaching a point not previously seen with other companies, yet possible to be seen again.

Although not commonly recognized, TOMS Shoes provides aid in more ways than the provision of shoes, motivating prospective entrepreneurs to seek opportunities for aid extended past initial commitments. Using excess profits, the company possesses the ability to provide aid in a variety of manners. In Hilary Clinton’s speech recognizing TOMS Shoes with the 2009’s Award for Corporate Excellence, she notes that in addition to the provision of shoes, “they have also supported local health and social service agencies that vaccinated nearly 800 children, and developed a nutritional census in Argentina” (Clinton, 2009). TOMS Shoes does not simply settle with its original promise to consumers to provide shoes. The company recognizes true needs in the world and the manner in which it can provide assistance. Medical support does not end by providing children with shoes as other struggles plague their bodies and prevent hopeful futures. In the same speech, Clinton identifies that “in the aftermath of horrible flooding that left thousands homeless in the province of Salta ... TOMS volunteers chartered a cargo plane to support the relief effort and deliver first aid and other supplies to help the community rebuild” (Clinton). When TOMS Shoes receives criticism for high prices and its existence as a for-profit company, consumers must realize that the company does more than provide shoes to children. The brand goes beyond its promise and seeks ways to provide

continued support and humanitarian aid. As prospective entrepreneurs determine long-term goals for the company, they should consider the ability to provide assistance above and beyond initial expectations. Existence as a for-profit allows for margin that creates freedom for radical giving. An example worth following, TOMS Shoes provides humanitarian aid above the initial promise made to consumers.

**Conclusion.** As one of the most well-known fashion-based humanitarian aid labels, TOMS Shoes possesses a story that includes many lessons for prospective entrepreneurs to follow. The founder, Blake Mycoskie, identified a clear cause and a simple model to provide relief. Consumers fell in love with the story and the feeling of ethical purchasing. Because of the uniqueness of the design itself, the shoes became a statement piece clearly identifying consumers with humanitarian aid and allowing for conversation about the story behind the purchase. As Mycoskie noted the future implications of a lack of shoes, prospective entrepreneurs should identify the consequences of limited resources and identify practical means to provide relief. Just as shoeless children cannot attend school, women in need of employment cannot impress at interviews without proper attire, hospitals cannot help the sick without medicine, and communities cannot repair damaged buildings without tools. Prospective entrepreneurs of tangible goods-based humanitarian aid labels must consider what specific needs are holding the people back and determine simple solutions to best fulfill the need.

### **Monetary-Based Donation**

#### **Definition**

Fashion-based companies that operate under the monetary donation form of humanitarian aid provide finances to pre-existing organizations to support a number of

profound causes. While fundraising ultimately provides tangible goods for the relief of both developed and developing nations, the initial contribution remains monetary in form. Companies that operate under this business model possess the freedom to support a variety of causes and establish campaigns of aid, encouraging awareness of the efforts of established organizations that may not previously possess significant recognition from consumers. Either through a percentage or entirety, profits of fashion-based companies that utilize the monetary donation form of aid are intended to benefit organizations with pre-existing expertise and connections in order to provide the best aid possible.

### **Hello Somebody**

**History.** The story of Hello Somebody reveals to prospective entrepreneurs the impact one may make when following a strong vision, life calling, and a selfless mission. In 2009, Ben Pirtel, the Senior Youth Pastor of Gateway Church in Southlake, TX, embarked on a mission trip with a group of students to Honduras (Hopper, 2011). Following the initial plan for his life, Pirtel visited the country unaware that his life and calling would soon shift. On the trip, Jimmy Hughes, his host, utilized the tag line of “hello somebody” as a manner to make participants aware of the need of the unfamiliar people around them (“Our Story,” 2013). As the days passed, the phrase rang throughout Pirtel’s dreams as he heard voices of children crying out, “Hello Somebody. Is anyone listening?” After viewing the need of the people and the hunger of hopeless children who chose food over toys, Pirtel received conviction he could not shake. Leaving the country, Pirtel accepted the “call to action” to provide one million meals within the next calendar year. The story of Pirtel’s inspiration began with a goal. He did not possess the awareness of how to complete the mission, but remained steadfast in his vision. Prospective

entrepreneurs must hold open hearts to ideas, burdens, and convictions. One never knows when inspiration will come, but the acceptance of inspiration remains a choice.

Through the continued story of the company's origin, prospective entrepreneurs learn the benefits of networking. Returning to the United States, Pirtel utilized available contacts and resources to achieve the goal of one million meals in one year. Pirtel spoke with many individuals about his dream, including co-founder Manny Martinez who joined the mission. Contacts within the music industry, including recording artist Ryan Edgar and the Rocket Summer singer Bryce Avery, brought about the song "Hello, Somebody" and a platform to spread the mission of the non-profit ("Our Story," 2013). One of the first steps the founders took was that of marketing, spreading awareness of the need, and encouraging response. Sponsorship of concerts brought about promotion and the opportunity to sell at concerts to a specific generation of consumer. While simultaneously spreading the word, the founders connected with designers and artists to create a line of apparel and unique watches that would sell in order to raise funds for cause ("Our Story"). Pirtel and Martinez understood consumer desire to not only to donate to causes while receiving a product, but also purchasing a product while giving donation. Aware of the consumer market, the founders developed products that would interest the young, cause-driven generation of concert attendees. Founders of Hello Somebody not only accepted the burden to provide one million meals, but also understood the appropriate methods of awareness and contribution to change.

**Mission.** Following a monetary donation method, Hello Somebody exists to give all profits to pre-existing humanitarian aid organizations for the support of multiple different causes, demonstrating to prospective entrepreneurs the ability to effectively

support a variety of campaigns at one time. The mission of Hello Somebody is “to provide sustainable projects and restorative care to improve the lives of children in need” (“Our Mission,” 2013). Upon the completion of the one million-meal goal, Hello Somebody does not limit itself to a specific cause. Existence as a monetary-based non-profit allows the brand to possess flexibility in giving, determined by immediate needs and numerous causes. Providing consumers with the chance to spend responsibly, the company exists to encourage consumers to spend responsibly and to impact the world with purchases. John Acuff, well known Christian blogger, speaker, and author, notes that “Hello Somebody’s mission is to support causes that are already in motion with any and every resource they can muster” (Acuff, 2011). Prospective entrepreneurs may learn from Hello Somebody as they consider the option of partnering with existing humanitarian aid organizations. Rather than determining efforts to prepare and distribute aid, profits may be given to pre-established organizations that already possess the necessary skills, resources, expertise and connections to provide aid. As Hello Somebody gives away profits to meet the needs of various causes, it accomplishes its mission to encourage responsible consumerism and impact the world.

**Humanitarian Aid.** The desirable products, marketing, and efforts of Hello Somebody generated quick relief for the mission of meal provision, surpassing initial goals and expectations, and proving to prospective entrepreneurs that audacious goals like the provision of one million meals are possible to achieve. In an interview, founder Pirtel rejoiced that “we reached our first goal of feeding 1 million children in just 10 months” (Hopper, 2011). Although the initial conviction and elevated dream of one million meals appeared daunting at the start of the project, the founders quickly learned

the desire of consumers to give and the ease of reaching their goal. Hello Somebody attributes success to the provision of products that excite consumers and stir discussion of ethical consumerism (“Our Story,” 2013). Prospective entrepreneurs, in the creation of dreams and goals, must not underestimate the possibility of success. Specific and audacious goals create excitement and passion to pursue the mission with fervor and intensity. While dreams should remain reachable and feasible, they should also present some form of high expectations that require energy and effort to propel the company forward. If one expects small results, small results will occur every time. Hello Somebody exemplifies a non-profit that dared to dream big, and the big dream came true.

Although Hello Somebody surpassed the goal of one million meals, the company continues to seek means of humanitarian aid through the provision of monetary support to pre-existing organizations, encouraging prospective entrepreneurs to continue aid even after original goals are met. Pirtel explains that in 2010 the company was able to give 50,000 meals to Haiti, \$90,000 of resources to Hokushima, Japan, after the impact of natural disaster, and additional aid to Pakistan, Honduras, and Mexico (Hopper, 2011) Through the use of monetary-based aid, Hello Somebody raises support for many different causes, including those which take place as a result of not only continuous need but also sudden natural disaster. The company possesses the flexibility to provide relief throughout the world, spanning countries on all continents. Current humanitarian projects supported by Hello Somebody include Hello: Freedom which fights against human trafficking, the Guatemala water project that provides wells to communities in need, Project: Livestock which will purchase three cows and 100 chickens to supply an entire school with dairy and eggs, and Present: Hope which raises funds for homes destroyed by

tornadoes in Joplin, Missouri, and Tuscaloosa, Alabama (“Campaigns,” 2013). As evident by the variety of causes and locations, Hello Somebody seeks to provide aid in any way possible. Rather than tackling one issue that may appeal to a certain sect of individuals, the company presents a number of campaigns that may appeal to a variety of consumers passionate about the provision of not only clean water, but other resources like food, education, health, and the end of human trafficking. If interested in utilizing the monetary-based method of humanitarian aid, prospective entrepreneurs should consider the support of numerous organizations that will cater to a variety of potential consumers. The use of monetary profits from product sales provides flexibility to distribute funds across a wide range of causes, allocating funds towards the necessary goods to distribute or labor to serve. Hello Somebody reveals the ability of monetary-based companies to support people all over the world in ways specific to the individual community’s needs.

**Product.** Primarily, Hello Somebody offers consumers unique, colorful watches with the addition of graphic tees that attract attention and allow consumers to spread the story of the humanitarian aid label. On the website of the brand, the founders write that “by offering relevant consumer products like watches and apparel, cause partnerships are able to be supported as we advocate for our partner organizations” (“Our Story,” 2013). The founders directly attribute the desire and motivation of quality products towards the mission and desire to raise funds for cause partners, or the pre-existing humanitarian organizations they sponsor. Prospective entrepreneurs should remember the intentions for products as they develop designs and potential offerings. Ideas will flow through focus on the need and the desire to spread awareness. Acuff promotes the unique watches as he remarks that “the watches, despite being ridiculously cool, cost only \$25” (Acuff, 2011).

The price of the product caters to the intended consumer market, contributing to higher sales numbers and overall funds for humanitarian aid. Concert attendees typically targeted by the company do not carry large quantities of cash, therefore, the price of Hello Somebody's products remain feasible for purchase. While profits gained per individual purchase may not equate to a large amount, the sum quickly accumulates as orders rise. As is the case with all businesses, prospective entrepreneurs of monetary-based humanitarian aid labels should strongly consider the consumer market when determining product pricing. Hello Somebody succeeds as it provides inexpensive, trendy products to its cause driven consumer market.

**Distribution and Sales.** With an intended focus on the music scene, Hello Somebody centers sales and distribution on concert events and online merchandising, revealing to prospective entrepreneurs the benefit of a specific niche market when determining methods of sale. While attending Christian and secular concert tours, audiences all over the country will see merchandise booths for Hello Somebody, covered with trendy apparel and displays of stylish watches (Hopper, 2011). By going directly to the environment of the marketed consumer, Hello Somebody promotes its products through physical presence in the music industry. Aware that concert attendees often desire a take-home item from the event, combined with reasonable prices, Hello Somebody encourages the use of products as souvenirs, which boosts sales and funds for aid. Another primary distributor of Hello Somebody products remains the company website which promotes not only the products themselves, but also the campaigns supported by purchases ("Campaigns," 2013). If unable to purchase products at the concerts or if they desire to purchase additional goods for friends and family, consumers within the niche

market may easily utilize the web shop for merchandise. As seen with other companies and models of humanitarian aid, online presence allows individuals from all over the nation to make purchases and contribute to aid. Information regarding supported campaigns allows consumers to follow a link to the specific organization assisted with purchases and become more aware of the impact of their individual contribution. Between merchandise tables at concerts and online presence, prospective entrepreneurs may learn from Hello Somebody the power of not only direct distribution, but also online provision of products.

**Marketing.** Intended for a young population of high school and college aged students, the marketing of Hello Somebody remain highly niche oriented through promotion at concerts and presence within the music industry. In the explanation of Hello Somebody's story, founder Pirtel explains that one of the first steps in the company's startup was to contact recording artist Ryan Edgar to create a song centered around the mission of the venture. Further communication and fostered relationship with Bryce Avary, lead singer of The Rocket Summer, as he prepared for a National Tour developed presence amongst the niche market of music-driven and cause-driven youth ("Our Story," 2013). In the very beginning of the company's existence, Hello Somebody identified and understood the desired niche market of its cause and products. Driven by available networking, the founders took advantage of the music scene and invested in sponsorships. Prospective entrepreneurs may recognize that the use of a specific market of consumers provides focus because efforts may be targeted to a succinct population of people. Hello Somebody was able to center all initial efforts and energy on concert tours and promotional events in order to make the most of available networking. Continuing to

promote the company within a niche market, Hello Somebody sponsors a compilation album that features well-known bands like The Rocket Summer, The Almost, and other national artists (“Hello Somebody,” 2012). These bands possess millions of followers and the ability to market the company as celebrity endorsers. When band members wear the apparel and accessories of Hello Somebody, fans notice. Desiring to be like these musicians, fans will purchase products and pick up the passion of the mission to change lives through support of humanitarian aid. Hello Somebody continues to invest in its niche market as it seeks to spread awareness of need in the world and create simply, desirable opportunities for contribution.

**Conclusion.** Hello Somebody depicts a successful fashion-based company that provides humanitarian aid through monetary donation of profits. As a non-profit, the company does not keep any of the profits as all finances contribute to pre-existing organizations that support a multitude of causes. Aware that established organizations possess the skills, resources, contacts, and expertise to administer aid in the most appropriate manner, Hello Somebody simply desires to promote awareness of the needs of the world and provide financial support to numerous causes. Prospective entrepreneurs may learn a variety of lessons through the story of the company, such as the acceptance of conviction, the establishment of big dreams, and the niche marketing strategy to develop results. Hello Somebody, while unknown to a large population of Americans, has established a significant presence in the music industry and continues to change lives through every purchase.

### **Ultimate Conclusion**

The three distinct models of aid, including employment-based, tangible goods-based, and monetary donation-based plans, provide prospective entrepreneurs with a variety of options as they prepare to launch fashion-based humanitarian aid startups. In the determination of the best business model for the company, prospective entrepreneurs need to determine which form of aid best fits their mission, product, and expected operating practices. For example, although an individual may desire to provide sustainable aid through the employment-based model, if production requires extensive employee training or results in too high of costs compared to product price points, this will not best fit the needs of company. Likewise, entrepreneurs may desire to provide certain tangible goods, but complications from the distribution of aid such as clothes, shoes, and medicine may hinder feasibility. Difficulties may arise from a variety of factors including a lack of connections in foreign nations, expense of travel and shipping, limited ability to acquire desired goods for distribution, and many others. Overall, the simplest model for new startups remains the monetary donation-based method, allowing companies to donate money from sales to pre-established organizations who possess the necessary resources, experience, and personnel to provide for a multitude of causes. While not all ventures are the same, the discussed labels of Krochet Kids International, TOMS Shoes, and Hello Somebody provide prospective entrepreneurs with strong role models to analyze for extractable lessons, encouragement, and inspiration.

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