

# Interview with Justine Bowes, Operations Director of Moab Bag Co

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Meet Justine Bowes, the Operations Director of Moab Bag Co, a unique company that creates functional items from upcycled materials. They offer items such as dog leashes, bags, card holders, and more, all made from bike tubes! Read more about Justine below.

### 1. What was the inspiration behind Moab Bag Co?

We wanted to save bike tubes from landfills and turn them into functional goods. There are so many forever materials from tires to bike tubes to fire hoses to vinyl signs that can be turned into something else once they surpass their initial use. We chose bike tubes because in Moab and the surrounding areas, biking is a huge activity for locals and tourists alike. Once the season starts, we get so many tube donations from local bike shops, and we are able to process the materials and make our bags! The rubber in bike tubes can't be recycled because it is a conglomerate material, so it seemed like a better use of the tubes to sew them like leather and create something fun and unique for the avid biker to use and show off.

### 2. What is the process like from bike tube to functional goods?

When we get the tubes, they are fresh off the bike. We usually don't take tubes that have slime or sealant, but the powder is just fine. We have to cut off the valve and then we cut the tubes down the middle to make them into the fabric we use. They also get a good wash in the washing machine to get off all the excess dirt and grime and hang dry in the Moab sun. Once they're clean, they're ready to sew! All our bags have different measurements, so we get to pick and choose from all our tube sizes from road

tubes to the large fat tire tubes. They sew easily once you're used to the texture as it is quite weird to sew rubber at first because it stretches a bit. Over the years we've gone through different designs and added new ones. Our newest line are the dog accessories as they utilize the road tubes that we get!

### 3. Where do you source your bike tubes from?

We get our bike tubes from local bike shops that collect them and donate them to us! If the shop is further out but wants to donate to us, we usually cover the shipping for them. It's an easy way to get low-cost materials of a variety of sizes. All our tubes are used or defective, so they don't serve a purpose in the bike shop world anymore. That's what makes all the products we sell unique. Some of the tubes have patches while others have logos and stripes on them.

### 4. What does shopping sustainably mean to you?

Shopping sustainably to me means doing research on companies and knowing what you're buying and from who. I love small (woman owned!) businesses, especially handmade items. If it is a necessity, then I feel like there is more leeway in using what your body allows and being conscious of the materials you are consuming. But for frivolous or fun purchases I try to find sustainable items that I like and companies that resonate with my values. I always try to thrift and shop secondhand for my clothing since I can also mend a lot of what I have or buy and usually can't afford big spendy purchases for every item. If I am buying a full price outdoor item I do some research on the brand. Patagonia is a spendy but worth it brand to me. I love that they offer a lifetime warranty as well as a repair program for all their items. As long as I don't grow out of an item, it can be a lifetime item! But that's also why I love shopping second hand as our bodies change and grow throughout life.

### 5. What is your favorite part of your role at Moab Bag Co?

I love that I get to create every day. I am a very hands-on person in my life, and I love that I work a job that allows me to keep my hands busy and my brain working. We are always workshoping new designs, reconfiguring old designs, and just playing around with new concepts. I've sewn for most of my life, but never bags. It was a fun

challenge and skill to learn and now I feel like it opened up a part of my brain that understands the construction of things better. I also do a lot of the social media and outreach for Moab Bag Co, and I love being able to interface with customers in person and online. If you ever see me at an event, say hi!

## **6. How have you seen Moab Bag Co make a difference in consumers or the community around you?**

Over the summer and fall last year I got to participate in quite a few farmer's markets and makers markets for Moab Bag Co. The markets were a ton of fun and on top of chatting with interested customers I got to learn about what people wanted to see, what people loved, and questions they had. On more than one occasion I also got individuals who turned in their bike tubes to me at the booths. It might not seem like a huge deal because I'm not personally seeing the landfills go down or the everyday use people get out of their bags, but it is comforting to know that our products are loved and are helping bike shops recycle their tubes. Education is an important part of improving in the future and I get to have those conversations with people about why tubes can't be recycled, why we make bags out of tubes, and what other materials could we integrate in the future. The community provides so much amazing feedback that we take to heart, and we hope to keep growing, learning and expanding in the future.

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