

Interview with Grace Christensen from Stardust Sustainables

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1. What is Stardust, and why was it created?

Stardust Sustainables is a company based in Park City, Utah that makes reusable shopping bags and beach bags out of jute fiber. It was created to reduce plastic waste in America by providing people with a bag that not only functions better than plastic bags, but is also very sustainable in that they are made from plants and are biodegradable. Stardust bags are strong and durable and may never wear out, but if they do, they can be thrown in a backyard compost bin and will biodegrade in about 9 weeks. They also have a very functional design including large, comfortable handles, and a wide gusset on the bottom that allows the bags to stand upright when items are placed inside. The plant that our bags are made from, jute, is a very sustainable plant that is grown without pesticides, fertilizer, or irrigation.

2. How have you applied your training in sustainability to your work at Stardust?

The knowledge I gained at USU was very helpful in preparing me to work at Stardust. I took a course titled "Sustainability Marketing" that emphasized tactics on how to help consumers see the benefits of more sustainable products. I learned that to help consumers see the value in a sustainable product, you have to emphasize the functionality and convenience of the product just as much if not more than the sustainability of the product. I also got to learn a lot about earth systems & climate change, which opened my eyes even more to the seriousness of climate change & motivated me to get into a career that would help towards a cleaner, healthier Earth.

3. Can you discuss some of the sustainable practices Stardust implements beyond the product itself, such as packaging or shipping methods?

We don't use any packaging, other than the boxes that the bags come in, so when they are sold in stores there is no additional packaging for the consumer to throw away after they buy it (other than the paper hang tag). About 98% of The bags that we sell are sold through bulk or wholesale, which helps reduce shipping Impacts as opposed to if we were to ship each bag individually.

4. What are some of the biggest challenges Stardust has faced in producing and promoting sustainable products?

The biggest obstacle we face is the fact that our bags are a higher price point than other reusable bags. Most other reusable bags sold in grocery stores, etc. are made from polypropylene which is a type of soft plastic. So even though they are marketed as "good for the earth" they're really just as harmful and will sit in a landfill for just as long as single use plastic bags. But polypropylene bags are extremely inexpensive to make, which is why it is sometimes a challenge to help consumers and retailers see the value in a bag like Stardust bags that are much more sustainable and high quality, even if they are more expensive.

5. What future opportunities do you see for innovation in sustainable product design and manufacturing?

I think that there are so many opportunities for sustainable products, Design, and manufacturing. I think consumers are moving towards wanting to feel good about the products that they own and what they consume. Companies that are terrible for the Earth are finally getting called out and more people are being educated on the effects of climate change and over consumption. I see a lot of opportunities for taking products that are typically single use & making them reusable, & better yet, biodegradable.

6. How do you educate your customers about the importance of

using sustainable products and the impact of their choices?

Recently what we've been trying to do at Stardust is create an emotional appeal to our consumers. We recently designed a new hang tag and replaced what was just the Stardust logo, with a picture of A mother and baby otter with the caption "Protect our planet, others are counting on us." We want our customers to really feel good about using Stardust bags & realize that they are making a choice to move towards a healthier planet. The otter graphic also reminds customers that humans aren't the only ones that are affected by climate change, plastic waste, and over consumption. As Stardust grows, we want to continue finding new ways to educate consumers on the importance of living a sustainable lifestyle.

7. Can you share any metrics or success stories that demonstrate the positive impact Stardust bags have had on reducing plastic waste?

We don't have any specific metrics or data right now that shows decreased plastic use due to Stardust bags, but it is really amazing to see how excited people get about using their Stardust bags as opposed to plastic bags at stores. I love seeing Stardust bags being used by other people when I am grocery shopping, at a farmers market, etc. & it seems like everyone that has them, loves them. Just today a store in Oregon that carries our bags emailed me to tell me that they are flying off the rack so fast she was worried they were being stolen, but none had been stolen, people just really love them! To use a reusable bag is a statement to everyone else around you that you are making a conscious effort to live more sustainability, & the more people that see that effort, the more that people are more likely to follow.

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