

ECO FASHION

GREEN FASHION TO SAVE THE WORLD

Eco fashion, ethical fashion, sustainable fashion, eco-friendly fashion, green fashion, etc. You would have heard of the terms, but what are they really? Although eco fashion may sound like a new trend but it started out way back as an organic movement in the 60's. In fact, it's not even a trend but rather a movement that has grown to revolutionise and transform the fashion industry of the 21st century.



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WHAT IS ECO FASHION?

The nonprofit Sustainable Technology Education Project (STEP) defines eco-fashion as clothes **“that take into account the environment, the health of consumers and the working conditions of people in the fashion industry.”**

But that was not the case until recently, as many eco clothing manufacturers were focusing only on the final product. Like many other industries, cost reduction was a high priority. Production was often outsourced to sweat shops with unethical business practices, fabrics were often treated with high levels of pesticides and other chemicals, which contributed to green house gases, which were never given much thought.

The late 90s activist movement against worker exploitation, saw a new code of labour practices for clothing companies being created resulting many sweat shops of the apparel industry being shut down, and more people supporting the need for fair trade, leading to employees being paid with respectable wages and quality working conditions.

Material of clothing in the fashion industry has also seen changes the past decade. Organic cotton is one of the major developments within eco fashion. Although the production of all cotton creates a fairly large carbon footprint, choosing organic is the safer route for the environment, as it is free of chemical fertilisers and toxic pesticides.

All-natural fibres such as silk, hemp, and even bamboo have also found their way as sustainable materials. Being resistant to bacteria and mold, these fibres are easier to grow, improve soil quality and are even biodegradable. Animal fibres such as wool, alpaca and cashmere are also finding their way to the eco fashion runway. Using plant-based dyes, as well as new printing quality, which adds colour to clothing without using water is another turning point for eco fashion industries contribution to a greener earth.

With more inspired key players in the eco fashion industry improving both the creation as well as the production of apparel, eco fashion is a rapidly growing movement. Some of the biggest fashion houses, in the world are already gearing new eco-initiatives last couple of years.

Nowadays, eco fashion is no longer attached to the hippy tie-dyed stereotype of the past. It has now been adopted by clothing distributors for the masses as well as the high fashion couture of the runways.

One argument still persist, that the eco-fashion development is over-priced, as many consumers still view it as elite. However, as more and more sustainable apparel companies enter the market, the supply will begin to match the high demand, and prices will begin to level out... hopefully.

ECO FASHION THAT WON'T HURT YOU... AND THE EARTH

One of the hottest trends in the world of style is eco friendly or natural fibre clothing. But what really separates eco fashion from ordinary clothing? There are a few elements that make a great outfit into an eco-friendly one:

ORGANIC MATERIALS

Clothing made from all or mostly all organic materials is usually said to be an eco fashion. The style of clothing made from these organic fabric clothing can range from sleepwear, outdoor apparel and activewear to the latest in haute couture. Choosing materials not treated with pesticides and herbicides clearly benefits the earth. But it may also help the wearer as well. There is a growing body of evidence that traces of the chemicals used in growing cotton and other materials may remain in the fibres. These traces could be absorbed through the skin of the wearer, especially if they sweat.

HEALTHY, PLANT-BASED DYES

Even organic materials can become less eco-friendly if the dyes used are synthetic, heavy metal based or otherwise dangerous to the workers who make the clothing, the earth or the wearer. Choosing clothing dyed with healthy, natural plant-based dyes means less irritation for the consumer and less toxic exposure for the clothing makers and the earth.



FREE TRADE PRACTICES

Another element of eco fashion has to do with the way the clothing is manufactured and sold. If the employees making the clothing are not paid a livable wage, or if the working conditions are substandard and hazardous, the clothing fails the free trade practices test. That means otherwise good clothing made from natural or even organic fabrics might not be a true eco fashion if the workers are children or if adult workers are paid only pennies for their labour.

GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

A final test of true eco fashion is whether the company is giving back to the community. Are they setting aside a certain portion of their profits for charities or environmental action? Are they working

to improve the lives of so-called Third World employees making the garments? Are they planting trees for catalogs or supporting local (or remote) schools? One of the tenets of the eco lifestyle is recognising the interconnectedness of the earth and its people, and sharing the bounty with those in need.

MAKE FULL USE OF LIMITED NATURAL RESOURCES

One of the positive side effects of the global recession has been a growing awareness of limited natural resources. People are more anxious than ever to reduce their carbon footprint and protect the earth. Eco fashion is just one expression of that shift.



SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS

Even if the material used in a garment is not organic, it may be a sustainable material. That means it's produced from a crop that can be replanted and regrown without damaging the eco system. Cotton or hemp grown in an environmentally friendly way, even if some chemicals are used, would qualify as sustainable. Other examples of sustainable, eco-friendly fabrics might include animal based choices like wool, alpaca and cashmere. Unlike leather and suede, the animals need not be harmed in gathering the fibres.



TAOlifestyle

3 ECO-FASHION MANUFACTURERS WHO ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

When it comes to eco fashion, it's only natural for us to name some leading international clothing labels and manufacturers. But what will surprise you is the fact that we have our own home-grown talents right here as well, albeit doing so quietly. In what ways can a Malaysian company compete to achieve world-class standard? We spoke to three eco fashion manufacturers recently, CP Lim, Merchandising Director of Organic Fashion House (TAO Lifestyle), CW Tan, CEO and Director of Nukleusshop, and also, Gayathri and Hema Vadivelu, founders of the Dive Label.

CP Lim, Merchandising Director of Organic Fashion House (TAO Lifestyle)

Organic Fashion House Sdn Bhd was established in Jan 2010. It's main goal is to provide an eco/green baby product for future generations. If given a chance they would like to tell all the parents, that they might not have the choice before, but now they do. Their product ranges include certified organic cotton baby apparel, organic cotton soft toys, and organic cotton accessories like storage bins, bags, etc.



What does eco fashion mean to you?

Free from chemical, all the way from farming to manufacturing, to finishing.

Your main aim in setting up your company?

Provide another option to the parents to choose chemical free apparel & toy to our precious one.



What sustainable practices your company follow?

Focus and insist on green product only and also insist on green from every possible way we can practice in the operations, i.e. cut down paper usage, use recycle paper for tagging designs, use nature wood without coating for counters/store design, etc.

What are your social standards, and how do you enforce them?

We have joined 1% for the Planet in 2010, meaning, we have contributed 1% of our sales revenue to this NGO in United States. You can find out more at www.onepercentfortheplanet.org

Are all your products made from ecologically conscious materials?

Yes, our company is only interested to sell certified eco/safety/chemical free products.

How do I know what goes into your clothes?

You can have a copy of our organic cotton certification, it tells everything.

What's so bad about normal fabrics? Why switch to eco friendly fabrics?

There are a number of chemicals involved in normal fabrics production, if we have a choice, why do we still want to pay for 'chemical clothes' for our baby?

Where are your clothing made at?

Our clothes are made in China, but the entire process from plantation to production has been certified organic.

Is there any certification that Malaysian eco fashion company must adhere to?

GOTS, IMO, Oeko-Tex Standard 100,

Eco fashion labels are still considered expensive. Will your products be made available for the masses at affordable prices?

Consumer always have the wrong impression of the price setting of eco product being on high side, however, if we compare eco products to those non-eco products, you will realise certain ranges of eco-products are still cheaper than those non-eco products. In order to serve the mass-market, the market must provide and meet the economic of scale, but by looking at the demand now around the world or in Malaysia, the eco products will still be under the pressure of cost.

What is the greatest challenge faced by your company in being a sustainable company?

General consumer acceptance level on eco-products and lack of support from our government. Therefore, educating the market to understand and know how to differentiate an eco-product from a non-eco-product is our priority now.

How receptive are Malaysians in purchasing your sustainable products?

Surprisingly, most of our local customers are willing to 'try out' the eco products and we have received very positive and encouraging feedback after their purchase.

TAO uses 100% organic cotton certified by IMO, GOTS and Oeko-Tex Standard 100 low impact dyes. For more information on this certification on **GOTS**: <http://www.global-standard.org/the-standard.html>
IMO: <http://www.imo.ch/>
Oeko-Tex Standard 100: http://www.oeko-tex.com/oekotex100_public/content5.asp?area=hauptmenue&site=oekotexstandard100&cls=02



CW Tan CEO & Director Nukleusshop

Nukleus is a revolutionary brand for fashionable, sustainable and affordable men's and women's underwear and basics.

.nukleus®
Inner Sense Revealed

What does eco fashion mean to you?

In the Nukleus vocabulary, sustainability means that we must satisfy our present needs without compromising the needs of future generations. Hence, any clothing that fulfils this requirement is considered sustainable. To produce truly sustainable clothing, one has to see sustainability as an end-to-end concept. That is, sustainability should permeate everything that one does. It begins with design and then "moves" to material selection, manufacturing, packaging, transportation, even to product disposal. In our view, this is the correct way to look at sustainability because every step along the value chain has environmental implications.

Your main aim in setting up your company?

Nukleus began with a dream: to create an innerwear brand with a global appeal. The first thing we did was to study the attributes of successful apparel and non-apparel brands. And in our research we discovered something interesting: Sustainability was the common denominator in those brands. We consulted people and organisations like the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Malaysia to learn more about sustainability. These "learning conversations" took place about three years ago and they sparked a paradigm shift in our thinking about sustainability. In fact, the shift was so big that we had to go back to the drawing board and redo virtually everything. That, in a nutshell, was how Nukleus was born.

What sustainable practices your company follow?

Our sustainable practices generally fall under four areas.

First is design. We begin with the end in mind, and we go all out to eliminate or minimise waste. If there's waste, we try to

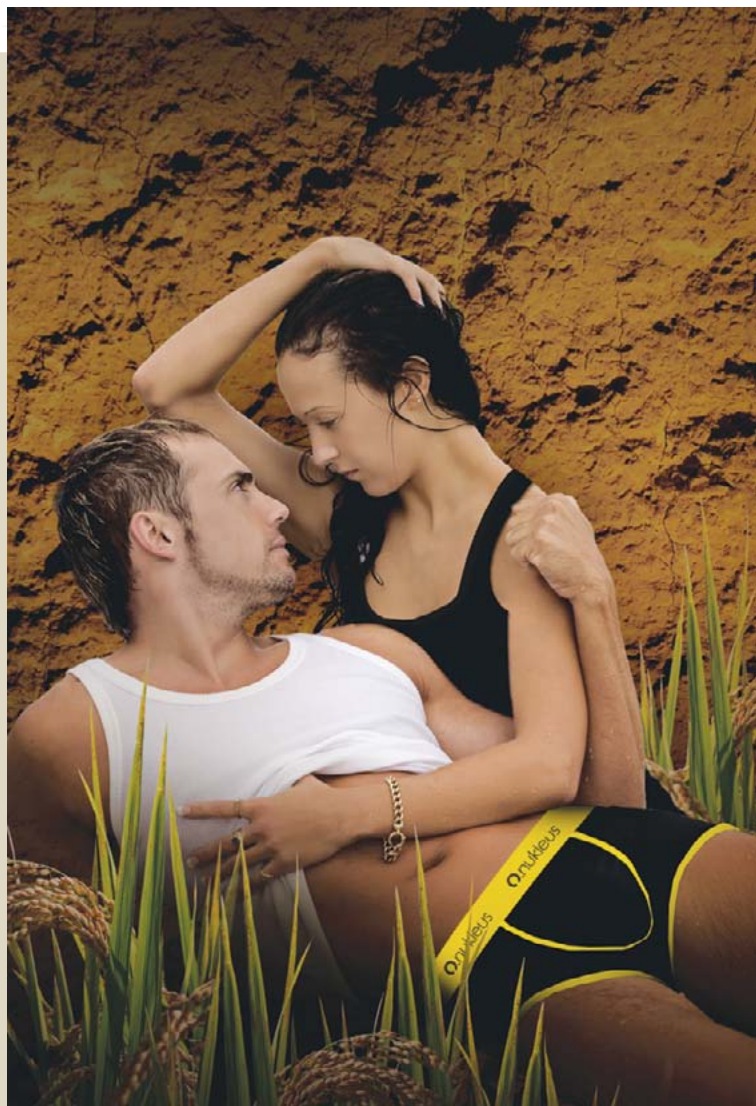


think of ways to recycle them or creatively use them. Second is materials selection. We select only the finest eco materials and we choose them with special care. Third is manufacturing. Our contract manufacturer is certified ISO14001 — that's the foundational requirement for environmental management system. It's also certified Oeko-Tex Standard 100. This standard is the world's highest for human ecological safety. Fourth is packaging. We use FSC certified paper for our eco-boxes because this type of paper is sustainable. The FSC, or Forest Stewardship Council, is a globally trusted organisation that promotes responsible forest management (e.g. appropriate harvesting rates and techniques, non-chemical methods of pest management, etc.). For health and environmental reasons, we use soy ink to print our boxes. Soy ink has low levels of VOCs (volatile organic compounds).

In addition to these, we also contribute to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Malaysia. Nukleus is a co-brand partner of WWF-Malaysia where part proceeds from the sale of all Nukleus products will be channeled to the latter to support its conservation work. We have recently extended the partnership with WWF to cover Hong Kong as well. WWF-Hong Kong is now our official co-brand partner.

What are your social standards? And how do you enforce them?

We produce our products using SA8000-certified facilities. SA8000 is an international certification standard that focuses on the development, maintenance and application of socially acceptable practices in the workplace. It was created in 1989 by Social Accountability International and is



considered the most globally accepted independent workplace standard. SA8000 also embraces existing international agreements, including conventions from the International Labor Organization, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The areas SA8000 addresses include forced and child labour, occupational health and safety, and management systems.

Our contract manufacturer is certified by National Quality Assurance (NQA), a leading international assessment, verification and certification body. NQA conducts audits and surveillance visits to ensure compliance.

It is often the green labels from the west who are drivers in setting ground-breaking trends. In what way can Nukleus compete to achieve world-class standard?

We compete through concepts and ideas. Our brand tells distinctly Asian stories. For example, they talk about Asia's exotic flora and fauna or about Asia's mystical, special places. All the stories have an environmental element. Our designs, the aesthetics, they all reflect those stories.

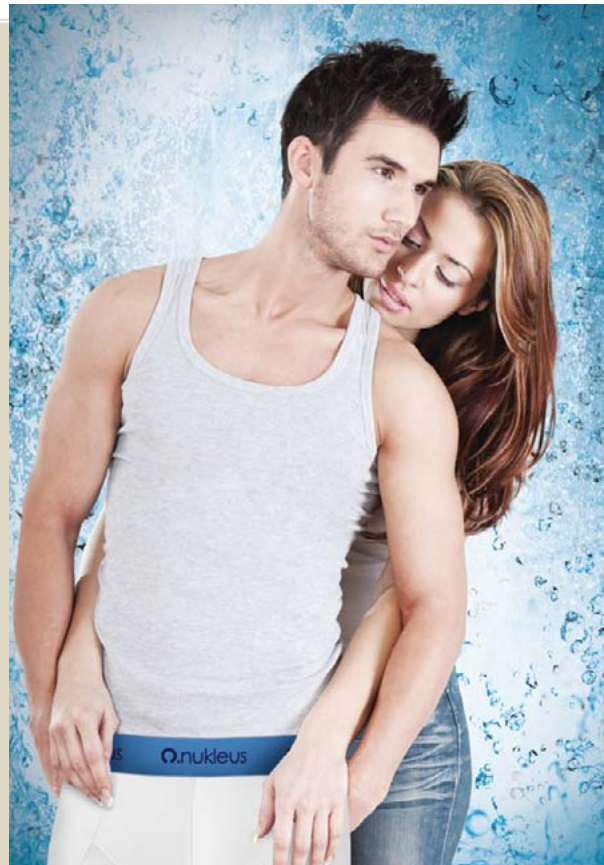
Based on the feedback from our foreign fans, they can't find a brand like ours in the West. Some of them have asked us to set up shop in their home countries.

Eco fashion is still considered expensive. Will your brand be made available for the masses at affordable prices one day?

It's a long-standing myth that all eco fashion is expensive. The reality: Not all is expensive. The evidence against the myth: Nukleus! It's Nukleus' dream to "mainstream" sustainable clothing, so to speak. We believe everyone should be wearing sustainable clothing because it's the right thing to wear. And we really mean it. Take our latest collection, The Quintet, for example. We have kept most of the Quintet items within the RM24 – 32 price range. Some are even below that range!

How receptive are Malaysians in purchasing your eco products?

Judging from our local sales, I'd say we've had a pretty good start. But as always, we can definitely do better. According to the international market research firm, Nielsen, out of the 51 countries that it recently surveyed,



Malaysia ranked ninth in terms of environmental awareness. That's impressive. Unfortunately, awareness doesn't always translate into action—Nielsen added that only one in five Malaysian consumers were willing to pay a premium for sustainable products. We hope to educate the Malaysian public that sustainable products aren't necessarily expensive and specifically, Nukleus is fashionable, sustainable and affordable.

For more information about Nukleus innerwear, visit www.nukleusshop.com. You can also follow the conversation on sustainable clothing and living at www.facebook.com/Nukleuswear.



Hema Vadivelu & Gayathri Vadivelu Founders of The Dive Label - DIVE Tees For A Cause

The Dive Label's vision is to create a cleaner, greener world - one eco product at a time. The Dive Label is determined to make the use of eco-friendly products the standard, nationwide.



What does eco fashion mean to you?

To us at The Dive Label, eco fashion is a part of the growing design philosophy and trend of sustainability, the goal is to create and produce a product with consideration to the environmental and social impact it may have throughout its total life span. Eco fashion is all about introducing eco-conscious methods at the source through the use of environmentally friendly materials and socially responsible methods of production.

What's your main aim in setting up your company?

At The Dive Label, our philosophy is different from others. It is to make profits with principles based on environmental responsibility. We set up this company with the clear intention of doing the right thing and pioneering positive change. The Dive Label aims to make everything that has its name on it as eco-friendly, safe, sustainable and as responsibly manufactured as possible. The future is an important investment and we can be on our way to being part of the solution instead of part of the problem.

What sustainable practices your company follow?

We are passionate about our products thus taking the integrity of our products very seriously. We try to ensure the highest standards whilst covering ethical production, quality, creative design and sustainability. We only work with factories that have regular ethical audits on pertinent issues such as child labour, workers fair trade and safe working conditions which fulfill environmental standards.

What are your social standards? And how do you enforce them?

We work closely with our suppliers to ensure that products are produced according to the environmental standards that we adhere to and we only work with factories that



are regularly audited to ensure all our concerns are put to rest, e.g.: authenticity of materials, working conditions and fair wages of workers,

Are all your products made from ecologically conscious materials?

We work hard to ensure that all our products are produced with sustainable materials and processes. We started working with organic cotton and we have slowly diversified into other eco friendly materials such as jute, bamboo, etc.

What's so bad about normal fabrics? Why switch to eco friendly fabrics?

We get asked this question all the time! Clothes are a big part of our lives, we can't live without them. However even a simple garment like a t-shirt contributes to the pollution in our environment and people don't realise this when they put on their t-shirts. For instance, cotton is one of the most widely

grown and chemical-intensive crops in the world. Conventionally grown cotton uses approximately 25% of the world's insecticides and more than 10% of the world's pesticides.

Where are your clothing manufactured?

All our products are manufactured in India.





Is there any certification that Malaysian eco fashion company must adhere to?

There are many international certification bodies that produce various certifications. We work with suppliers who are certified by and adhere to the Global Organic Textile Standards (GOTS) certification standards.

It's often the eco labels from the west who are drivers in setting ground-breaking trends. In what way can a Malaysian company like yours compete to achieve world-class standard?

As long as we don't compromise quality and design, we think there is always a way to compete in an international arena.

Eco fashion is still considered expensive and afforded only by a few. Will your eco fashion be made available for the masses one day?

It is true that eco products are more expensive than conventional products. However, it is not as expensive as people think it is. A good example are our DIVE tees for a cause, its priced at RM59 which is an affordable price for the masses. The most important thing to do right now is to create the demand for eco friendly



products and as the demand grows and supply increases then the prices will get cheaper in the future.

What is the greatest challenge faced by your company in being an eco fashion company?

The greatest challenge has been to create awareness and interest towards eco friendly products. Generally, most people don't seem to realise the impact the products they use everyday have on the environment and we are still working to change the mindset.

How receptive are Malaysians in purchasing your eco products?

The response has been incredibly encouraging! We have received great support from people from all walks of life and a lot of them have signed up as our members through our website and send us their encouragement and positive feedback online.

Where can one get your products?

You can buy our t-shirts at the Little Green Planet stores as well as buy it online at www.emmagem.com.

For more information, visit www.thedivelabel.com

WHY IS ECO FASHION EXPENSIVE?

TIME AND EFFORT IS MONEY

It may seem counterintuitive that sustainable crops such as organic cotton, free from the trappings of GMO, chemical pesticides, and synthetic fertilisers, would actually cost more to grow, but the truth of the matter is that these toxic shortcuts are precisely what enables farmers to keep their costs down. Harvesting organic cotton is also more labour intensive because it's done without the use of chemical defoliation aids.

FAIR IS FAIR

Most companies, especially those without the supply-chain muscle of big-box stores, would be hard-pressed to price their garb inexpensively without resorting to grossly underpaid minions in a factory in Bangladesh. It's unrealistic to expect something to be cheap, equitable, and well-made - something's gotta give. If you pick up an unbelievable steal, you can bet your bottom dollar that someone down - way down - the line is paying for those savings.

ECONOMIES OF SCALE

While the organic market continues to grow and thrive, it's still a small slice of the overall consumer-spending pie. Inventory-wise, the volume of goods produced is also infinitesimally smaller compared to what mass-market manufacturers churn out on a daily basis, which makes everything from marketing to shipping less cost-effective. On the plus side, sustainable products tend to be better crafted, which makes for longer life spans than the majority of disposable clothing and accessories you can get on the cheap at artificially depressed prices.

References: www.treehugger.com / www.stepin.org

