

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Angela Roi aims to reach handbag customers with vegan options

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Vegan mini crossbody handbag from Angela Roi. Image courtesy of Angela Roi

By DIANNA DILWORTH

Vegan handbag maker Angela Roi wants to disrupt the traditional fashion industry and deliver handbags that are animal-friendly, fair trade and good for the planet in a strategic move to appeal to consumers who want more purpose in the products they purchase.

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The company was launched by 28-year-old cofounder and creative director Angela Lee, who wanted to challenge the traditional system that she sees as built on environmentally unfriendly practices that are often bad for animals and workers.

"It's ironic that brands are sacrificing so much on the other side of the world to create values for customers, and they either don't know about it or don't care about it," Ms. Lee said.

Material change

Angela Roi is on a mission to craft high-quality handbags made from non-animal related materials that look like real leather.

"We cannot change people's perception on non-animal material handbags if the quality is bad," Ms. Lee said.

"In order to do this, we make sure to use high-quality materials," she said. "We work with highly skilled artisans and provide a great warranty program in case something goes wrong with the customers' products. We had to earn people's trust about the quality of non-animal material handbags."

Additionally, the company hires factories that do not use child labor and treat their workers fairly.

"We have correspondents in [South] Korea who visit the factories randomly throughout the year to ensure that," Ms. Lee said.

"I also make trips to the factories in Korea myself twice a year," she said. "Communicating with the workers closely and building the relationship with these boutique factories are significant to us as well."

The company is also incorporating various eco initiatives to make its products and packaging.

For instance, it is currently testing some non-leather materials that use less harmful chemicals in production, as well as interior fabrics that are made of recycled plastic bottles.

The company's paper tags are made of sugarcane, and its dust bags are made of 100 percent cotton that has been tested for the presence of more than 100 toxic substances.

Additionally, the firm is moving from plastic packaging to a biodegradable option.



Vegan tote from Angela Roi. Image courtesy of Angela Roi

Value shoppers

Shoppers are more likely to be attracted to brands that endorse the social causes they care about such as sustainability or equality.

However, the price premium associated with sustainable products and communications challenges are key deterrents for consumers to buy from marketers with sustainability-oriented practices, according to a recent report from The Conference Board ([see story](#)).

Not all consumers want to be preached at and consumers have different understandings of what sustainable tactics mean based on their location in the world.

"Changing people's perception is not easy," Ms. Lee said. "When people first hear non-leather materials, they immediately question the quality.

"Most of them have only experienced very low-quality, non-animal materials from cheap brands," she said.

"We don't expect to change this perception easily in the short term. We are trying to change one person's mind at a time."



Angela Lee is cofounder of Angela Roi

Organic growth

The collection includes shoulder bags, buckets, totes and shoulder bags in various colors that retail for \$200 to \$300.

The bags are available through the [brand's ecommerce site](#), as well as through select retail partners including Amour Vert, Moo Shoes and Bulletin Nolita.

The brand positions itself as a company that wants to help solve industry issues, but stresses that it is not an activist.

"We have this DNA of being rebellious, yet elegant," Ms. Lee said. "This DNA formed our brand personality, and we see that many others want to join this community."

"It organically built the brand platform for us," she said. "Having a strong community of people who believe in our mission to build rebellious, ethical fashion has been the best marketing for us."

Optics of ethics

As more consumers look to sustainable fashion, vintage and vegan options are hitting trend lists and influencer Instagram pages.

Brands that can pitch themselves as offering solutions to fashion's unsustainable side will win the coming years.

"More customers will ask more brands to become more ethical," Ms. Lee said. "More customers will also ask existing ethical brands to become even more ethical."

"It's hard to become perfectly ethical at the moment, but people understand that as well, so it's important to initiate," she said. "Ethical fashion will only get more detailed and improved over the next year."

"In the near future, many people will start looking for compressively ethical products that can embrace various values."