

This Woman Entrepreneur led the way for change in Footwear

Being a graphic designer and commercial artist **Trishla** dabbled in hair accessories for kids but was always obsessed with footwear and challenged why it wasn't creative and colorful.

It didn't deter her that she was not from the footwear background and wanted to create a beautiful pair of footwear which would stand out and attract customers but the problem was how to explain it to the artisans who are used to working traditionally and cannot work without having a sample for reference.

Thus began **Trishla's journey** in the dusty lanes of Kurla in distant suburbs of Mumbai where she had to spend thankless evenings struggling with the artisans and explaining her concept of the 'colorful and creative' sandals she had in her mind.

She was lucky to find help from local people which somehow was the glimmer of hope for her to develop world-class footwear in India which is used to importing most of its footwear requirement from China and the rest of it is locally manufactured but seldom focusing on quality and finish.

Trishla says that her first breakthrough *"when she was able to figure out how to print her designs directly on flip flops but on testing realized that the print wouldn't stay on the flip flop once it was put to use."*

This led her to the learning that printing on the fabric would be the next best thing to do and she was able to make printed flip flops which looked cute but got a rude shock when she went to a college festival where the students got attracted to

the prints but didn't find it worth the premium for the product.

She and her team went back to the drawing board and in the process of research, Trishla discovered cork which originated from a cork oak tree and one of the best materials for the feet.

So the printing technology was applied to cork footbed in the form of an insole and the first pair of cork footbed sandals was launched by **Colour Me Mad** at a lifestyle exhibition in Mumbai which was an instant success and Trishla was sold out to her surprise.

Having tasted blood, Trishla started doing exhibitions across India and got resounding success with customers queuing up to buy her cork sandals which not only looked good but provided instant comfort to the ladies who bought it.

To take her journey forward she decided to venture overseas with the help of Govt. of India which sponsored her travel to Milan, the fashion capital of the world which she was excited about and nervous also as this was her first attempt to exhibit her cork sandals outside India at a show called La Artigano which attracted one million customers.

Trishla arrived in the chilling winters of Milan in December and when she visited the venue a day before the exhibition she got goosebumps as the venue was huge with country pavilions all around and Indian pavilion comprised of cheap Xmas gifts starting at as low as Euro 1.

She had initially priced her sandals at Euro 40 to Euro 60 and seeing the price points at which other stuff was selling and the wrong weather in which she landed, she crashed her prices at Euro 15 to 20 but was unable to sell the stuff and had to dump the remaining stock in Milan as getting the stock back to India would be a major hassle due to customs duty hassle.

This was a temporary setback for her but she took the next step and hired a PR agency to reach out to Bollywood celebrities and generate more visibility for the brand. This initiative immediately paid off and several Bollywood celebrities started unboxing the footwear and were spotted wearing them at airports and casual outings.

The real highlight was when the fashionista of Bollywood, Sonam Kapoor unboxed CMM sandals on her Instagram page and it led to a deluge of orders on her website which led to the crashing of the website and they had to take orders on Instagram to handle the surge in demand.

This led to a move to retail and selling in stores across India but soon they realized that they were unable to manage the complexity of retail operations and the resultant issue of unsold inventory.

The setback in retail along with the feedback from investors made Trishla and the team realize that their footwear has broad targeting and it needs to be positioned clearly for a target audience.

This led to self-reflection which made Trishla realize that most of her customers were patients which made her pivot to medical footwear and provide complete foot care solutions.