



HOW TO DRAW A PERFECT CIRCLE

ECOALF

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01 Executive Summary

A pioneering force in the fashion industry, ECOALF has redefined the sustainable fashion landscape through a visionary approach and its indelible commitment to circularity. This case study investigates the brand's exemplary journey, detailing the strategies and initiatives that have propelled it to the forefront of conscious fashion. The mission to radically transform the fashion industry is rooted in ECOALF's commitment which, since its foundation, has sought to draw a perfect circle. By creating a closed-loop system that minimizes waste and maximizes positive environmental and social impact, the company stands out as a living model for fashion brands that have the courage to adopt business models that benefit people and the planet.

This case study invites readers along Ecoalf's inspiring path, uncovering the disruptive initiatives that have enabled the company to push the boundaries of sustainable innovation, and offering clues as to the key drivers of its success. Readers can expect to gain a comprehensive understanding of the collaborative ecosystem nurtured by the company by engaging with stakeholders across the value chain which culminates in the Ecoalf Foundation where the brand transforms Ocean waste into high-quality textiles. This research will also demonstrate the fundamental role of education in ECOALF's DNA, which has a mission to empower society through workshops, campaigns and partnerships that raise awareness about the impacts of the fashion industry. This task is undertaken with total transparency and a sense of purpose, leading change.

At the end of this case study, readers will have relevant information about ECOALF's distinctive role as a fashion brand that embodies the challenging balance of the triple P's bottom line - people, planet and profit -, and will be able to evaluate the success of a circular business model in a sector historically based on a linear one. In conclusion, ECOALF's journey is a testament to the transformative power of sustainable innovation. By drawing the perfect circle, ECOALF is not only leading by example, but also inspiring a global shift towards a truly circular and conscious fashion industry.

02 Walking the talk

Javier Goyeneche went to the port for a few beers with the fishermen after a day's work. He had founded ECOALF in 2012, in **a personal commitment to create a quality brand made from waste and recycled products only, and to move away from the usual dependence on natural resources**. At the same time, he asked the “wolves of the sea” to help him clean up the garbage, particularly plastic, from the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea and then recycle it. Javier was working towards a happier planet, one that he wanted to leave to his children, and to be an example of a new and conscious way of consuming fashion, one of the most consumerist and polluting industries in the world. If his first idea had been to clean the earth of the most toxic waste, a letter from a fisherman soon drew his attention to the scourge lying dormant at the bottom of the seas. Covered in plastics, due to the excesses of human consumption, which continues to grow, just as the planet's population continues to grow, their waste is being dumped in nature, or has ended up there almost fatally.

For the majority, the idea has always been ingrained, and with greater expression and speed since the Enlightenment and the industrial revolution, **that progress involves exploiting natural resources, which are believed to be inexhaustible**. Also, it doesn't help our growing distance from Nature and from a circular economy which means an industrial system that is restorative and regenerative from its conception and based on three fundamental principles: preserving and improving natural capital, optimizing the yield of resources and promoting the efficiency of the system. Various research efforts and examples of good practice have shown that a transition to the circular economy can bring the lasting benefits of a more innovative, resilient and productive economy. For example, the 2015 study *Growth Within: A Circular Economy Vision for a Competitive Europe* estimated that a switch to the circular economy development path in just three key areas - mobility, food and construction - would generate total annual benefits for Europe of around 1.8 billion euros.

Javier decided to do something about the inconsequential and unsustainability of this human way of living. So, he decided to roll up his sleeves and dedicate himself to repairing what is possible, even if it only seems like a drop in the great ocean that is the consequences of a fashion industry without brakes. As the motto says: "*Make the change you want to see in the world around you*". ECOALF wants to inspire you towards a necessary and inevitable change. And sometimes, a story begins with an encounter.



Javier Goyeneche



Fishnets plastic in the ocean

03 Building a *storydoing* brand

In his book *Consumer Society* (2004)¹, Baudrillard says that one modern phenomena is **that we consume not merchandise but "signs"** (a message, an image). We therefore need to "read" the system, its "code" of consumer meaning, to know what we identify with and make our own choices. Thus, **consumer society is no longer bound by morality and habit, its value is no longer the rationality of consumption for use or exchange, but rather it has a particular socio-cultural meaning, a symbolic character**, signs that are consumed and manipulated. This is where fashion comes in, as it is much more than clothing, and consumption satisfies desires rather than needs.

Javier Goyeneche studied in Paris, where he created a pin merchandising brand after the Barcelona Olympics in 1992. He was just over 20 years old and it didn't survive the economic crisis of 1993 in Spain. He then dedicated himself to wholesaling designer purses and ventured into an accessories brand, Fun & Basics, which he sold in department stores such as El Corte Ingles. He achieved a financial turnover of 20 million euros in 2008. The following year, however, a new economic crisis hit Europe and buried his business hopes once again. Javier sold the company a year later and it was with some of the money from that sale that he started again and thought up ECOALF.

In the meantime, he had become a family man, which turned his attention, even more, to the future and the planet he would leave to his children. For him, a time of responsibility had come business could no longer ignore its impact on Nature and people's lives. *"Before I started this project, I was already working in the fashion industry and I was always thinking about the kind of world I would leave for my children,"* says Javier Goyeneche, in an exclusive interview with the be@t project team at BCSD Portugal. *"So I decided that I wanted to dedicate myself to sustainability, I was tired of the fashion world and started thinking about what I was going to leave behind. For a while, I looked for a project that I liked and that would have a significant impact, but I didn't find one. What I found was an activist world that wasn't enough. I think the activist part is important, but there must also be an action part. I wanted to create a truly sustainable fashion brand and I thought that the most sustainable thing to do was to stop using the planet's natural resources indiscriminately, in order to guarantee the needs of future generations."*

And he thought that recycling could be a solution if he **could "create a new generation of recycled products with the same quality and design as the best non-recycled products"**. This is how the idea of ECOALF was born in 2009, **to protect natural resources, "a sustainable lifestyle brand that leads change with every product"**. The name of the new project was chosen after the birth of his first son, Alfredo, and it made even more sense when his second son, Álvaro, was born. Javier wanted this to be a brand for the new generation, for a new world.

When he took his first steps, in 2009, *"there were no recycled materials or fabrics"*, he recalls, *"and those that did exist were of poor quality or had a very low percentage of recycled material"*. It was then that he started traveling the world and, in Taipei, Taiwan, he met a woman who was

¹ BAUDRILLARD, Jean – A Sociedade de Consumo. Edições 70, 2008. Coleção Arte & Comunicação. ISBN 9789724415215

transforming used PET bottles [a thermoplastic polymer patented in 1941 by two British chemists, John Rex Whinfield and James Tennant Dickson] to make carpets. It was an inspiration for him, and for what later became ECOALF. This episode also resulted in the first collection of backpacks made from the recycled material that is now one of the brand's images. From the start, *"everything has been a challenge."*

More than the economic crises, Javier Goyeneche says, *"The biggest obstacle was undoubtedly changing people's mentality and habits, as well as their perception of recycled materials; they didn't understand what it meant to wear clothes made with recycled and low-impact materials. And disruption was definitely the key, at the time, in 2009, when I decided to create ECOALF, sustainability was not identified with design and recycling had a pejorative component. Recycled things were seen as poor quality and uncool. The big challenge was to change this perception through innovative products with design and quality equal to or better than the best non-recycled products."*

Then it **became clear how unbearable the way we live our relationship with clothes is**, especially in the Western world, where fashion was born, developed, and flourished. As it became more and more democratized, the disposable, fast-fashion culture was established: unbridled consumption, often automatic and thoughtless, of low-quality, easily disposable garments, produced in distant markets where labor is much cheaper. Without noticing, we have become undemanding consumers, without taking care to know where the clothes we buy come from, what materials they are made of and where they came from, how the clothes are produced and by whom. Much less have we been concerned about their durability or end of life, which is often short, and this has been the most common way of thinking, especially since the prosperous years, the 80s and 90s of the 20th century.

The German philosopher Herbert Marcuse, one of the main critics of capitalist society, writes in his book *Eros and Civilization*² **that post-industrial society is completely dominated by unconscious overconsumption, resulting from the manipulation of false needs that lead to the accumulation of environmentally harmful materials.** Marcuse developed the Critical Theory of Society in order to rescue critical rationality, which is why he advocates the radical transformation of society and defends the idea that it is necessary to train citizens capable of transforming the world for the better. They must therefore seek ways of *"reading nature through science"* as a primary step towards change.

*"The fast-fashion model and continuous promotions are depleting our natural resources and causing thousands of tons of textile waste to be deposited in landfills every month. [At ECOALF] we focus on timeless products, on quality over quantity, and we don't take part in continuous promotions and campaigns, such as Black Friday, based on an impulse-buying model that generates a lot of waste. In other words, we don't support overproduction in order to stock up because it generates waste and the planet's natural resources are not infinite. And we stand by this conviction, even if it means losing sales. Commercially it may not be right, but it's in line with our purpose. We advocate a redefinition of the seasonal calendar."*³

² MARCUSE, Herbert – Eros e Civilização: uma interpretação filosófica do pensamento de Freud. LTC, 1982. ISBN 9788521611875

³ According to the European Union's waste hierarchy, landfill is the least preferable option and should be limited to the minimum necessary. In 2018, 24% of all municipal waste generated in the EU was buried. This can have dangerous effects on human health

The speech by Frans Timmermans, Vice-President of the European Commission and European Commissioner, at the Global Fashion Summit reaffirms this reality: "The way we produce and consume clothing is highly unsustainable. In the European Union alone, we waste around 5.8 million tons of textiles every year. This represents almost 11 kilos per person. And around the world, a truckload of textiles is landfilled or incinerated every second."⁴

Creating a brand's idea is one thing, making it fly is another. Javier used his experience to make a difference and wanted to take a higher, longer and more ambitious leap in his commitment to quality, business ethics, creativity and innovation. **ECOALF was objectively born as a brand in 2012 with a start-up of two million euros, with the help of family and friends**, in a firm desire to **create quality fashion using only recycled raw materials, some created from the waste that lies at the bottom of the oceans**. And to do it as quickly as possible. As well as creating social impact, from the outset it had the management challenge of making it profitable and on the right track: it wasn't just about survival, but about creating a business with a strategy and a scale that would make it grow, viable for the future, and solid. Even to keep its investors enthusiastic and confident. So began the production of a sports collection, outdoor garments, swimwear, footwear and accessories.

In 2016, the company needed a new injection of cash to scale up and mature and went looking for investors who could understand this vision: "*We explained that we were a brand that made stories, not a brand that told stories. And that we wanted to be part of the solution,*" recalls Javier. Then came the private equity investment from the Manor Group, which had started out as a family office with a focus on sustainable projects, and fit their idealistic brand materialized in quality products. They simply asked him to reinforce their management team with retail experience. And so he did.

04 A hand-picked team

In 2017, Marisa Selfa joined as general manager and was the brand's CEO until 2020, when she moved to North Sails Apparel. She comes from the world of fashion, where she worked for 20 years in brands like Timberland, Adidas, Cortefiel, Levi Strauss and National Geographic Retail. She says in the case study *Ecoalf: Because there is no planet B⁵*, carried out by IMD on September 14, 2020: "*When I joined in 2017, I found a start-up with more than three million euros in sales, full of bright and energetic people, but with little experience. Javier had a clear vision, a fantastic concept, a great brand, but the organization still devoid of processes, procedures and systems. The company, in a way, was 'very Spanish', but with very big dreams. In 2018, we closed the year*

and the environment. (...)", we read in the European Union's sustainability report, [Landfill waste - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#), which outlines the waste scenario and proposes the green transition by 2030. Specifically for textiles, the [Strategy for textiles - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#), adopted on March 30, 2022, reads: "Textiles are the fourth most pressured category in terms of the use of primary raw materials and water, after food, housing and transport, and the fifth in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. It is estimated that less than 1% of all textiles worldwide are recycled into new textiles. The EU textile sector, predominantly made up of SMEs, has started to recover after a long period of restructuring, while 60% of clothing in the EU, in terms of value, is produced elsewhere

⁴ [Speech EVP Timmermans at the Global Fashion Summit \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁵ [ECOALF: Because there is no Planet B \(imd.org\)](#)

with around 7 million euros in revenue, a growth of 133% compared to the previous year. People are now joining the company not because we are increasing their salaries, but to be part of a project, and this is remarkable and very exciting."

That same year, Javier recruited Carolina Alvarez-Ossorio, who joined the young team as marketing director/CMO. She had experience in marketing and sales, having worked for 12 years at the American cosmetics giant Estée Lauder, particularly in the US and UK markets, where she communicated its smaller brands. Carolina had just moved to Madrid and remembers the day Javier told her about the Foundation's upcycling project, in an interview for BCSD Portugal: *"I was very impressed"*⁶. ECOALF was still a small company of just 12 people, and Carolina joined to give shape to what she wanted to be *"a truly international brand, one that was more than fashion and beyond Spain"*. The aim was also *"to create a movement, not just for the industry, but for everyone, for the world."*

Carolina Ossorio was also responsible for ECOALF being the first Spanish fashion brand to be certified as a B Corp⁷, i.e. a profitable business, but one whose definition of success includes not just financial return, but offering products and services that bring benefits to society and the environment - and a message of hope for our endangered planet. On the brand's website, Javier Goyeneche states with conviction: *"Our mission and vision remain intact, if possible with more strength and clarity than ever before. Our planet is shaking and we must act. It's time to take responsibility. We believe we have a mission that goes beyond business. Fashion is one of the biggest consumer goods' industries in the world and one of the most polluting. I believe that the time when fashion was just about looking good has passed. More than ever, you have to do the right thing and feel good about it. We have the opportunity and the responsibility to rethink the business model we want for the future."*

Many other key players have joined over the years, and today ECOALF has around 80 employees. If we include the stores workers, that number rises to around 150 people. *"I often say that we keep our start-up spirit, we make a lot of noise, because we need the big players to change the industry,"* says Carolina Ossorio. Javier has always been right about one thing, until proven otherwise: *"There is no planet B"*, a life motto we've heard more and more in recent years and which has become ECOALF's slogan.

05 How the ECOALF Foundation removes plastic from the bottom of the ocean

⁶ Interview conducted by BCSD Portugal on July 14th 2023

⁷ B Lab Global Site ([bcorporation.net](https://www.bcorporation.net))

It was the largest ocean garbage dump in the world, a third of the size of the United States and equivalent to 3.5 million square kilometers, according to data from an exhaustive and disruptive National Geographic article from 2018⁸, which shocked the world. **It is estimated that around 450 million tons of plastic are produced every year and almost 10% ends up in the ocean.** At the time this article was published, it was estimated that the ocean was already overloaded with around 165 million tons of plastic, while around 5.25 trillion plastic particles were already floating on its surface. This kind of scary island is made up of 1.8 trillion pieces of floating plastic.

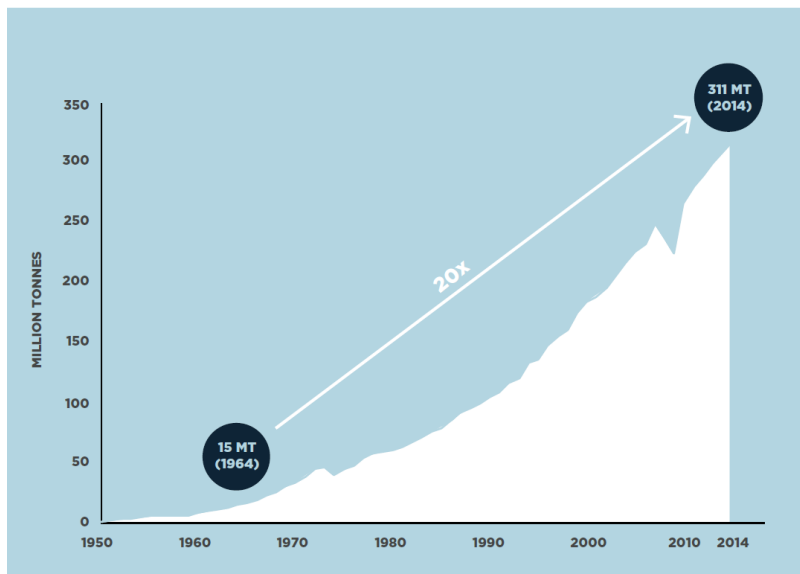


Figure 1. Growth in global plastics production between 1950-2014

Note: Production from virgin fossil-based feedstock only (does not include bio-based, greenhouse gas-based or recycled feedstock).

Source: World Economic Forum, Ellen MacArthur Foundation and McKinsey & Company, The New Plastics Economy — Rethinking the future of plastics (2016, <http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications>).

⁸ [Bioplastics—are they truly better for the environment?](#)



Blue Moss Sweatshirt from the collection Because There is No Planet B

The ECOALF Foundation was born precisely from observing and noticing this type of catastrophe caused by human hands. The trigger was pulled when **Javier Goyeneche received a call from a fisherman**, who read an interview with him in which he mentioned the amount of buried garbage he was trying to recycle. *"He said: 'Why do you only take the garbage from the land and not the garbage from the sea? **You should come fishing and see how much garbage there is in the sea.** He went and saw that when the fishermen pull in their nets, they bring in a lot of garbage, not just plastic, but tires and glass, which they take out and throw back into the ocean,"* recalls Carolina Ossorio.

Then there is also the plastic accumulated at the bottom of the sea: **"Did you know that 8 million tons of waste enter our oceans every year?"** adds Javier Goyeneche. The ECOALF Foundation took shape in his mind when he actually boarded a trawler *"and saw with my own eyes the amount of garbage that ends up at the bottom of the ocean"*. When he started investigating, he discovered that 80% of marine waste ends up at the bottom of the ocean and no one is collecting it. *"A plastic bottle takes about 150 years to disappear, because as soon as it fills up with water, it sinks, glass takes 200 years, a can another 150 years, everything starts off floating, but then it goes to the bottom and becomes part of the ecosystem,"* explains the marketing director. *"By 2050, there will be more plastic than fish in the sea! That's why we have to start doing things and being part of the solution, and that's why the ECOALF Foundation was born in 2015."* The results of today's single-use, disposable plastic culture can be seen on coastlines everywhere. Plastic waste is increasingly polluting the seas. **According to one estimate, by 2050 the oceans could contain more plastic than fish.**

Plastics are one of the seven areas considered crucial by the European Commission for achieving a circular economy in the EU by 2050. In addition to **the European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy**⁹, which would **phase out the use of microplastics**, the Commission has identified two priority groups of plastics, fishing nets (around 27% of the total) and ten single-use plastic products most commonly found on European coasts (around 49% of the total, including bottles, caps and cigarette butts, among others). Together, these two groups account for 76% of marine litter.

Plastic doesn't just litter the beaches, it also harms marine animals that get entangled in larger pieces and mistake smaller pieces for food. Ingesting plastic particles can prevent them from digesting normal food and can attract toxic chemical pollutants into their organisms. In turn, humans ingest plastic through the food chain, and the consequences for their health are unknown.

Marine litter also causes economic losses for sectors and communities dependent on the sea, but also for manufacturers: only around 5% of the value of plastic packaging remains in the economy, the rest is literally thrown away, which shows the need for a more focused approach to recycling and reusing materials.

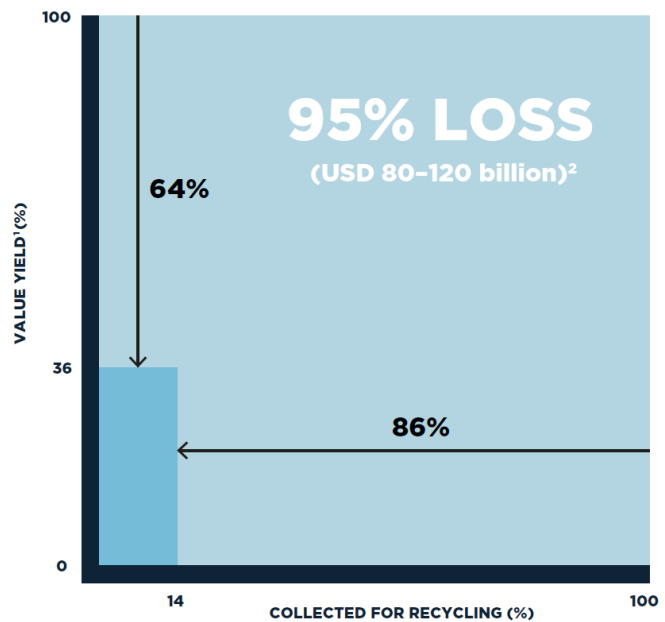
⁹ [EUR-Lex - 52018DC0028 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

Figure 2. Plastic packaging material value loss after one use cycle

1 Value yield = volume yield * price yield, where volume yield = output volumes / input volumes, and price yield = USD per tonne of reprocessed material / USD per tonne of virgin material

2 Current situation based on 14% recycling rate, 72% volume yield and 50% price yield. Total volume of plastic packaging of 78 Mt, given a weighted average price of 1,100-1,600 USD/t

Source: World Economic Forum, Ellen MacArthur Foundation and McKinsey & Company, The New Plastics Economy — Rethinking the future of plastics (2016, <http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications>).



To address this issue, **the EU has implemented a total ban on single-use plastic items**, alternatives in other materials already exist. And has approved a series of other measures, including extended producer responsibility, in order to strengthen the application of the polluter pays principle. This new regime will also apply to the fisheries sector, to ensure that manufacturers, and not the fishermen, bear the costs of collecting nets lost at sea.

At first, Javier would go to the **port of Vilajoyosa** to visit the fishermen and have a beer with them. *"They don't have telephones or speak English, so it was all about meeting people who wanted to help and be part of the solution. And, as this expanded, we shared everything with them, to realize that what they do has a real impact. Because at the beginning they said: 'I don't know if this helps much.' It helps so much!"* This is how the first steps were taken towards **the ambitious Upcycling the Oceans (UTO) project**, with three volunteer fishermen from Villajoyosa, in Alicante, Spain, *"whom we convinced to let us put a small container on their boat to collect the garbage they take out of the sea and bring it to land,"* remembers Javier. This waste is then unloaded into larger 800-liter containers when they arrive at the port, which ECOALF collects every week. At the moment, they have the daily support of around 4,300 fishermen who, since 2015, when the project began, have removed more than 1,500 tons of garbage from the seabed. *"We're already operating 72 ports in the Mediterranean, 45 ports in Spain, 15 in Greece, ten in France and opening ports in Italy and Egypt, one in each..."* says Javier proudly. ***"It's a beautiful project thanks to the generosity and effort of fishermen from many countries united by the common goal of cleaning up the sea and raising awareness of the problem of marine litter."***

In June 2023, ECOALF launched an awareness and emergency campaign around the Ocean's Day with the fishermen as protagonists: *"We brought them to life. They explain what they find in the Ocean and why it is important to do this, they deliver the message to city people. Because the Ocean starts at home and in the streets. This is ECOALF's boldest project so far. And, from a communications point of view, this is the brand's story, so we try to share it as much as we can. We've had the press here to learn all about it, and now what we want is them to come and meet*

the fishermen, which is very different from listening to them in a video. That's what we're trying to do with different stakeholders, to amplify the message." **The main goal is the number of employees reach more than 10,000 fishermen by 2025 and remove around 1,000 tons of waste from the seabed, every year.**

The ECOALF Foundation holds also another project that helps cleaning up rivers. "*Javier was very obsessed with solving the problem at its source*", says the CMO, "*80% of pollution comes from ten rivers¹⁰, so it starts in homes and cities, and it's not the right place to dispose waste and garbage. When it rains, the rivers become garbage highways*". So they started a three-year project with Biotherm Spain, in November 2020, entitled ***Limpia Ríos, Salva Océanos***¹¹ (with the collaboration and experience of Proyecto LIBERA¹²), **to improve the environmental status of rivers, from their birth to their outflow. It is a volunteer program that can be offered to various companies** as "*a way to understand what's going on: garbage is already part of Nature, which is pretty shocking!*" They started with the River Jarama, one of the main tributaries of the River Tagus in Spain, which rises in Peña Cebollera and is 190 kilometers long, the ECOALF Foundation's team cleans it every week. "*What is amazing is how you can transform these activities and these clean-ups with different stakeholders who really want to make a difference and be part of the solution.*"

The ECOALF Foundation is a non-profit organization and is listed in the Register of Foundations from the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment's. On its website it presents itself as "*a space for innovation in the circular economy, with a clear vocation for the preservation of the oceans and a methodology based on partnerships, and whose team is made up of a technical group of experts, supported by a highly experienced and motivated board of directors*", led by Javier Goyeneche. The Upcycling the Oceans project "*is a global adventure, a pioneering initiative*", and Javier Goyeneche's greatest pride, which he sums up as follows: "*It has three objectives: to remove the waste that damages our seas' ecosystems; to give a second life to the waste recovered from a circular economy perspective and to raise awareness of the global problem that marine waste represents. A global problem which, like climate change, has no geographical or political boundaries and involves ecological and socio-economic impacts. It's a very good project and, although we won't solve the problem on its own and completely, we want to draw attention to what is happening and the urgency of stopping the daily flow of garbage into the ocean. **This was an obsession I had: I didn't want to create a storytelling company, I wanted to be a storydoing company and contribute to solving problems.***"

¹⁰ [Around 90% of all river-borne plastic that ends up in the ocean comes from just 10 rivers | World Economic Forum \(weforum.org\)](https://www.weforum.org)

¹¹ [Limpia Ríos, Salva Océanos – ECOALF](https://www.ecoalf.com)

¹² [Proyecto LIBERA - Unidos contra la basuraleza](https://www.proyecto-libera.com)

The ECOALF Foundation in numbers

+ 1000 boats

+ 4200 fishermen

+ 365 tons per year

+ 929.000 plastic water bottles

+ 1450 tons (since 2015)

71 ports

8M

tons of garbage
deposited in the sea to
date

70%

of the garbage sits at the
bottom of the sea

2025

is the year where there
will be more plastic –
than fish – in the sea

80%

of garbage in the sea
comes from the land

06 Innovation: Ocean Yarn and the new recycled materials

The plastic rescued from the oceans by fishermen's nets is treated and goes through several main stages until it is incorporated into ECOALF's value chain and garments. As already mentioned, the waste is deposited in specific containers in the ports participating in the program and, every two weeks, it is collected and transported to treatment plants where it is sorted, classified and recovered: *"68% of what is collected enters the waste management stream and is recovered, 32%, unfortunately, we can't recycle and it goes to landfill."*

According to the **World Economic Forum and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation**¹³, a fundamental principle of the circular economy is that products and materials always circulate at their highest value. In the technical cycle, this implies that plastic packaging is reused whenever possible (circulating the packaging product) and then recycled (circulating the packaging materials). In the context of recycling, this principle results in a general order of preference:

1. Mechanical recycling in closed circuits: this is the cycle that preserves the most value. Mechanical recycling keeps the polymers intact and therefore preserves more value than chemical recycling, in which the polymers are broken down. Closed-loop mechanical recycling maintains the quality of the materials at a similar level by circulating the materials for the same application (for example, from PET bottle to PET bottle) or for applications that require materials of a similar quality. As such, closed-loop mechanical recycling not only preserves the value of the material, but also maintains the range of possible applications in future additional circuits.
2. Open-loop mechanical recycling ("cascade"): given the loss of quality inherent in mechanical recycling¹⁴, closed-loop mechanical recycling cannot continue indefinitely. Open-loop recycling also plays an important role. In open-loop mechanical recycling, the polymers are also kept intact, but the degraded quality and/or material properties require applications with lower demands. Cascade recycling for the highest value applications in each cycle could help maximize value preservation and the number of possible cycles.
3. Chemical recycling: breaks down polymers into individual monomers or other hydrocarbon products that can then be used as building blocks or raw materials to produce polymers again. As such, it is less value-preserving than mechanical recycling. Chemical recycling technologies are not yet widespread and/or economically viable for

¹³ [The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking the future of plastics \(ellenmacarthurfoundation.org\)](https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org)

¹⁴ Loss of quality is due to (1) contamination or mixing of different polymers, polymer grades and/or additives and (2) thermal degradation (reduced average molecular weight due to breaking of polymer chains) during reheating/melting.

most common packaging plastics. However, as they can allow post-use plastics to be recycled back into virgin quality polymers, they can become an option for materials for which mechanical recycling is not possible (for example, most multi-material packaging or plastics that cannot be cascaded recycled).

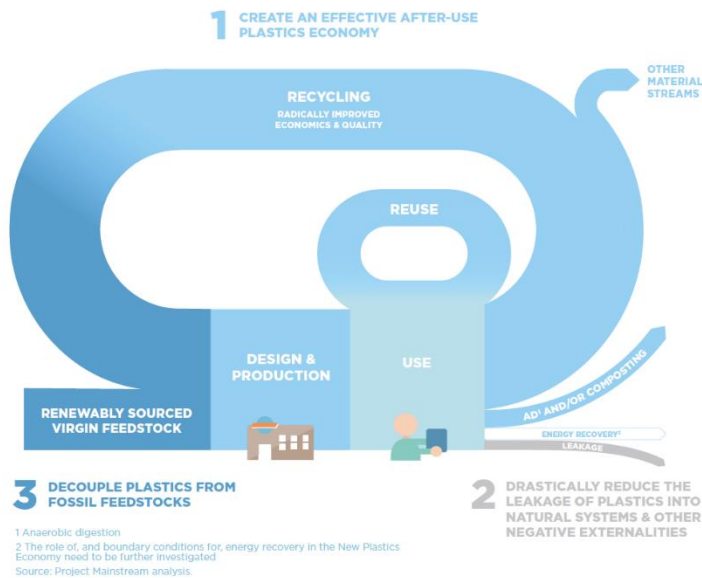


Figure 3. Ambitions of the New Plastics Economy

Source: World Economic Forum, Ellen MacArthur Foundation and McKinsey & Company, The New Plastics Economy — Rethinking the future of plastics (2016, <http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications>).

In the case of ECOALF, **once the PET plastic has been separated, the rest is recycled using conventional methods, crushed and transformed into flakes and pellets through polymerisation.** The pellets, which are between three and six millimeters in size, are then prepared for the next stages of the process. Once the purity conditions required by ECOALF have been met, **a continuous fiber filament is created through extrusion, which is then transformed into a very fine fiber used in fabrics, laces and shoelaces.** Most of ECOALF's processes involve mechanical recycling, mainly of fishing nets and plastic bottles collected from the bottom of the ocean.

The great challenge of processing plastic collected from the oceans begins with its very heterogeneity. *"An intensive sorting process is needed to isolate the plastics. In addition, the level of degradation is high. The materials have been at the bottom of the ocean for years and salt and light drastically affect their composition, making the recycling process more difficult,"* explains Javier Goyeneche. **"Only 5-15 per cent of the waste collected is PET (polyethylene terephthalate), but as part of our mission to protect our oceans and end marine pollution, we recover and manage 100 per cent of the marine waste we collect, sending it to recycling facilities."** Who does this specialized work depends on the country in which the ECOALF Foundation operates; in Spain, for example, they work with a recycling company, Ecoembes¹⁵.

Of the 68 per cent of plastics that ECOALF manages to recycle, 10 per cent are PET plastic bottles, whose lifespan, once recycled, can be extended to three decades, far beyond the moments it takes to drink a bottle of water. From them comes their patented Ocean yarn, *"one of our favorite materials in the collection, which we can use to make our high-quality garments"*, which they mostly turn into jackets, accessories and trainer collections. *"It's a small percentage, I'd say*

¹⁵ <https://www.ecoembes.com/en>

it's about 3 to 5 per cent and it is in our accessories, some trainers and in four or five winter coats - on the label we always specify that it's Ocean Yarn and whether it's made from recycled plastic bottles, recycled cotton or recycled cashmere," explains Carolina Ossorio. ECOALF has dedicated many years of R&D to the technology that can transform this plastic recovered from the ocean floor into its Ocean Yarn. *"To obtain a market-quality yarn, it has to be mixed with another post-consumer material that can be recycled, but that doesn't come from marine plastic, which is highly degraded. The same is true of the nylon we recover from fishing nets, which we mix with other materials to guarantee quality."* So when they produce their Ocean Yarn from recycled plastic bottles collected from the bottom of the ocean, they mix it with other materials and obtain a conventional polyester yarn. Then, **depending on the different collections, they produce different yarns according to the needs and specificities of each product.** This was the case with footwear, for example, because they didn't have a yarn with the right thickness and had to adapt it. Consequently, today they use two types of yarn, one for fabrics and one for footwear.

With the idea of turning waste into quality parts, Javier started looking for biofibers and developing new materials for almost two years in 2010. It was difficult, it was still a very new and insipient world, he had few suppliers and short negotiating margins - the market was not yet naturally and actively looking for them. Even before thinking about design, his new fabrics began to be made in two factories based in Asia, one in Taiwan and the other in Korea. From the outset, the desire has always been to integrate new and advanced technologies so that their collections take sustainable fashion to the next level. Far from the dull textures and patterns of the first fashion collections of its kind, he was driven to create timeless pieces, with quality materials and finishes, so that they could last in the closets, and in the hearts, of those who buy them.

Since 2009, **ECOALF has proudly developed around 540 recycled materials using all kinds of waste, from plastic bottles to nylon fishing nets, from tires to coffee grounds**¹⁶. Fishing nets, which are dangerous to marine life, are easy to separate in fishing ports, require fewer chemicals in the recycling process, are made mostly of nylon and other resistant synthetic fibers, and get about 25 more years of life than would be expected in their ordinary use. Coffee was a discovery, ECOALF teamed up with S. Café - Singex¹⁷, a company that collects waste from a large coffee chain in Taiwan, dries it and turns it into powder which is then mixed with plastic polymers to create a soft, light and flexible fabric that is quick-drying and water-repellent, with UV protection and odor control.

Whenever possible, ECOALF incorporate their Ocean Yarn into new garments, accessories and iconic launches, such as the **Iceberg winter coat**. And they use other recycled materials such as nylon, cashmere, polyester cotton, etc. *"It's the more traditional recycled materials, created from wool and cotton, that have built the brand. Now we're working with coffee, for example, so we can bring natural properties to the garment without having to add any chemicals,"* says Carolina Ossorio. Between 2015 and 2018 alone, ECOALF developed almost 100 new recycled textures, with different suppliers, with the added care of touch and comfort. Javier wanted his

¹⁶ <https://ecoalf.com/pages/materiales>

¹⁷ S.Café® - Singtex)

fabrics to be as soft, supple and easy to care for as the synthetic fibers that had invaded the fashion world in the 80s and 90s, making it more accessible.

Innovation has always been at the heart of ECOALF, and it has to be. *"Our pillars are innovation, design and sustainability. We constantly work to minimize environmental impact, driving innovation to create sustainable solutions and promote the circular economy, from the ecological design and production processes to the end of the product's life cycle,"* says Javier Goyeneche. Thus, **they join the best, most focused on technology and its innovative advances, to propose the most daring and visionary materials, techniques and processes in the textile area.** *"Innovation is the tool that allows us to generate solutions to the challenges we face in the textile sector. That's why we work in constant collaboration with the most innovative factories and technology centers to develop materials, processes and products with less impact."*

In the area of new developments, and as *"the brand's great obsessions are water and circularity"*, in **April 2023 they launched the first collection made from 100% recycled cotton**, from post-consumer cotton. *"It's been a big journey, because when we started ECOALF we used a tiny percentage of recycled cotton in our sweaters, but the textures were more textured, more thicker. We started mixing them with organic cotton, but we discovered that it wastes a lot of water, so we started mixing it with recycled polyester. Then we discovered that this mixture wouldn't let us recycle, because it has to be a mono-material instead, so we went back to recycled cotton and organic cotton... Now we've finally managed to produce only with recycled cotton and achieve a fantastic finish and feel. It's been years of R&D and working with our partners. It's one of our proudest materials,"* says the CMO.

In fact, fresh water is one of the essential natural resources for the textile industry, which consumes an annual volume of around 79 billion cubic meters, with a 50% increase expected by 2030.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of freshwater use and water scarcity footprint in the global clothing value chain, with critical points during fiber production, bleaching/dyeing and finishing, and the use phase. It is estimated that textile dyeing alone is responsible for around 20% of global industrial water pollution.

POLIÉSTER RECICLADO



17 M DE BOTELLAS DE PLÁSTICO RECICLADAS



Con nuestra Colección Otoño-Invierno 2022

POLIÉSTER PET RECICLADO



(Residuo post-consumo)

La mayoría del poliéster reciclado que usamos está hecho a partir de botellas de agua (PET, Polietileno Tereftalato). Estas botellas se reciclan mediante un proceso mecánico que primero las transforma en escamas, luego en pellets y finalmente en hilo de primera calidad.

+929.000 BOTELLAS DE PLÁSTICO RECUPERADAS DEL FONDO DEL OCEANO



Con el proyecto Upcycling the Ocean de la Fundación Ecoalf

NUUESTRO HILO DE MAR (UTO) POLIÉSTER PET RECICLADO



(Desechos post consumo)

Gracias al proyecto Upcycling the Ocean (UTO) de la Fundación Ecoalf, el plástico que es recogido del fondo del mar se recicla y transforma en hilo de poliéster reciclado de primera calidad. Entre el 5-10% de la basura que se recoge en la Fundación es de botellas de PET que gracias a un innovador proceso se transforma en nuestro hilo UTO.

5,5 TN. DE PRENDAS RECICLADAS TRANSFORMADAS EN ROPA NUEVA



Con nuestra Colección Otoño-Invierno 2022

POLIÉSTER RECICLADO DE RESIDUO TEXTIL



(FIBER TO FIBER: Desechos post industrial y post consumo)

Estamos trabajando con nuestros proveedores para introducir nuevas tecnologías para transformar los residuos textiles post industriales y las prendas usadas en hilo de poliéster reciclado para crear nuevos tejidos. Estas tecnologías están aún en fase de desarrollo, pero ya tenemos prendas en nuestras colecciones hechas de poliéster reciclado procedente de residuos textiles y prendas usadas.

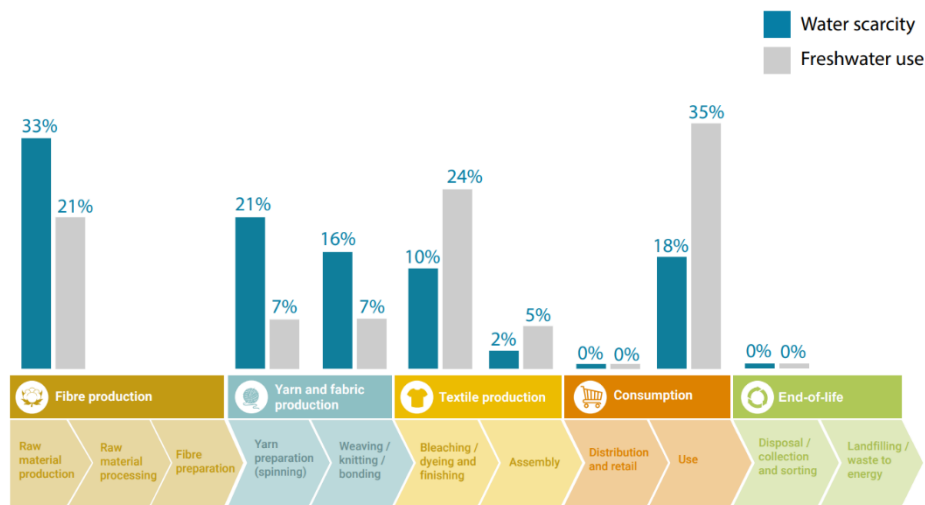


Figure 4. Freshwater use and water scarcity footprint across the global apparel value chain

Source: UNEP (2020), Sustainability and Circularity in the Textile Value Chain: Global Stockaging

This heavy reliance on water contributes significantly to environmental degradation. The release of untreated water containing harmful chemicals, dyes and additives leads to widespread water pollution, impacting aquatic ecosystems and biodiversity. Chemical waste from dyeing processes poses ecotoxicity risks, harming aquatic life and upsetting the balance of ecosystems.

In addition to environmental concerns, the textile industry's water-intensive practices have serious social implications. Many textile production centers are located in regions where water scarcity is already a critical problem. This exacerbates water stress, posing challenges for both environmental sustainability and the well-being of local communities. In areas struggling with water scarcity, the high demand for textile production becomes a social justice issue, affecting the environment and the well-being of local communities.

Water impacts are felt locally rather than globally, so it is a challenge to set a global target that is also locally applicable. However, adopting water-efficient technologies and sustainable dyeing methods can significantly reduce the industry's water footprint, addressing both environmental and social sustainability concerns. Implementing closed-loop water systems and water recycling technologies minimizes fresh water consumption, benefiting both the environment and nearby communities.

"But removing plastic from the oceans is only half the solution," he warns, "the other is preventing it from getting there in the first place. Every year, half a million tons of microfibers are released into the ocean simply by washing synthetic materials," which means that more than a third of the microplastics in the oceans come from the existence and maintenance of synthetic clothing alone. In fact, microfibers can come from both natural and synthetic materials, but only microfibers from synthetic materials (plastics) are considered microplastics. *"We brands have to take into account both the design and manufacturing phases, always designing with the end in mind: what happens to that garment when it reaches the end of its life cycle?"*

That's why ECOALF is now **introducing a new product, meryl**, "a yarn that uses hydrogen technology to seal all microfibers, without silicone, and limits the release of microplastics into our oceans and ecosystems", explain Carolina. **Meryl is in ECOALF's sports collection and polos, and is basically recycled nylon with a technology that seals the release of plastic microfibers.** "We can't say zero, but it's 0.001, almost zero, compared to any other filament in the industry. **It's one of the materials we're most obsessed with, because of water, its scarcity on the one hand, and its conservation on the other.** We are recovering and cleaning up the ocean and preventing anything from polluting it," concludes the marketing director. "Basically, the brand is always involved with water: to avoid and prevent any contamination of water, which is one of the industry's biggest challenges today." And still on the subject of concern about microplastics, in addition to looking for materials that help them develop products that minimize their impact, ECOALF is in a microfiber consortium "where we work with different stakeholders to figure out how we can prevent this, with (brands of) washing machines, for example."

So the brand often teams up with different international partners who join forces to make the projects happen: "We're always looking for partnerships that have a goal and an impact behind them. That's the most important thing for us. There are already many t-shirts in the world, the important thing is to know what impact the t-shirt we create or buy leaves," says the founder of ECOALF. To give some examples, in 2013 they developed, together with SIGNUS¹⁸ and the CTCR, the Centro Tecnológico de Calzado de la Rioja¹⁹, Spain, the first collection of slippers made from 100% recycled tires that don't need glue to bind them together. In 2021, they collaborated with Michelin²⁰ to bring the Michelin Group's first sole made from reused rubber to the footwear industry. "In the case of rubbers, after several attempts to find the best and most resistant material to produce slippers, the solution was found in a specific truck tire that was turned into powder and solidified again, without the need for any conglomerate or glue, and easily dyed in all kinds of colors." In 2023, in collaboration with Piñatex²¹, they created a very new natural material made from pineapple leaf fibers, and launched lines of comfortable, lightweight, low-impact sneakers. Another of their projects, which they consider to be one of the most innovative, is a collection of 100% recycled cotton in collaboration with the Portuguese company TheLoopTM²², which includes garments that can be recycled over and over again.

In that same year, they also launched **the innovative Ecoalf Sports line**, they want to attract a new generation of sportspeople to the sustainable fashion industry, and "maximize performance but minimize impact", says Carolina Ossorio. "We work with the highest quality recycled nylon, which emits the least amount of microplastics into the ocean, and we've focused on yoga, pilates, surfing and cycling." They also teamed with Natxo González²³ the giant wave surfing champion, and with the brand Deeply²⁴ to create a surf line featuring wetsuits made with YULEX²⁵ natural rubber, which replaces neoprene and thus avoids the use of petroleum-based materials, together they created the first plant-based surf suit. "It's very interesting and new for us. It's been a fantastic journey of sustainability and performance, which is quite complex." Also, in

¹⁸ SIGNUS – Sistema Colectivo de Gestión de Neumáticos Fuera de Uso)

¹⁹ CTCR

²⁰ www.michelin.pt

²¹ ananas-anam.com

²² THE LOOP (hallotex.com)

²³ NATXO GONZALEZ - NATXO GONZALEZ · following the storm

²⁴ DEEPLY | Loja Online. Fatos de Surf – Deeply - Portugal

²⁵ YULEX | From The Tree

partnership with Lapo Elkann, heir to the Fiat empire and an Italian celebrity close to fashion, ECOALF launched a limited edition collection of surf suits made from recycled nylon, one of the materials that releases the least microplastics into Nature.

The marketing director announces ECOALF's latest creation, a brand **new wellness line**, where new technologies are very present and are being explored at the service of more sustainable cosmetics. *"It's quite disruptive for us, because **everything will be produced without wasting water and without plastic, in absolute circularity**," she says. For example, they have developed solids and powders to create a bath soap and a shampoo soap, a moisturizing balm and a balm with sun protection and also a deodorant. *"It's a challenge, because of course you have to change your routine, you mix the powder with water, which is very simple, but it's a change of habit. Once you get used to it, you're completely converted. It's going to be very interesting to see people's reaction, and the adherence of a new generation that I think is looking for this type of product, its **fantastic formulas, vegan, based on natural or upcycled ingredients**. It's the possibility of having a product that doesn't harm the planet or generate waste, which is the big issue in this industry. It's also very important to communicate the impact not only on the planet, but also on your skin. This is our **most revolutionary innovation this year**."**

07 B Corp brand: transparency, traceability and ethics

At ECOALF *"we measure and track absolutely everything we do, which helps us to keep growing and learning,"* says Javier Goyeneche. From the origin of the materials, to their treatment, production, packaging and distribution, emissions are measured at each station, which has already made it possible to reduce scope 1 and 2 emissions, and is now focusing on reducing scope 3 emissions. In the ocean plastic supply chain, traceability is ensured thanks to its relationship with sorting organizations. *"These control the amount of waste collected at each port, which is transported individually (not mixed with other materials) to the factory."*

In addition to creating and using recycled materials, ECOALF increasingly wants to prioritize other sustainability practices in its operations: *"It's true that we focus a lot on materials, circularity and not using up the planet's natural resources. And we realize that being sustainable is much more than taking care of the origin and manufacture of materials, so we also work in other areas that make the company much more developed in terms of sustainability. **The big task for the next few years is to find the perfect supply chain that will help us achieve Net Zero emissions by 2030**",* i.e. the commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere until zero net carbon emissions are reached. We read about this commitment on the brand's website: *«Our goal is to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. This means that all greenhouse gas emissions from our collections are reduced or offset until they reach zero.»* And, of course, **to have a certified value chain, since its suppliers are both in Europe, namely Spain,**

and in Asia, in particular Thailand (they make swimming trunks with yarn produced from water bottles collected in its tourist-plagued sea) **and Vietnam**, among others.

Not always able to order the minimum quantities requested by its suppliers, ECOALF has always relied on good relations. And although the entire brand is based on a **principle of social responsibility**, in a world increasingly geared towards sustainability, **its corporate responsibility had to be registered**. And then balance that requirement with the company's main financial and logistical imperatives. Thus, **in 2018, ECOALF was the first fashion brand in Spain to be recognized as a BCorp** and this means complying with the highest and most demanding social and environmental standards: *"It was a great milestone for us, we're on the right track, this recognition means that we measure up in every aspect,"* emphasizes its founder, once again.

In 2022, it was also recognized by Merco²⁶ (a benchmark monitor for Ibero-America that publishes the ranking of the 100 most responsible companies in terms of ESG) as being **in the top 5% of the 5,000 best B Corp companies globally in the environmental category, the so-called Best for the World**. *«We fulfil high standards of social and environmental performance, public transparency and legal responsibility»* can be read on the brand's website. *«It's a community of leaders, a global movement of companies that put the planet and people at the center of their activity. They strike a balance between their profits and their purpose, putting the planet at the center of their business strategy in order to have a positive impact on it.»* They say they align themselves with *«a commitment to our planet, the environment and people, to ourselves, our employees and all those who work with us: suppliers, partners, co-workers, customers...»*

They **produced their first sustainability report in 2023²⁷, referring to 2022**. It explains the brand's identity, what they do, why they do it and how they do it, the marketing director clarifies: *"We wanted to do something that people would actually read and connect with, because most of these reports are very boring. So we created a campaign around it, entitled **Don't think it's a Utopia** [it's on our website, you can download it], and we even won a prize, because we're not obliged to deliver the sustainability report. We did it because we wanted to and, above all, because we wanted to share what we had done with all our stakeholders. For us, it was a way of being very clear about what the brand is doing, even to show that we're not perfect, it's part of a journey to be very transparent about everything we do and where we want to go. It's not about the department, it's about the whole. The brand, and this is important to know, doesn't cut corners, it's **important to realize that our decisions are good for the planet, and therefore good for the business** - and to make sure that everyone in the team is aware of this. That's why it's a powerful tool internally and for everyone who works with ECOALF in any way. In fact, we're preparing the next [2023 sustainability report] and it will be very ECOALF-like, to be very inspiring and educational."*

They want to **ensure a value chain they can be proud of, and the company's values must be transversal and non-negotiable**. They created the Sustainable ECOALF Commitment²⁸, which also includes suppliers and partners. *"We wanted to have an internal commitment that talks*

²⁶ <https://www.merco.info/pt>

²⁷ ECOALF Memoria sostenibilidad 2022 271123 74e090ae-a3e7-4db4-8937-a99858727dea.pdf (shopify.com)

²⁸ Ecoalf Codigo de Conducta 2023.pdf (shopify.com)

*about all the social, ethical and environmental aspects that are in the ECOALF standards, otherwise we won't be partners with these suppliers. And it's for all partners, even for my area, the PR agency has to sign this commitment. We work as a team and we just need to make sure that, even if it's someone outside the company, they share the same DNA and work to the same standards." ECOALF only works with those who share its values, "and fulfil our standards or, better still, exceed them. Let us say that **our suppliers are not just good, but the most ambitious in terms of sustainability,**" adds the brand's founder. "We have a very close relationship with them, which allows us to influence their processes, ensuring that the basic human rights of all the people involved in our supply chain are respected. Every decision we make, every day, has an impact on our surroundings, the environment and the people we interact with. We believe it is our duty to go beyond regulatory compliance and we strive to be a benchmark in terms of ethics and integrity. And we know that this commitment must be transversal to the entire company, from its individual to its collective actions, from the governing bodies to all the people who make up ECOALF, as well as our key employees. Because **it's not about compliance, it's about leading the way.** To this end, we have developed a robust ethical model, based on ECOALF's purpose and values, and always under the guidance of the Ethics Committee."*

At the time of this case study, ECOALF **still has no fixed metrics to guide its sustainability efforts.** "We still have a lot of work to do, but we like to share with our community our commitments, progress, what we're doing and even what we'd like to improve. Transparency means being able to talk openly about what we do and how we do it." They **hired an external company, Bcome Technology²⁹, which traces the entire supply chain, from raw materials to warehouses,** "and they give us an impact report, the exact impact of the garment and the collection. Every season, we analyse and review these impacts to measure how much we've improved and how much we want to improve, to know which direction to take next," explains Carolina Ossorio. **This Bcome technology incorporates a QR code into every garment for traceability, leading directly to the product's online page** where you can find out everything about its impact: how it was made, how many people were involved, where it comes from, how much water is used and how much is saved, how much CO2 emissions are generated and how much are reduced, etc. "It's important to educate the consumer, but also to improve each season. So what we're doing is: *this is what we want to achieve, this is what we want to do, and the more people who do it, the better. It's not a threat at all, in the end this is going to be the industry standard.*" ECOALF shares the environmental and social impact of each product: "100 per cent of our products are traceable: from the yarn to the final product. This helps the consumer to realise that the garment they are looking at has a real impact so they can make informed decisions."

"We make a lot of noise, but we can't really make a change, and that's why we're committed to improving and putting a big focus on transparency and traceability," emphasizes Carolina Ossorio. **The traceability and transparency of the ECOALF Foundation's work is also independently audited.** "There are three people responsible for the foundation, who are constantly in the harbours, on the move, they do everything. And then there are the regular audits."

²⁹ <https://bcome.biz/>



DE LA UTOPIÍA

ECOALF

MEMORIA DE
SOSTENIBILIDAD 2022



A LA ACCIÓN

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ECOALF guarantees that its commitment to sustainability is in every aspect of the company: **"Perhaps what make us all most proud for working at ECOALF is the fact that 14 years after the birth of the brand, our goal remains the same, and I think that's something our customers realize and value. The whole team knows what we do, how we do it and why we do it, and that's how we move forward. We're not the biggest and we don't pretend to be, we're not perfect and we're not afraid to be transparent and talk about improvements and the way forward,"** says Javier Goyeneche. **"The brand has grown a lot and we now have three major challenges and objectives ahead of us: protecting water sources, reducing CO2 emissions and achieving circularity."** With the spring-summer 2023 collection, they say they have saved 223 million liters of water and reduced 4,410 tons of CO2 emissions. And **"as part of our commitment to becoming a zero-emissions brand by 2030, we are constantly working to reduce our carbon footprint. For example, we have designed our last three shops to be zero emissions."**

08 Meeting the consumer: the brand and its sustainable shops

The idea has always been **to create a slow fashion brand for everyone, with no preferred age or style, to reach as many people as possible, as a brand and as a message** and to be savored slowly and with quality. So, no matter how accessible it wants to be, the price to pay for quality and durability is always a double-edged sword: on the one hand, quality is worth it and lasts over time, which is already a definition of sustainability, and it attracts a more conscious type of consumer; on the other hand, we know that price puts most people off for obvious reasons, not just because of the economic conditions it implies, but because of the prevailing disposable consumer mentality. For all this, **ECOALF has positioned itself in an intermediate price ranking and appeals more to shoppers aged 35-50**, said its former CEO, Marisa Selfa, in the 2020 IMD Case Study: **"But we have teenagers coming in and loving the brand, men and women, grandparents and grandchildren. The brand isn't really age-orientated: it's a philosophy and a lifestyle, and that gives us a fantastic position in the market. Children's clothing is also becoming a great opportunity. The new generations are very sensitive to environmental issues and we offer a way of showing that we care about them."**

ECOALF is now known all over the world and half of its market is outside Spain, particularly in the **Western market, Europe and the United States**. The company has a mixed business strategy, focusing on the B2C (business-to-consumer) model, through seven of its own shops in Spain and 12 internationally and its own website, which is complemented by a B2B (business-to-business) approach with many sale points and corners in department stores such as El Corte Inglés, a presence in approximately **1,100 multi-brand shops across Europe**, and operating



Madrid Las Rojas Village store

online at *Ecoalf.com*³⁰. "Everything we do has high aspects of environmental and social sustainability," emphasizes Carolina Ossorio. The **commitment to be a net zero company by 2030**, which is part of the B Corp community's, is **a principle followed in all their shops**.

They have just opened a **shop in the Caleido** neighborhood, Madrid's trendy new district, at Paseo de la Castellana 259. "It's **our first completely net zero shop**, but all the others will be," she says. This first zero emissions shop, which they consider a milestone on their journey, was designed with international interior designer Lorenzo Castillo³¹ and bioclimatic architecture specialists MVN Arquitectos³², who created 3D representations of different ecological designs. The shop is 149 square meters and is supported by wooden beams from Spanish forests, "with a positive CO2 impact", as well as shoe displays, benches and tables with ceramic tiles made from the same wood. The walls are covered in terracotta, which naturally regulates heat and humidity, while the abundant natural light and LED lamps reduce energy consumption powered by 15 solar panels made of silicon, almost entirely recyclable, with an average life cycle of 25 years that "prevent 2.95 tons of CO2 from entering the atmosphere every year". Located next to the IE University (Spanish Private University) tower, «we want our shop to serve as a meeting point for students with our ACT NOW events, where we invite professionals and experts to discuss sustainability issues and promote change», we read on the website.

Also the **shop in the village of Las Rozas**, near Madrid, the interior of the space is entirely printed and made with 3.3 tons of 100% recycled plastic, using the latest 3D technology to reproduce a melting glacier, «to raise awareness, inspire change, we have established a partnership with the design studio Nagami, we have used the latest 3D technology to create a new space that portrays the melting of the poles». «In the last 50 years, temperatures have risen on the Antarctic Peninsula five times more than the average for the rest of the planet, so 75 per cent of the areas covered by glaciers have melted. If we exceed 1.5°C, glaciers will disappear, sea levels will continue to rise, coral reefs will shrink and storms, forest fires and droughts will intensify. » The walls, shelves, display tables and even the hangers are made of recycled plastic, their elements were manufactured in Spain to reduce CO2 emissions and the entire space is recyclable at the end of its life cycle.

Each shop is different, because **the brand likes to work with local architects and designers** and "preserve the space," says Carolina Ossorio. "We work mostly with recycled materials or those with low impact and high durability, because it's synonymous with sustainability. As far as energy is concerned, we work with green energy and we have a very strict internal list of requirements and when we start a project we establish our list of priorities, otherwise we don't go ahead." **All ECOALF shops and their merchandising carry messages aimed at sustainability** and, again, when there is space, there is **always a spot dedicated to their #ACTNOW events, where knowledgeable voices in the field of fashion and design, innovation and sustainability join forces for a better planet**, "personalizing our mission to create awareness and educate our community to be part of the solution and change".

³⁰ [ECOALF - Sustainable and Recycled Clothing](#)

³¹ <http://www.lorenzocastillo.org>

³² www.mvn-arquitectos.com

09 How to communicate a sustainable lifestyle brand

ECOALF's greatest strength is what it does, so it is very important how to communicate. Therefore, it is more of a storydoing company than a storytelling company, as its founder has emphasized, and the importance of the ocean conservation and recycling reaches the brand's customers and followers in various ways.

Education and awareness-raising are the main ones, a fundamental part since the brand foundation. *"When people came into the shop, we always explained what we did and how we did it, we told them our history and purpose. And that's something we continue to do",* recalls Javier Goyeneche, about the early days of the brand. ***"Through communication, we try to inspire and educate people. What we do is not enough, but how we do it actually is. We want to increase our visibility and position ourselves as leaders in a sustainable lifestyle, committed to caring for the planet and the people. We create a community of people who identify with the brand values and who want to be part of the change and the movement."***

Through marketing and communication, they raise awareness of the negative impacts of certain consumer habits and share the positive impacts and savings the brand created by acting responsibly, *"promoting care for the only planet we have"*. So, **every year they give around 150 talks at schools, universities, companies and institutes with the aim of raising awareness, inspiring and educating.**

ECOALF *"isn't just about sustainability, it's a lifestyle brand, which is why we launch so many different collections and activities throughout the year,"* adds the marketing and communications director, Carolina Ossorio. With each campaign, they reinforce ECOALF's DNA, the idea being to *"touch people and make them realize"*. The marketing department have awareness campaigns, which have nothing to do with the product itself, but devote a month to education, for example: Earth Day in April, World Ocean Day in June and Recycling Black Friday. *"We explain why Black Friday shouldn't exist and why we shouldn't take part in it",* and *"these are key moments to raise our voices and educate, with impact data, about what is happening and the need to take urgent action"*, says the founder.

Then there are the current **campaigns, linked to the collections and capsule collections they launch each time, as well as the new editions, clothing lines or accessories.** *"They all have the same simple, transparent tone, very solution-orientated, because we don't want to point the finger and say that people are doing it wrong. We want to say that we all live in the same world, so we should all look for solutions, collaborate and try to find the best and most responsible way of doing things together,"* emphasizes the CMO. *"We work in one of the most polluting industries and you are helping to change the way it works. It's not an easy job, it's very difficult, in fact, but there are ways to minimize the impact on everything we do, no matter what department you're in."*

Recently, and in addition to being marketing director, Carolina became a Wellness Advisor among the board members. Valuing wellness means making clear that **ECOALF, more than a sustainable fashion brand, is a sustainable lifestyle brand** and all its marketing and communication, which crosses its various departments, carries this banner with evidence. *"Every department has a purpose guide"*, she says. *"We're in the sports area, furniture, stationary and the beauty industry, which has the great challenge of packaging"*, and here Carolina is investing her expertise from the cosmetics industry, where she has been working for the last two years, being it their great challenge at the moment in the innovation area, as already mentioned. They launched their **wellness line in September 2023**, which includes basic daily products with *"zero plastic, zero water consumption and completely circular"*, some of which are already sold out online.

ECOALF's **marketing strategy is always educational**, with the intention of making the consumer aware of why they mind the trouble of doing what they do, so that the consumer can realize and choose and, who knows, align healthy and sustainable choices. *"We always make the most responsible choice: what does it mean to have a jacket made of recycled polyester instead of conventional polyester?"*, for instance. And it's also a strategy that **revolves around the idea of community**, *"we show people what we do and why we do it, so that they too can be the best ambassadors of best practice. And so you lead by changing: at home with your children, in the street with your friends, colleagues and everyone around you."*

ECOALF was born to protect natural resources, be a sustainable lifestyle brand, and wants to lead the change with each of its products. *"This is the basis of everything and of what we do when we think about our marketing strategies. We want to make sure that we always communicate the purpose behind each product, why it was created. There's already too much of everything, so it's not so much about what you make, but how you make it and how much waste you generate by producing it."*

To create this community, the marketing and communications department works on several fronts and through the **Because there is not planet B movement**, a current statement on the subject of sustainability, *"which Javier remembered in 2015 and registered in 45 countries"*. A few years ago, because so many people said they wanted to help the brand in its cause, in some way, they created the **merchandising line with the phrase Because there is not planet B, where 10 per cent of its cost for the consumer represents a donation percentage that goes to the ECOALF Foundation and helps fishermen, who work as volunteers**, in order to continue expanding the *Upcycling the Oceans* project. And at the end of each year, *"we say how much rubbish we removed from the ocean, how many fishermen took part and how many people participated by using the message"*, explains Carolina. And create a lot of content on social media to inspire and say: *"You're not just donating; you're actively helping to expand our Upcycling the Oceans project. Because it started with three fishermen in a harbor and today, we have 4,500! This is the ECOALF movement and it's very cool because no matter from what generation, country, or culture you are, you read the message and you automatically know what we stand for. And there's more: that T-shirt represents four kilos of rubbish from the ocean."*

They want *"to be close to the people, to organize talks together, launch the debate, so that they wear the brand's values"*. Another way of gathering this community is through experiences,

BECAUSE THERE IS NO PLANET B®

COMMITTED CLEAN CARE,
WATERLESS FORMULAS, UPCYCLED
INGREDIENTS, PLASTIC FREE,
RE-USE, RE-FILL.

Stick container & Moisturiser Everywhere Balm

ECOALF



which have become increasingly challenging because the marketing budget is limited. *"Everything is invested in innovation and sustainability, but we're looking for experiences that connect us to nature, which is why we created the sports line and started running on the third Saturday of every month."* They have an **ECOALF sports club where they bring together people who run five kilometers casually**, *"then we have a coffee and a healthy breakfast,"* says Carolina Ossorio. It started in Madrid, now they're in Barcelona and they want to expand, it's open to everyone: *"Let's call all the people out there who care about the environment and bring all these voices together."*

That's why **their marketing budget** is less invested in pure and hard marketing and **more in educational communication that seeks visibility for the brand, in addition to an excellent shopping and consumption experience, the creation of a shared voice and an engaged community**: *"Why are we doing this? How does it benefit you? How does it benefit the planet?"* For example, in the wellness and in the beauty industries, *"150,000 tons of plastic are used in packaging alone, and only 10% is recycled. These are things we use every day and throw away: shampoo, soap, cream. It took us a while, but we're bringing products to the market that we're proud of, that improve our lives as consumers and the planet - that's the key, otherwise we wouldn't do it. Before the mindset wasn't there, and the habit wasn't there, now people are more open to listening and understanding."* Now, her **department's main challenge is greenwashing**. *"Because there are big brands that make a capsule collection made from recycled materials, and that's the campaign of the year. And we see it everywhere and with great ambassadors, on television, on social media, with incredible events and it eclipses everything else, because it's presented and communicated as their great milestone in their commitment to sustainability. But it's not."*

While focusing on transparency and traceability, with **the introduction of the QR code on their garments**, they are also **"very focused" on brand awareness in all their shops and corners**, which are many across Europe. The CMO explains: *"We are focused on creating brand awareness and recognition across Europe"*. And they measure this through different KPIs. *We have communication, which is key, because it's the way we share what the company and the foundation are doing, their storydoing, and we can measure the impact on readers and users, in print and digital. And this is very important for us because, in the end, it creates a relationship with the press, which has the great responsibility and opportunity to educate. And that's why we explain everything very well. Of course, we also have our KPIs on social media for our campaigns and their growth, as well as the brand and its expansion, and it has evolved a lot in recent years."* In order to reach wider audiences, **they don't use influencers, but invest in ambassadors for specific capsule collections**, some of which have already been mentioned, **and other brands that aren't necessarily in the fashion industry**, who wanted to make their new uniforms out of recycled cotton with ECOALF, "and save millions of liters of water".

This past winter, they did a collaboration with Goop, Gwyneth Paltrow's lifestyle blog and brand with a capsule collection of five recycled coats. *"These collaborations are great because we reach other audiences and other communities that may not be as familiar with sustainability, and it's a way of showing them why we're doing this and why it's important."* Partnerships with other brands and designers, who wanted to ally themselves with ECOALF's sustainability knowledge and reputation, also helped to give it visibility and spread its word. This has been the case with

Apple or the well-known artist Will.I.am, with Swatch, Starbucks or Room Mate hotels, whose uniforms are produced by the Spanish brand and, in the same vein, they have already been contacted by airlines, cruise lines and football clubs such as Barcelona.

10 Spreading the word

Javier Goyeneche is very active in the community, giving interviews to the media, representing himself at conferences, and has already received some awards. *"Javier always say: 'We're worried about the planet we're leaving to our kids, but we should be worried about the kids we're leaving in our planet'," says Carolina. "Javier is a natural speaker and a passionate one, because this is his baby, so it's fantastic to have him as part of the communication." The secret is always to educate. "We spend a lot of time, Javier and I, as well as Carol and the Foundation, giving talks in schools, universities, at summits, to master's students." They give around 150 talks a year, to explain to a larger audience what they do, how they do it and why they do it, visually, with facts and figures. "We've been doing it since the beginning and, communication wise, it's one of the most powerful bits of the brand's DNA and it's a way of humanizing it too. To show and share that it was, and still is, a difficult start, but that you can do it if you have a clear vision of what you want to achieve, and there's always a way to do it. It's a way of empowering and inspiring and showing that solutions exist, in our social networks and by visiting different schools and places, we try to maximize it, particularly now with the online world."*

For other CMOs/marketing directors working in sustainable fashion, Carolina Ossorio says she has the same advice for her team the ones she calls "earth warriors": **"It's very important to have a great level of commitment, and to really understand why we do what we do, it's very important for the planet. Action is the difference between dreams and what we want to achieve, so we have to act. And action involves different stakeholders and must be integrated into everything we do. Of course it's not going to solve everything, it's a small part, but if we act and do a little more every day... And it's true that you should always be super ambitious and have your dreams up there, but the answer is to activate, you have to start."**

To anyone who wants to be an entrepreneur, and not just to future fashion brands and designers who want to follow in ECOALF's footsteps on the road to sustainability, Javier Goyeneche would say **to be innovative, disruptive and courageous.** *"I believe the world doesn't need more companies doing things the same way, but rather a new generation of companies that show that it can be done in a more responsible way, without the consumer having to give up quality and design. And that they can also be profitable. It may be more complicated at first, but it's much more rewarding for the whole team to feel that they're part of a project they're proud of."*

For the founder of ECOALF, the "secret of the business" is **balancing sustainability with the demands and trends of the fashion industry:** *"We believe that the fashion business model, with a new trend every month and the idea of buy/discard, buy/discard, is creating a terrible impact on the planet in terms of consumption of natural resources, energy and emissions. And it's causing thousands of tonnes of textile waste to go to landfill. That's why we're committed to*

timeless products, to quality over quantity and to not taking part in ongoing promotions and campaigns, such as Black Friday, based on an impulse-buying model that generates a lot of waste. It may not be the most commercially correct, but it's in line with our purpose. And we educate every day: it's better to have a minimalist and very careful wardrobe, with fewer but good quality clothes that you don't throw away after wearing them five times."

Ecoalf's near future is centered on the three objectives mentioned above: protecting water sources, reducing CO2 emissions and achieving circularity. *"With our autumn-winter 2023 collection, we saved 223 million liters of water and reduced CO2 emissions by 4,410 tons. As part of our commitment to becoming a net zero brand by 2030, we are constantly working to reduce our carbon footprint and have designed our last three shops to be net zero, and we want all future shops to be net zero too. With the Foundation, our main goal is to get the support of more than 10,000 fishermen in the Mediterranean to remove around 1,000 tons from the seabed every year. We're already operating in more than 45 ports in Spain, Greece, France and opening ports in Italy, Egypt... It's a beautiful project thanks to the generosity and effort of fishermen from many countries united by the common goal of cleaning up the sea and raising awareness of the problem of marine litter..."*

And if ECOALF is doing everything it can to minimize its impact and change the fashion industry for good: **"We're still a small company, so to really make a change we need big companies to change their current business models and join us,"** stresses Javier Goyeneche. **"We want to inspire large companies, which have more resources and the volume needed to make a real impact, to be part of the change and get the message across. ECOALF can show them that it's possible, but they have the volume and capacity to make the transformation faster. The future of fashion has to be sustainable or it won't be. We need projects and companies that are committed, activist, disruptive and ambitious. We don't need more t-shirts on the market, we need t-shirts that leave a positive footprint on the planet. We have great challenges ahead of us at ECOALF: to demonstrate that it is possible to do things differently, while being tremendously profitable and showing that this path is possible. This will also pave the way for many other companies."**

11 From utopia to action: conclusions and recommendations for brands in the portuguese textile ecosystem

ECOALF's transformative journey in the fashion industry is a powerful testament to the impact of sustainable innovation. The brand has redefined industry norms through a visionary approach and an unwavering commitment to circularity, making the well-being of the planet and society the purpose of its business and treading a courageous path that has proved paradigmatic.

Throughout this case study, we have tried to follow the drawing of ECOALF's perfect circle, which begins with a holistic engagement with sustainability, evident in the closed-loop system it continues to build and promote today. By minimizing not only the impacts of its operations but, in a more inspiring and exemplary way, by looking outside its doors and actively solving environmental and social problems in the ecosystems in which it operates.

Like successful ventures in other industries, which textiles has more recently adopted, ECOALF has cultivated a collaborative ecosystem by involving stakeholders throughout the value chain. The creation of the ECOALF Foundation, which transforms ocean waste into high-quality textiles, exemplifies the brand's dedication to pushing the boundaries of sustainable innovation by proving, with its constant investment in the R&D of new materials, that it is a brand of storydoing and not just storytelling - in other words, a brand of impact.

One of the keys to ECOALF's success, which we were able to observe, lies in recognizing the fundamental role of education in its DNA. Through workshops, campaigns and partnerships, the brand raises awareness, in a transparent and intentional way, of the harmful consequences of the fashion industry, catalyzing positive changes in society as a whole.

By incorporating the challenging balance of the triple bottom line - people, planet and profit - ECOALF distinguishes itself as a pioneer in a sector historically rooted in a linear logic of extraction, production and disposal. The B Corp certification and the constant awards it has received are proof of this and point to a guiding focus for this company.

In essence, ECOALF's journey consists of imagining and molding a possible future for the fashion industry. By drawing this perfect circle, ECOALF is not only leading by example, but also fueling real change towards a truly circular and conscious fashion industry. As the fashion landscape evolves, ECOALF's pioneering strength serves as a lasting testament to the profound impact of sustainable purpose on the trajectory of an entire industry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopt circular economy practices: embrace circular economy principles by designing products that are recyclable, reusable and made from recycled materials. Create closed-loop systems that minimize waste and resource consumption.

Invest in sustainable materials: explore innovative and sustainable materials such as recycled polyester, organic cotton and other ecological alternatives. Prioritize the purchase of materials that have a lower environmental impact.

Choose transparency and traceability: increase transparency in the supply chain by providing detailed information on the sourcing, production and distribution of products. Implement traceability measures to guarantee customers the sustainability of the materials used.

Reduce water and energy consumption: implement water and energy efficiency practices in production processes. Invest in technologies that minimise water use and energy consumption, contributing to both cost reduction and environmental conservation.

Use certifications and standards: look for relevant certifications and standards related to sustainability, such as the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS), OEKO-TEX or other recognised eco-labels. Certifications provide credibility and assurance to environmentally conscious consumers.

Embrace recycling and reuse: explore opportunities for recycling and reusing materials to create unique and sustainable products. This approach aligns with the circular economy model and can differentiate the brand in the market.

Collaborate with sustainable initiatives: collaborate with industry initiatives, NGOs or government programmes focused on sustainability and social responsibility. Engaging in partnerships can amplify the positive impact on the environment and society.

Educate consumers: develop educational campaigns to make consumers aware of the environmental impact of textile consumption. Encourage responsible purchasing behaviour and highlight the benefits of choosing sustainable products.

Innovate in design and production: promote a culture of innovation in design and production processes. Explore new technologies and methodologies that increase efficiency and minimise the ecological footprint of products.

Ensure social responsibility and fair labour practices: guarantee the ethical treatment of workers, compliance with labour standards and contribute to the well-being of local communities.

Implement a take-back programme: set up a returns programme for used products, allowing customers to return items for recycling or upcycling. This initiative promotes responsible disposal and aligns with the principles of the circular economy.

Set ambitious sustainability targets: Set clear and ambitious sustainability targets, incorporating key performance indicators (KPIs) to track progress. Regularly communicate achievements and improvements to stakeholders.

Get involved in sustainable innovation: stay informed about innovations and trends in sustainable fashion. Take part in conferences, collaborate with research institutions and stay at the forefront of sustainability practices.

Create a positive corporate culture: promote a corporate culture that values sustainability and environmental management. Involve employees in sustainability initiatives and empower them to contribute to the company's green objectives.

By incorporating these recommendations, portuguese fashion brands can align their business practices with ecological principles, appeal to a growing market of environmentally conscious consumers and contribute to the global effort to build a more sustainable and responsible industry.

12 Appendixes

1. THE EVOLUTION OF THE ECOALF FOUNDATION



3. MARKETING CAMPAIGNS (examples)

BLACK FRIDAY RECYCLING CAMPAIGN

Under #RecyclingBlackFriday #BreakYourHabitNotYourPlanet, some teams by the English poet Tom Footley inspired us to find solutions and alternatives to excess clothing.

Reach:

- +44.8 M** views in the press
- +2.5 M** organic reach on social networks

National media: RTVE, Telemadrid, Televisió de Catalunya, Madrid Directo, Teleno, Caparison

International media: Digi24 (Austria)

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CAMPAIGN 20 CUPS OF COFFEE = 1 JACKET

We give a second life to post-consumer coffee grounds that would otherwise end up waste. ECOLIFE integrates used coffee grounds into its recycled polyester jackets. Tereven stores in lanes are collaborating with the project as a sustainable solution to the coffee-ground waste they generate.

Reach:

- +19.4 M** views in the press

National media: Expresión, Telemar, Elicion Sibila, Tereven Magazine

International media: H. OK, BlockDer Fratz, Business Insider, Mavi, Tina (Austria), Hecht, MSN (Austria)

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WORLD OCEANS DAY CAMPAIGN

Dedicated to our oceans, the lungs of the planet, which provide up to 80% of the oxygen we breathe, but we're using them as a giant dumping ground.

Reach:

- 52.4 M** views in the press
- +9 M** organic reach on social networks
- +200** mentions on social networks

National media: Elio, Tereven, Mavi Clari, El Español

International media: Vogue, Vanity Fair (Italy), GQ (Germany)

WORLD EARTH DAY CAMPAIGN

We launched Priva Knit sweaters with the lowest carbon footprint on the market and activated the ECOUJ Movement, which united more than 50 brand ambassadors.

Reach:

- +17,7 M** views in the press
- +95 K** organic reach on social networks

National media: El País, GQ

International media: The Spin Off (Germany), Mavi Clari (Italy), WU in Bild (Austria)

◻ CHECK OUT THE VIDEO