

## **Best in show: Nike's scrappy trash talk shoes**

*Venessa Wong*

*The eco-friendly athletic shoe is made from scraps of leather and synthetic materials and attached to a recycled rubber sole.*

Nike (NKE) isn't anyone's idea of a scrappy company. But one style of its athletic shoes is—literally. The Trash Talk is made from scraps of leather and synthetic materials that are stitched together and attached to a recycled rubber sole. The shoe is constructed well enough for NBA play, yet with sufficient style and eco-cred to win Best in Show in this year's International Design Excellence Awards.

Kasey Jarvis, 33, a designer in Nike's product-development Innovation Kitchen, began working on a junk shoe after seeing heaps of discarded materials in a waste-management center at a Nike factory near Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Ten years ago, Nike could have made an entire shoe from the materials left over from manufacturing each pair of shoes. The materials weren't generally used, though, and ended up in landfills or incinerators.

Since then, Nike has halved its waste output and recycles two-thirds of its scrap, says spokeswoman Kate Meyers. But top management wanted to do better. Under a 2008 effort dubbed Considered Design, the sports apparel and equipment company aims to reduce waste throughout its supply chain by 17% and increase use of environmentally preferred materials by 20% by 2020.

ZigZag Stitching gives cred

Having worked with reprocessed materials as a designer in General Motors' Hummer division from 2000 to 2004, Jarvis looked for solutions in recycling. "I wanted to find a way not only to create less waste, but use some of it," he says. At the same time, his effort would have to be profitable.

Jarvis originally hoped to blend the scraps into a new material, à la recycled paper or plastic. But he soon realized that sewing them together would be far simpler. Jarvis and colleagues Fred Dojan and Andreas Harlow designed a patchwork prototype from random shapes of yellow, green, silver, and blue materials.

The heavy-duty zigzag stitching not only held up during high-impact activities, a requirement in Nike's basketball division, but also readily conveyed the idea that this was a recycled shoe. "Typically we try to hide the stitches, and here we were stitching together all these pieces," he says. "The factories thought it was crazy,"

Steve Nash is a fan

More than one year after his 2004 trip to Vietnam, Jarvis went undercover to a plant near Guangzhou, China, to collect sample scraps and explore production. He found that by using different cutting dies, factories could efficiently make a "tossed salad" of standardized shapes such as rectangles and squares. Remnants from making eight pairs of basketball shoes could be cut into about 100 pieces and yield one size 9 Trash Talk shoe.

By turning the scrap into uniform pieces, factories also could employ computer stitching rather than labor- and cost-intensive hand stitching. That made large-scale production of the Trash Talk feasible in China.

Yet Nike's executive leaders did not immediately embrace the Trash Talk. Months of discussions passed before Harlow, Nike's design director for running footwear, approached

Steve Nash of the Phoenix Suns. An environmental advocate, Nash debuted the sneaker, in red and gold, at the 2008 National Basketball Assn. All-Star game. The company sold out its first run of thousands of pairs of Trash Talks at \$100 a pair within hours.

Kids get it

The 2009 version came in two other color combos: white and orange and black and blue. The next edition is in the pipeline. "Kids understood and appreciated the story," Jarvis says, adding that people often underestimate kids' grasp on sustainability. The trick was not proclaiming that there is a big environmental problem that Nike wants to solve, but showing that eco-friendly shoes can be fun. "It was a refreshing way to look at sustainable shoes."

WONG, Vanessa. Best in show: Nike's scrappy trash talk shoes. **BusinessWeek**, New York, July 29<sup>th</sup> 2009. Disponível em: <[www.businessweek.com](http://www.businessweek.com)>. Acesso em: 7 ago. 2009.

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