

CLIENT: Birkenstock **PROJECT:** Footprints & Birkies

Reinventing the Heel

STRATEGY:

Conceived new sub brand concept, direction, and implementation strategy. Redirected the current philosophies of the company into a new and innovative products and brands.

BRAND:

New brands and extensions were designed to take the Birkenstock demographic into the post-college urban crowd.

PRODUCT:

- Designed new lines for Footprints including in-sole comfort assemblies using new materials and production techniques.
- Designed new youthful outdoor/indoor lightweight plastic shoes which became widely imitated in the market place.

PACKAGING/COLLATERAL:

Create a new footprints logo, applications and art direction to be carried across all product applications, POP Concepts, packaging design, art direction and product photography.

RECOGNITION:

- IDEA - Business Week, Gold Excellence Award – Birkenstock Footprints branding & strategy.
- Red Dot Design Award – Birki Pro Clogs
- Red Dot Design Award – Birkis Clogs



“The new design is fluidly sculpted around the wide insole fit, minimizing extra material and making the shoe appear more dynamic and the product mass visually lighter. The result is a more fitted, sporty and elegant product.”

➤ Yves Behar



THE BACKGROUND

Reinventing the Heel

One of the great paradoxes of business is that brands must evolve to stay competitive, but they must do so without jeopardizing the equity they've spent so many years developing. The more powerful a company's heritage, the more difficult it is to enact successful change.

This was the problem facing Birkenstock; a shoe company that can trace its roots back to a German cobbler in the late 1700s. In 1967, when the shoes were first introduced to the American market, they rapidly built a successful, counter-cultural brand. In order to grow, however, Birkenstock needed to break free from the rigidity of its past. They approached fuseproject to help develop a new line of shoes under the name Footprints. They wanted to maintain their commitment to comfort, green design, recyclability and sustainable manufacturing, while simultaneously attracting a new audience – the modern urbanite.



THE STRATEGY

A Strategy of Organic Growth

Traditionally, shoes and sneakers are designed from the outside in: side-view sketches are developed and sent to factories around the world. The manufacturers deliver samples that are then tested and approved. fuseproject recognized that when it comes to developing a new collection that will attract a specific audience to a traditional brand this overtly product-centric approach is far too limited. By failing to consider the wider repercussions of the new collection for the new audience and for the brand itself, it becomes little more than a shot in the dark. Instead, we devised a "brand-centric" strategy. We call it "designing from the inside out."

To design with a brand focus, we develop a point of view first, a perspective of what the brand means currently and what it wants to mean in the future. In other words, you have to know what you want to say before you start talking. To help us accomplish this goal, we use our trend and merchandising specialists, branding and graphic designers, industrial designers and writers to devise a strategy that was both emotional and communicative. This team approach, and the surprisingly singular point of view it generates, results in a non-status quo product and strategy. It forms ideas, incubates them, and gives them time to breath. It allows a brand to evolve organically.



THE DESIGN SOLUTION

Inside Out Design

For the Footprints collection, a story developed around the elements that make traditional Birkenstocks unique and interesting. It was important the customer understand how much effort Birkenstock puts into the conceptualization and design of its shoes. We also wanted to express Birkenstock's traditional values of comfort, craftsmanship and green design and we had to do all this while appealing to the particular taste of the intended customer—the urbanite.

The key was to design from the inside out: We started by redesigning Birkenstock's trademark recycled cork and natural latex insole, then reshaping the fit and, finally, adding biodegradable gels. For the outside we devised a lighter, more elegant aesthetic introducing streamlined details and vegetable-died leathers.

The brand strategy needed to express the convergence of these values as well. The Footprints' logo represents a fluid continuum, simply expressing the circular element of Birkenstock's ecological product and the company's principles. It also reflects the urban attitude of the new Footprints line: slick, clean, organic and simple. The new logo appears on all Footprints' products, packaging, point-of-purchase displays and collateral materials. It distinguishes the Footprints line without alienating the Birkenstock tradition.



THE BUSINESS IMPACT

The Sole Reborn

We worked with Birkenstock on the product launch plan, partnering with Kartell for the New York debut and with the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco for the West Coast unveiling. The goal was to create events that put Birkenstock in a new light: green design that isn't granola. We built large shoe chandeliers to present the product in a surprisingly dramatic fashion. In addition, fuseproject designed a point-of-purchase display based on the Footprints logo: six shoes orbit around a glossy orange acrylic "fp" wordmark.

Footprints and Birkies broke new ground with Birkenstock. It transformed a brand that had lost its reputation for innovation, imbuing it with a contemporary, urban appeal without compromising the company's traditional values. fuseproject's unique strategic approach, of reviving a brand from the inside out, emanates from the product line itself to the way it is positioned at every point in the market. In Footprints and Birkies, Birkenstock's past and its future have found equal expression.