

"We're saving the world, one handbag at a time!"

Gabriella Alberoni, 35, has always been passionate about the environment. A year ago she came up with the idea of turning billboards into handbags and she started Carbon d'Affreeque, a recycled handbag company, with her partner, Irvan Damon. Gabriella lives in Fourways and also has her own branding consultancy.

OLD JOB Owner of a branding consultancy.
NEW JOB Co-founder of Carbon d'Affreeque handbags.

"Marketing and branding has been my business for 15 years, so I understand how effective billboards are as media tools. However, they pose a huge environmental problem because they're only displayed for a few months and then the PVC 'skins' on which the adverts are printed are either dumped or incinerated.

The heavy metals inside the inks are highly toxic and when the skins are dumped, these toxins seep into the water-table and the PVC takes at least a thousand years before it starts decomposing. Burning them releases greenhouse gases, so there's no way to dispose of them properly.

About a year ago, Irvan and I spotted a roadside hawker who had used the skin of a billboard as a make-shift canopy for his bakkie. It made me wonder what else these discarded pieces of PVC could be used for.

I toyed with the idea of umbrellas, but there isn't a big enough market for those in South Africa. I eventually settled on handbags as they appeal to the very people who I believe need to be targeted with the 'green' message. Those with enough disposable income are the ones who can afford to buy goods and services like dishwashers, multiple cars and long-distance holidays. They are the people who

WORST MISTAKE Not starting this amazing business sooner!
BEST MOVE Getting green ambassadors to wear our bags – when high profile people in the limelight spread your message, it's priceless publicity for your brand.
TOP TIP If you have a big idea that can't be protected, make sure that you are first to market and get as much publicity as possible – that way you will always own that space.

have the purchasing power to reduce their carbon footprint by making slightly more informed choices – the bags create awareness without all the finger wagging that turns people off 'green' issues.

So we're appealing to them as sassy shoppers – our aim is to be hip, not hippy! The bags are chic and we've created a classy, upmarket look and feel for the brand.

I hose down each skin as it arrives in my home, and cut out the sections of skin to be sent to the manufacturers. I try and maximise the amount used but also want to create the best-looking product, without revealing too much of the original brand. Sometimes advertisers want their brand to be identifiable – I've been approached by a corporate client, who wants me to make all the delegates at their annual conference a bag, using their old billboards.

As someone who's always been conscious of the longevity of the planet and the effect we have on it, Carbon d'Affreeque is a great way to marry my design skills with my passion." Visit www.carbonfree.co.za w&h



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