

STRATHMORE SUSTAINABILITY PORTFOLIO

The new Strathmore Sustainability Portfolio features the inspiring stories of six companies that are pioneers in environmental and social stewardship. It is intended to empower designers to initiate their own sustainable initiatives at work, at home and in communities across the country.

TRICYCLE, INC. FOUNDED 2002 CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE & LEEDS, ENGLAND 32 EMPLOYEES WWW.TRICYCLEINC.COM

A new company with an innovative business plan. Tricycle creates digital carpet simulations printed on 100% recycled paper, which annually saves millions of carpet samples from going to the landfill.

START: ANN WILLOUGHBY'S INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL HENDRIX, CHIEF BRAND OFFICER, TRICYCLE

Ann: How would you describe Tricycle to designers? Why did you start the company?

Michael: Tricycle is four years old now. I started it with another American and two Brits. We all had different backgrounds that had some touch-point with the carpet industry. The carpet industry is in our backyard—we're in Chattanooga, and Dalton, Georgia, is about 30 minutes south of us. Over 60 percent of the world's tufted carpet is manufactured in Dalton. I had been in the graphic design profession at that point for about eight years and was having a career crisis. Living in a relatively small city, I was finding the work I was doing pretty unsatisfying. I wanted to have a broader affect upon society than I was having. As much as you don't want to, oftentimes you become the hands of the client, but you want to become the brains; the strategic thinker. As I was going through this, I was talking to Jonathan, one of my partners at the time; we had started working with the carpet industry some and saw an opportunity to do something to change the way that industry functioned and the way it related to its marketplace. This was a much broader thing than working for a small business here or there. Jonathan studied industrial engineering and ended up in marketing, did a stint at a carpet tufting machine manufacturer and then eventually ended up in a web development firm. He was brought in for development, to do new business, and then he hired me to rebrand them. In the course of working together, I decided to actually merge into that business and start a design branch. After about a year and a half, we decided to start Tricycle. Jamie started out as a carpet designer. In England, carpet is different. Here we tuft carpet, there they weave carpet. We use nylon here, they use wool there. It's a different kind of industry, really. Their carpet costs more, it's more luxurious; it goes into casinos, hotels, hospitality industry. Andy was a programmer hired by Jamie at a job where they were making CAD systems for carpet design. We all had different skill sets that make the company a stronger whole.

Ann: What are your plans for the future of the company?

Michael: Ultimately, Tricycle is part of a larger trend that is finding new vehicles for experiences, and we're using the digital world to get there. We used to exchange money, but now we use credit cards. We used to buy records, but now we download music. It doesn't change the final experience for the end user—you're still listening to music or having a transaction and getting something. We live in a time period in which we can create things without actually physically making them, and we can have experiences without actually interacting with the physical world. And that allows us to have more sustainable interactions; it's really dematerialized.

Ann: I suppose that many things can be digitized to create a dematerialized experience.

Michael: We're still very focused on the commercial interiors industry right now and will continue on that path. What's most interesting to us right now is understanding how interior designers and architects work with manufacturers across all interiors, not just carpet but furnishings, wall coverings, any kind of surface. Because we feel like we can reinvent or reincarnate that channel so that it takes less natural man-made resources to give people what they want and need, we have a very exciting opportunity.

Ann: Is this business infinitely scalable?

Michael: It is scalable. We're actually starting our second round of investment funding to help us grow. We have a patent pending on a product we're launching at Neocon called ZoomRoom.

Ann: I see you are speaking at GAIN.

Michael: It's funny to me, because I went to the conference four years ago in Minneapolis. I was just another person in the audience hoping to get something out of it, and then four years later I get to contribute. It's so exciting to me because the opportunities I've had have all been in my own backyard. **It hasn't been anything really exciting or sexy. It's just carpet. But to identify a problem in your own geography and solve it with the skill sets that you have can create significant opportunities, and I think it's important for everyone to see that.**

END: ANN WILLOUGHBY'S INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL HENDRIX, CHIEF BRAND OFFICER, TRICYCLE