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Worn with conscience

HEMA and Gayathri Vadivelu are two individuals who have adopted business concepts that are green yet economically feasible at the same time. They launched their eco-conscious clothing line named The Dive Label (thedivelabel.com) last June.

Their philosophy is to make profits based on principles of environmental responsibility.

The duo realised the challenges they would face when they started the business. "Everyone thinks that going green means that you must be a treehugger or an environmentalist. We wanted to come up with a line that is catchy with eco-conscious messages and see how people respond to them," says 30-year-old Gayathri, a former professional dancer.

In order to be accessible and for their message to reach the public, they had to find a product that was easily recognisable and reasonably priced.

"T-shirts generally transcend age. You can be five or 50 years old and you would still be wearing one," says 39-year-old Hema, who has extensive background in retail and merchandising.

The Dive Label strives to be different from other clothing lines by using 100% organic cotton as the material for their T-shirts. One of their objectives is to raise awareness about the dangers that artificial cotton poses to not only the environment, but the people as well.

"Cotton is actually quite harmful to the environment. The amount of pesticides and chemicals used in manufacturing shirts is substantial. That is why we promote organic cotton whereby the method of cultivation uses no chemicals and the farmers will benefit from a healthier lifestyle," says Hema.

This healthy lifestyle that they promote has also permeated into their how they run their business as well as their way of life. Hema and Gayathri feel that it would be very hypocritical of them to not practise what they preach.

Hema knows the importance of sticking to their initial principles: "We started off by just wanting to sell a product that could make a small contribution to a cause. But after a while, we realised that we

had to be true to our convictions and we switched to recycled paper name cards and leaflets.

"The leaflets come with seeds sponsored by Forest Research Institute Malaysia so everyone can plant and grow a tree." The Dive Label also contributes 10% of their profits – which amounts to about RM7,000 to date – to the Malaysian Nature Society.

Even as a relatively new enterprise, The Dive Label has created waves amongst the green community and this has pushed the sisters to expand their range of merchandise.

"We not only have our own clothing line but we create custom-made products for eco-conscious clients.

"We want to associate ourselves with companies which are putting in an effort to promote sustainable living," says Gayathri.

As part of their future plans, the sisters intend to open up their own store.

For now, they just want to collaborate with different organisations to raise awareness about what they believe in, which is caring for the environment.

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Hema (left) and Gayathri Vadivelu of The Dive Label, sell 100% organic cotton T-shirts which feature eco-conscious messages. They donate 10% of their profits to the Malaysian Nature Society.