

# ALL ABOUT THE B-CORP - THE NEW "IT" CERTIFICATE FOR FASHION

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7 DAYS AGO IN [CULTUREWORDS](#) BY HARVEY JAMES



PATAGONIA

**SIGN UP TO NEVER MISS A DROP**

"Fashion is drowning in industry initiatives, certifications and standards," says Sonia Hylling, a Circular Economy and Sustainable Supply Chain Strategist. As The Dreadful 20s (just

coined it) roll on – the climate burns; social and worker issues simmer; the spectral pandemic looms; and global supply chains creak – it seems we are dying a death from a thousand cuts, and a better framework is needed. Is B-Corp's holistic philosophy the standard that we have been waiting for?

A lot of B-Corp certified fashion brands – Finisterre, All Birds, MUD Jeans, and – have always strived to be progressive, so becoming a B-Corp didn't require much change. It is fashion's recent cohort that's more telling. In October 2021, Chloe announced their certification; a large, legacy brand taking demonstrable steps to reinvent and reshuffle itself. Couple this with the interest from Prada, as expressed by Lorenzo Bertelli in a recent Business of Fashion interview, and high street brands calling B-Corps to chat about the certificate, this stirs up some questions. Is it the symptom of a larger cultural shift? Why this one certification? And wait, are B-Corps cool now?

The B-Corp certification was set up in 2006 as a way to rigorously analyze, formally approve, and legally bind companies that looked to move beyond using profit as the sole measurement of success and switch to a stakeholder model. To be approved, brands use the B Impact Assessment tool which houses five key areas: governance, workers, community, environment, and customers. Vanessa Barboni Hallik, CEO and founder of B-Corp luxury fashion brand Another Tomorrow likens it to “an architecture for accountability.” Brands have to field questions like: “Does your company source from and/or provide support to populations in low-income, poor, or very poor markets through

your supply chain purchasing practises,” and undergo deep questioning, data presentation and supplication of hard evidence to support their answers. Only 4,395 applicants from 143,085 have been accepted in its 15 year lifespan.



ALL BIRDS

“What I love about B Corp is you have to back up factually what you say you do, [and] you really don't have anything that's so holistic across environmental, social and governance factors. I think that that really does set [B-Corp] apart,” says Barboni Hallik. Once approved, scores are shown publicly for comparison and every three years, they must reapply to hold onto the status, each time it getting more stringent. Finisterre’s Positive Impact Manager, Adele Gingell took them through their revaluation and she says “it should... we’re facing a climate emergency.”



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Barboni Hallik readily admits that “B-Corp probably needs to be more stringent in certain areas, particularly in terms of brand accountability for working conditions and liveable wages.” Every

three years, B-Corp adopts stricter principles and manipulates the framework to better reflect the world at that current time. This is in the hope that the magic word, credibility, is retained. Laura Vicaria, CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) Manager at MUD Jeans says that in the sustainability sector, consumer trust is hugely important because it “can easily be shattered.” The B-Corp certification acts as a broad stroke mediator, questioner and enforcer of values between brand and consumer, but also, helps simplify consumer choices. As Barboni Hallik puts it: “You shouldn't have to have a PhD as a customer to screen out which companies are really doing the work.”

*Capitalism? Completed it, mate.* Well, not so fast. Hylling points out some problems. The certificate is not legally enforceable, and it is a market driven solution for a market created problem. She suggests general legislation might be more effective (see: [Green Claims Code](#), effective in UK from Jan 2022), and that she hasn't seen evidence of B-Corp consulting legislators to enforce wider change.



MUD JEANS

Hylling questions whether high fashion is “*really* ready to commit to a supply chain decision that prioritizes ethics over cost, or to implement a non-consumerism approach to marketing and sales.” Plus, Michael O’Regan in [The Conversationist](#) makes the point that, “certified companies can simply walk away if they feel being a B Corp no longer suits their profit-making aims, or if it threatens short-term shareholder profitability.” But the optimist in me considers what an impact it’d have if a brand like Prada did succeed longterm considering their footprint and influence, not to mention the panache it would bring to the B-Corp Christmas party.

For the over-saturated, confused, but concerned consumer, B-Corp Certification at its heart is really about aligning values. If you like its mission of better governance, higher environmental standards, open-sourcing, education, better workers’ rights and

pay, increased diversity— A dam Smith's hand reaching out for a hug — then approved brands will be notched up in your estimation.

Last summer at the G7 Summit in Cornwall, Finisterre teamed up with Seas Seven, an ocean activist training camp to try to put the oceans on the agenda. Finisterre reached out to the B-Corp community and mustered up a 12 million person reach on social media. Adele said it might have been weird, that a Solicitor firm, or a tampon manufacturer was sharing a clothing brand's content but "everyone just joined forces, I was blown away by the collaboration on that."

Vicaria from MUD Jeans says collaboration between B-Corps "comes about because it's like, 'Oh, you're a B Corp. Cool.' It is a symbol that you're doing your due diligence. The whole aspect of going beyond profit, and using profit as a means to a bigger end." Collaboration is the bedrock of the modern fashion brand and is built into the assessment structure, as it's open for all and useful for those beginning their journey to betterment. B-Corp wants to lift up and educate even if brands don't end up certifying.



MUD JEANS

Maybe “cool” has been the wrong word all along. It’s a rigorous assessment, combined with a somewhat enforceable legal status, that boldly looks to address the current crises of our times. So, “important,” “fastidious,” and “ambitious” might do better. However, it embodies a new wave of value-based expectation

that consumers are beginning to impose on brands. In our 2020 report "Culture, Culture, Culture," it states Gen Z consumers will make up 60% of the market by 2026, and will demand brands be credible, grasp with social issues, and foster community; all which the B-Corp initiative checks out on. And while the consumer might not know too much about it yet, Barboni Hallik says it's already been "influential in talent and hiring" with an "immense number of people saying 'I want to align my energy with my values' and switching jobs." In short, she says, "Gen Z gets it."

B-Corp is about putting your values (and data) out there to be scrupulously analyzed, working tirelessly to live up to the high standards, and being damn proud of that. It might not be cool... but, no, fuck it... yeah it is.