

Meet Go Thrift, the real alternative to fast fashion

As part of our quick fire questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Carl Walker, cofounder and CEO of Go Thrift about wearing without waste, reducing carbon footprints and matching affordability with sustainability.

Temps de lecture : minute

2 March 2023

When my wife and I met our now cofounders Sam and Sarah in 2019 something just clicked. We have over 40 years combined industry experience - I'd built up a good network of suppliers of second-hand clothing and Sam and Sarah had extensive tech and ecommerce experience. We decided that together we could build something really special.

All four of us had sold 'vintage' clothing in the past, but that market was quite niche without much potential to scale. We wanted to offer a real alternative to fast fashion and so Go Thrift was born.

It didn't matter if the clothing we sold was made a week ago, a year ago, or 30 years ago - if it was good quality and had life left in it, we would sell it. By offering a more sustainable way of shopping for clothing online, at prices that were often cheaper than fast fashion, we saw huge demand and things just went from strength to strength.

Tell me about the business - what it is, what

it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

Our aim is simple: to wear without waste. With a vision to offer a more sustainable and affordable way of shopping for clothing online, the brand was born and has fast become one of the UK's leading used-clothing retailers. One of Go Thrift's key selling points is its thousands of quality checked items listed every day on the website from top brands such as Levi and Adidas. We exclusively sell online to keep prices low, affordable, and accessible to all.

We upload over 20,000 individual items to our website every month, and sync with marketplaces to increase sell through rate. Due to the continued mass over production of new clothing, large volumes of stock are available as we scale. We have built in-house software that automates data input and item pricing, increasing efficiency and allowing us to process 1000s of items every day.

Our stock is sourced in bulk from long-standing partnerships with textile recycling centres in the UK and across Europe. Buying one used item of clothing versus a new item displaces 8kg of CO2 emissions, reducing its carbon footprint by 82% and this is our motivation to grow the business to help improve the future of our planet. The fashion industry produces 10% of all humanity's carbon emissions and is the second-largest consumer of the world's water supply and we want to change that.

How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

Founded in 2019, Go Thrift has gone from strength to strength with incredible growth and revenue numbers. In 2022 alone, we raised £370K investment and moved to a new 31,000 square foot warehouse. We've

built a world-class team of 30 people operating from our warehouse in Blackburn, Lancashire.

In Q4 2022 we sold £850K worth of second-hand clothes through our ecommerce platform and through our shop on eBay. Our net revenue is £3.4M in just three years of trading and as the second-hand clothing market is growing three times faster than the apparel market overall, second hand fashion will be bigger than fast fashion by 2030 and our revenue will grow in line with market size.

We have also just hired CMO Paul Stevens who has an incredible CV working with billion-pound brands such as Apple and Coca Cola. Stevens will drive our business forward, raise awareness, increase SEO, improve website conversion rates and drive market share.

We pride ourselves on breaking down the barriers to shopping sustainably. The growth we've seen since launch proves that when sustainability meets affordability, consumers get on board.

Tell us about the working culture at Go Thrift

We understand that the way we articulate ourselves internally is almost as important as how we do it externally. We are a very respectful, inclusive, close knit but hard-working culture. We trust our employees and empower them to excel in their roles. Most of our team have been with us since day one, they aligned with the vision and many of them have now developed into management roles.

How are you funded?

We were a completely bootstrapped business from 2019 until Q2 of 2022 and then took on investment of nearly £400k.

We are currently in our second round of investment, with an ambitious but achievable target of £1million to accelerate the growth of the website, stock build, expand our warehouse, increase the team, and upgrade the current tech. The investment will be from angel investors and VCs with this due to land in Q2 of 2023.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

Keeping up with soaring orders, particularly in times of increased retail spend such as Black Friday and Christmas. We saw a huge spike in sales in Q4, selling over 40,000 items in just 3 months. Without the amazing team we have in place things could have overwhelmed us but thankfully we smashed it! Another challenge was ensuring we strengthened the leadership team. We are immensely proud of everything we have achieved as Founders, however, we knew it was vital that we brought people into certain areas of the business who had experience and expertise in areas that are crucial to growth. With our new CMO Paul Stevens, our new CFO Arti Modhwadia, and our new General Manager Emma Webster, we feel we've made huge progress here over the past few months.

How does Go Thrift answer an unmet need?

57% of consumers want the fashion industry to become more sustainable but 61% say they are more concerned about price as the current cost of living crisis continues. Go Thrift answers this insight by offering more sustainable and affordable fashion choices to both men and women and we are not limited by location as we can ship throughout the UK.

At Go Thrift we're trying to offer an alternative to fast fashion, but we're not 'anti' fashion. We believe clothing should be made with more care,

from better quality and more sustainable materials. This way we can produce less, wear for longer, and then donate or sell the item on when we're finished with it. Quality over quantity benefits both the customer, and the planet.

What's in store for the future?

We're all really proud of how far we've grown Go Thrift so far, but our motto is that we're only just getting started. As one of the UK's leading online used clothing retailers, we plan on continuing our growth in a market. By always striving to improve what we do, staying ahead of the curve with technology that helps us scale, and by expanding the team with amazing people who have the same drive to make our business the best it can be.

Once the £1M investment lands in Q2 this year, we will scale up quickly and make sure the right people and technology are in place to elevate the business.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

Find a business or sector you are genuinely passionate about and focus on that. We love getting up in the morning for work because we are passionate about circular fashion, sustainability and helping the future of our planet. This combined with our knowledge and love for fashion results in motivation, commitment, and success for a business.

The other piece of advice is to choose your team wisely. In a small business, getting the right characteristics are more important than getting the right skills. You can teach technical skills, but you can't teach soft skills, and having the right people in place will make your business thrive.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

These days my working life seems to revolve around meetings – but it's great because I get to meet lots of new people and learn from them. I really miss the early days when it was my job to sort through all the amazing stock we receive - it was like Christmas every day, you never knew what you were going to find. I visit our suppliers in the UK and across Europe as often as possible, strengthening the relationships we have with them and ensuring we have the partnerships in place to scale.

Outside of work, I enjoy spending as much time as possible with my family. Thankfully my wife Katie is Co-Founder at Go Thrift, so she doesn't mind me constantly talking about the business! We love to visit as many restaurants as possible and we live for summer holidays which can't come quickly enough after the very busy winter we're having!

Carl Walker is the cofounder and CEO of *GO THRIFT*.

Article by Carl Walker