

Foldable canoe company ONAK to focus on sustainability, local employment

GHENT, BELGIUM – After successfully closing 2017 with over 400 deliveries and getting a fresh capital injection in February of 2018, the foldable canoe company ONAK steadily continues on its chartered course. Key focus areas for the rest of the year will be sustainability, local employment and community building.

Sustainability is part of the young firm's DNA: their foldable, hassle-free canoes are manufactured out of fully recyclable parts, and accessories such as their waterproof lamps that run on solar energy. The company also switched to more easily degradable cardboard for its packaging.

"People who spend time in the water know better than anyone how unsustainable plastic has become, and the threat it poses to aquatic biodiversity," says Otto Van De Steene, co-founder at ONAK. The company recently reached out to its social media followers to join in on a water clean-up action, and the response was huge. "This proves that our customers share our values," comments Mr. Van De Steene.

For employment, ONAK looks local, rather than outsourcing to low-wage countries with precarious working conditions. It has set up a partnership with the craftspeople of Ryhove, who employ people with disabilities in the Ghent area. "Not only do the people at Ryhove deliver the quality our customers demand, it also lets us focus on hiring people at ONAK to help us grow further," comments Mr. Van De Steene.

Speaking of customers, ONAK is rolling out an 'adventure platform' for them. Each individual customer can name their boat, and this name will be reflected in a unique URL they can use to chart canoe routes worldwide, effectively creating a community.

This creates value for all members within it and breathes life into the company's "Go explore"-motto. ONAK also incentivizes customers to spread the word: for each canoe sold that came through a customer as a referrer, that customer gets a small referral fee, starting at €50.

The origami-like foldable canoes themselves constitute a quantum leap in space requirements for transport. "Most importantly, our canoes don't sacrifice performance for easy transportation. The canoe is able to paddle against crosswinds of 3 Beaufort, has a sleek, stable waterline, and offers lots of resistance against impact and ruptures," says Thomas Weyn, ONAK's co-founder. He continues: "We want to give everyone the freedom to explore, take their canoes in their flight luggage, show other paddlers the best waterways to discover, and simply enjoy life on the water."

ONAK takes leisure quite seriously. "An advantage of being a nimble and agile company is that the distance between us and our customer base is small. This is also a conscious choice. We can't create a community by being invisible behind the screens – our customers can always reach out to us and get fast responses," concludes Mr. Weyn.

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