Fernanda Maturana

Bolsas Reutilizables

“ I saw an opportunity to lead the green movement in Chile. ”

COUNTRY	Chile
INDUSTRY	Consumer
EMPLOYEES	30
YEAR SELECTED	2009
PARTNER	Pablo Maturana
WEBSITE	bolsasreutilizables.cl

COMPANY SNAPSHOT

“Going green” in Chile, Bolsas manufactures and distributes reusable bags that serve as green alternatives to plastic shopping bags. The sibling duo, Maria and Pablo, are already supplying some of the biggest retail names in Chile and Peru with their innovative products. They continue to make a dent in the 3 billion disposable bags that Chileans use each year.

Both Fernanda and Pablo have a background in business. A graduate of the University of Chile, Pablo had been working with his mother, Julia Rubilar, at her small publicity items business. There, he noticed the growing demand for branded reusable bags. After he saw shoppers toting similar bags to the grocery store during a working holiday in Australia, Pablo knew it was the right time to launch a reusable bags company. Pablo’s research confirmed his intuition, as he learned that Chilean legislators were organizing to ban disposable plastic bags by 2011. Meanwhile, Pablo’s sister Fernanda had graduated first in her class at the Federico Santa Maria Technical University in 2004. A manager at the Chilean telecommunications firm Entel, Fernanda immediately recognized the potential of her brother’s idea. While Fernanda maintained her regular job, the entrepreneurs developed and presented a proposal for the investment group Chilean Angels, who offered them advice on launching the business.

In August 2008, Pablo and Fernanda made a connection with retail giant Jumbo, which was searching for reusable bags to use in their “green bag” campaign. While negotiating with Jumbo, the entrepreneurs also traveled to Argentina and China to make new contacts and learn about manufacturing techniques. They also consulted with their mother, a civil and chemical engineer, to further develop the reusable bag product. In September 2008, with little certainty about what lay ahead, Fernanda left her job to help her brother formally launch Bolsas Reutilizables. The risk paid off in December, when Jumbo placed their first order for 20,000 bags. Over the next month, the entrepreneurs obtained bank loans to rent factory space, bought equipment and materials using their contacts from China and Argentina, and hired sewers and a serigraphing company using their mother’s business contacts. Exhausted, they filled their first order on time in January 2009. In the eight months following this initial success, Fernada and Pablo built Bolsas Reutilizables into a million dollar company that now supplies some of the biggest retail names in Chile and Peru – including the Cencosud group, Unimarc Supermarkets, Lider Supermarkets, and Wong Supermarkets in Peru – as well as government and corporate clients.

As the first Chilean company to supply these bags on a mass scale, Bolsas has put a new spin on a product that was previously manufactured only on a small scale by companies with a broader focus on promotional items. In addition to decreasing the use of plastic bags, Bolsas bags serve as a chic promotional tool that clients are eager to emblazon with their logos. Currently operating in Chile and Peru, Bolsas Reutilizables is poised to expand throughout Latin America with new product lines to meet the environmental and fashion needs of its growing list of clients.

ENDEAVOR AND BOLSAS REUTILIZABLES

Maria and Pablo have worked with the local VentureCorps to map out their clients and define a methodology for negotiation. This area of focus has been important not only for individual projects (i.e., the Frei Presidential campaign), but also for navigating a highly concentrated retail environment in Chile. In 2010, they also received support through the global eMBA and Ernst & Young Fellows programs.