



Crocs products are sold in more than 90 countries worldwide and it has sold 100 million pairs since the company started in 2002.

ALL CREDITS: CROCS

Crocs are here to stay

Since its launch in 2002, Crocs has certainly made its mark across the globe. It is rare to go a whole day without seeing a pair of the distinctive looking shoes on the feet of a child, mother or even an office worker. The phenomenon has been embraced by many, while others have described the shoes as “fugly” – beyond ugly. Many critics are questioning whether, and when, the novelty will wear off, but as new stores continue to pop up all over the world, it appears the brand has become much more than a fleeting fancy.

The early years

Crocs Shoes was founded in Boulder, Colorado, back in July 2002. The shoes were originally designed to be used for boating and outdoor purposes in order to maximise the benefits of their slip-resistant, non-marking soles. Each shoe incorporates the firm’s closed-cell resin material, Croslite, which is said to improve comfort and functionality as well as being antimicrobial.

As the brand took off, the company made a series of acquisitions, including Foam Creations, Ocean Minded, Bite Footwear, Tungz and Jibbitz. It has also signed licensing agreements with major companies and associations such as Disney, the National Football League, DC Comics, Marvel, Warner Brothers, the National Basketball Association, Major League Baseball, the National Hockey League, PGA Tour and NASCAR.

Responding to controversy

Despite this, there have been various complaints about the Crocs range. The first is that, according to some people, the standard Cayman style is not attractive to look at. In fact, entire websites have been devoted to discussing this. The brightly coloured clog-style shoe with the large holes has met with disapproval from many consumers, despite the fact that sales were rising at record rates. However, the company took these complaints in its stride and started to add new styles and categories to its

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range, using the Croslite footbed across its collection.

In 2006, it launched the All Terrain shoe model at the Outdoor Retailer Summer Market tradeshow in Salt Lake City. The shoe features an enclosed design with a rugged sole for additional traction. It has a washable leather upper and is suitable for outdoor activities. The company's first high-heeled shoe was also launched in 2006. The Sassari model has a prominent wedge heel and is available in six two-toned colour options. Other additions included the Georgie boot for children, the Sobek model for leisure activities and après sport, and various watersports models such as Ace Boating, Wraith and Dead Ahead.

Perhaps the two most notable additions, in terms of appearance, are the Mammoth range and the Italian-inspired YOU by Crocs range, the strapline for which is "where comfort meets fashion". According to Martin Johnston, marketing director, crocs Europe, the Mammoth boot has

been a big hit since its launch and the fur-lined Nadia style has been the most popular model. Because they have the Croslite base, they are more waterproof than many other fashion boots. Liselore Stuut, the company's European PR manager, says the Nadia model "reflects the comfort while embodying the spirit of Crocs' past and present".

Meanwhile, the YOU line was introduced as a direct response to criticism about the appearance of the original Cayman shoes. Styles range from three-inch patent-leather heels to suede ankle boots. Speaking at the time of the launch, vice president and co-founder, Lyndon Hanson, said: "When people think of Crocs, they might think of ugly and then they think of comfort." She added that the YOU range was designed "for the woman who loves the comfort of her Crocs but certainly can't wear them with a cocktail dress." Despite all the additions to the range, however, the Cayman style is still the most popular, according to Mr Johnston.

Better safe than sorry

An even more pressing criticism of the shoes was that they were unsafe. They were banned from some hospitals as it was alleged they could pose a health and safety or infection risk. Concerns were also raised over people wearing the colourful footwear on escalators, particularly in Japan, and some schools have told pupils not to wear their Crocs during school hours.

While Crocs has not substantiated these concerns, it has introduced new models to appease fears as well as agreeing to launch an escalator safety awareness initiative. The firm introduced two new models specifically aimed at people working in the medical profession at the end of 2007. Lacking the distinctive holes, the Croslite footbed is covered by a thick protective upper to prevent injury from sharp instruments or needles. Despite this, the shoes have still been banned from some hospitals on the back of allegations that static electricity produced when wearing the shoes