

The experience of a Berlin footwear start-up shows that a strong social media output and securing the help of key influencers could be more important these days than finding bricks-and-mortar stockists. Founded in 2015, Aeyde sold a higher volume of shoes on high-end e-commerce site Net A Porter in 2018 than any other brand.

Online tools spark start-up success

It's only a decade since footwear entrepreneur Luisa Krogmann finished university, having studied economics, business management and English at the University of Duisburg-Essen in the west part of Germany. On finishing, she was lured home to Berlin by fashion e-commerce business Zalando, stayed for four years and finished up as the commercial lead for women's and men's apparel for its zLabels subsidiary.

On deciding to indulge her entrepreneurial spirit by launching her own business in 2015, it was no surprise that the idea that she and business partner (and zLabels colleague) Constantin Langholz-Baikousis came up with should have a combined focus on fashion and e-commerce. But that it should be a shoe brand, Aeyde, was a little more surprising. Footwear had been part of Mr Langholz-Baikousis's remit at the Zalando subsidiary, but it was new territory, business-wise, for Ms Krogmann; she was a self-professed shoe enthusiast, however, if the price was right.

Right price

She explains that, when Zalando grew from start-up status to having more than 15,000 employees, it occurred to her, having put so much energy into this venture, that she was clearly capable of "doing something on my own". She and Mr Langholz-Baikousis decided footwear should be their focus because of a personal frustration that Ms Krogmann had felt for some time.

"I had a good job, I was earning money and I could afford to buy nice products," she says, "but I was not willing to spend €500, €600, €700 or even €800 for a pair of pumps or boots. I talked to my co-founder and we did a bit of market research and we saw a huge gap in the mid-price market for shoes. We thought about it for half a year, prepped a concept and decided to quit our jobs and jump into the water."

Aeyde co-founder, Luisa Krogmann.

CREDIT: AEYDE



Luxury-grade materials

She describes Aeyde as being deliberately anti-cyclical (it launched with one style, an ankle boot, in the month of October, after the fuss and hubbub of the main Fashion Week events had died down) and deliberately non-luxury. But its products are all made by family-run partner manufacturers in Le Marche in Italy and every boot or shoe includes a hand-sewn signature stitch as a mark of quality. What the brand refers to as "luxury-grade materials" are also a prerequisite. Uppers tend to be 100% calf leather while goatskin lines the interiors of most products in the brand's range. Flats, sandals and heels of up to 9.5 centimetres, as well as boots, populate the catalogue now. Only a handful of items cost more than €300.

Expanding list of stockists

For the first 18 months after launch, Aeyde footwear was only available online and it still sells to online customers through its own e-commerce site and through two important internet shopping partners, Moda Operandi and Net A Porter, on which the Berlin brand achieved the accolade of being the biggest selling footwear brand (in terms of volume) in 2018.

Now, however, there are six Lane Crawford bricks-and-mortar stores selling Aeyde footwear: three in mainland China and three in the retail group's home territory of Hong Kong. Canadian department store group Holt Renfrew stocks the shoes in five of its shops, two in Toronto and one each in Calgary, Montreal and Vancouver. Assembly is doing the same in stores in Los Angeles and New York and Aeyde also has one stockist in Tel Aviv. In Europe, its collections are on sale at Galeries Lafayette and at one other outlet in Paris and in Folli Follie stores in four Italian towns. Other retail partners have them in stock in shops in the UK, Switzerland, Croatia, Lithuania, Belgium and Denmark. In Germany, nearly 20 boutiques from east to west and from north to south have now signed up to sell Aeyde collections.

How to influence people and win friends

Online is critically important to the brand's success, though, and always has been. Instagram was new territory for Ms Krogmann when she founded Aeyde in 2015, but she could see how important social media in general and Instagram in particular were becoming for fashion. She set about learning to use these tools. Now 40% of the brand's sales come to it through social media and, after bringing a small group of important influencers on board, the online community that they count as its customer-base numbers 50,000 people. She says this is an illustration of what this technology has done to the fashion industry in the last five years or so.

Analysis of the data the brand is able to collect from customers or potential customers feeds into the brief that Ms Krogmann gives to her design team. This includes analysing how old these consumers are and where else they like to shop. She talks of using all this information to add accessories to the Aeyde range. In fact, she says this was part of the plan from the start. "I think what's important is that you keep a vision from the beginning," she explains. "Our vision was to have an accessories brand as well. The biggest question was how to move Aeyde from being a boot brand, to being a shoe brand too and then to being an accessories brand. We've slowly broadened the range."

She accepts that her use of the word 'slowly' is not strictly accurate here. 📍



Luisa Krogmann founded Aeyde out of frustration at the lack of mid-priced, high-quality shoes on the market.

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