

Winning Strategies 2023: How Skandinavisk is Championing the B Corp Beauty Coalition

The B Corp Beauty Coalition is dedicated to protecting the future of the beauty industry and the planet. Shaun Russell, founder of Skandinavisk and a member of the coalition, discusses the importance of collaboration, consumer awareness and more responsible practices

Emma Grace Bailey
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BEAUTY FOR GOOD

B Corp Beauty Coalition

Overview

B Corp–certified Skandinavisk is a founding member of the B Corp Beauty Coalition. B Corporations are legally required to consider the impact of their decisions on their people, customers, suppliers, community and the planet. We talk to Shaun Russell about using business as a force for good.

As outlined in [Intelligence: B Corp Beauty Strategies](#), the B Corp Beauty Coalition is a collection of 30-plus certified B Corp beauty brands working together to effect positive change within the beauty industry.

As one of its founding members, Copenhagen-based fragrance and bath and body brand Skandinavisk stands up to scrutiny against all of B Corp's rigorous criteria, but admits more change is needed. Collaboration between B Corps is key to this movement, with the B Corp Beauty Coalition dedicated to finding solutions to industry wide problems such as packaging waste.

As a standalone brand, Skandinavisk is committed to transparency. Its website features a Frequently Asked Questions section providing honest and fact-based answers to a range of sourcing, employment and practice questions. The brand's environmental policies reveal its commitment to becoming carbon neutral by 2025. Actions taken to minimise its impact to date include producing all hand and bodycare products within a one-hour radius of its Copenhagen warehouse and using renewable, sustainably sourced, industry certified rapeseed, wood and paper.

WGSN talks to Skandinavisk founder Shaun Russell about the importance of B Corp certification in a world needing more purpose.



Why is this coalition so important to the future of beauty?

The beauty and cosmetics industry is one of the largest and most competitive retail industries in the world. It touches almost everyone on, and every corner of, our planet. It is also rife with not so beautiful challenges: opaque supply chains that hide toxic ingredients, pollution, land and water degradation, loss of biodiversity; working conditions including unreasonable hours and unfair wages or, worse, forced or child labour in order to manipulate and profit from human insecurity by offering more consumption as the solution.

We (the coalition) believe there is a better way. As Certified B Corporations meeting the highest standards of social and environmental impact, we have become increasingly uncomfortable with the footprint our industry leaves and have concluded our respective solo efforts so that positive change can be enhanced through a partnership. We will start by focusing on three crucial areas: ingredient sourcing and sustainability; developing a circular and regenerative supply chain; and designing more responsible packaging.

In parallel, by publishing our learnings, actions and outcomes, we believe our initiative can lead to a broader understanding of the concept of beauty that both re-educates the beauty customer and better protects the beauty of the nature we all rely on.

**FOR IMPACT AS
MUCH AS
PERFORMANCE**

As a proud member of the B Corp Beauty Coalition, we envision a new approach to beauty that prioritises soil as much as skin, nature as much as natural, evidence as much as ego, and impact as much as performance.

B Beauty
A B Corp™ Beauty Coalition

bcorpbeauty.org
B Corp Beauty

One of your four pillars is on clear consumer communication that's easy to understand and trustworthy. How are you planning to do this and what key issues are you planning to overcome?

This objective is reflected in the words of our manifesto – in particular, the statement "for soil as much as skin, nature as much as natural, evidence as much as ego, and impact as much as performance". The beauty industry has almost exclusively focused on improvement of the self since inception, but true beauty really starts with the protection of the nature that surrounds us. We believe such broader public awareness should be as important as the end user benefits when choosing a beauty product in the future.

This manifesto and our commitment to publishing the outcomes of our work is intended to inspire the wider industry that change is needed. We have already established a shared home at bcorpbeauty.org and will use this for coalition updates as work gets underway. Members are also free to republish this information on their platforms and some have already created sections on their sites to do so.

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COMMUNITIES, AND OUR PLANET.
BCORPBEAUTY.ORG**

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Do you think consumers truly understand what B Corp brands are? If not, why not?

There is very limited awareness of B Corp brands for a number of reasons. The movement is run by a nonprofit organisation, B Lab, that is expressly committed to setting standards, not self-promotion. The criteria for certification is so high that only 4,000-plus companies worldwide have achieved certification in 15 years to date, so we tend to be outnumbered in every industry where a B Corp operates. Finally, there are no group media budgets to communicate our message, so external promotion is generated by the B Corps themselves and all tend to use certification more as an internal measure of progress than a marketing tool.

In the beauty category, however, we do believe there is a growing need to help customers navigate toward the right brands and buying choices. We are fortunate enough now to have a scale and number of members that many will be familiar with, so it makes sense to create and share a simple banner, B Beauty, and communicate a common vision to deliver beauty for good. In a crowded and noisy industry, this clarity can help raise awareness of the B Corp movement.



Why do you think B Corp certification is so important for a brand today?

Because it's the best independent validation of a company's entire actions. It's a forensic audit of the impact of a company on its own people, customers, community, suppliers and planet. Everything. There is no place to hide and it personally taught me the tremendous difference between how good you think you are versus how good you actually act. If other companies were also prepared to discover how big their own promise/reality gap was, I think this would then motivate them to improve across the spectrum, rather than the tendency to greenwash in isolated areas. This is what happens with B Corps – they understand the impact of their actions more, so they constantly strive to improve on a broad front. Other third-party certifications tend to focus on a far narrower scope: ingredients, formula, packaging, sourcing. While each is also relevant and credible, they only account for a fraction of the impact that a company is responsible for.



How can brands help change the world for the better when governments aren't stepping up to the challenge in the same way?

It's interesting you mention this because a recent survey revealed that trust in politicians is now lower than business. Historically, business took a backseat role in shaping the public agenda as shareholder primacy was paramount. But with politics and media increasingly polarised, I see many businesses filling the gap, taking responsibility for their actions and showing a better way. Particularly in the past decade, brands – in parallel with the youth movement – often seem to have more to contribute than those in elected office.

The seeds of this are many and include the growing switch in executive priorities from shareholder primacy to stakeholder primacy; the increasing number of companies registering as B Corps or public benefit corporations; single activist brands shaping the public agenda on national or international levels; and the launch of coalitions and interdependence movements like ours. I would say, however, that not all governments are failing. The Nordic countries that we champion continue to provide the best existing role model for where the world needs to head, while the EU's Green Deal is determined and expansive.



The coalition will be sharing best practices. The beauty industry thrives on brands being 'the first' or 'the best' – how will you encourage behaviour change to ensure more brands come together to solve problems, rather than work in silos?

It's a great question. On a practical level, the 30-plus members will be working together on a pre-competitive level; participation is voluntary, as is information sharing, so company secrets can remain so. But all B Corps sign a Declaration of Interdependence on certification, so collaboration is in our DNA and I personally expect a real cauldron of enthusiasm, transparency and innovation as the coalition gets underway. It's like the old African proverb: "If you want to go fast, go alone. But if you want to go far, go together."



Skandinavisk

Finally, one regarding the B Corp certification process. How did Skandinavisk approach this and what was your core focus when applying?

I've always been inspired by brands with purpose, whose business model goes beyond simple profit motives. Patagonia, Innocent Drinks, The Guardian, Warby Parker to name just a few. These are all pioneering brands that stand for something. They're also all B Corps. At Skandinavisk, we want to inspire the world to take a more Scandinavian approach to life, so we actively celebrate the respect for nature and human balance that Scandinavia is famous for. I wanted to understand if we were genuinely 'walking the talk', so I decided to investigate B Corp certification about five years into our journey. We lined up all our strengths: our purpose, our local sourcing, our responsible packaging, our refugee integration programme, everything we could think of. We barely made it. The certification process was the hardest thing I have ever done. It was brutal in its exposure of all our weaknesses, humbling in its outcome and improvement areas, and inspiring in how it helped reveal the path toward becoming a better version of ourselves. It was the best thing we ever did and the benchmark against which we will now measure our progress. I can only recommend it to any business leader.



Action points

1

Be honest

Consumers are becoming more attuned to greenwashing and claims that hold no substance. Don't make them search for the answers. Be transparent about your progress and challenges to embed trust in your brand and generate loyalty

2

Collaboration is key

Work with your competitors to find solutions to common problems. Collaborative efforts will accelerate your brand's goals, consumer reach and growth potential and can complement, not jeopardise, industry leadership

3

Use the BIA tool

B Lab's Impact Assessment tool will give you insights into your brand that were previously inaccessible. Whether you want to be certified or not, these insights and subsequent suggestions for improvement will future-proof your brand

4

Prioritise education

If you're B Corp certified or looking to be, consumer and employee education is key. The former will ensure your purpose is clear to see, while the latter will ensure it's embedded into the fabric of your brand, facilitating certification now and in the future