

Shannon Boase: The world in the palm of her hand

By Nina Velasquez

For Capilano College graduate, Shannon Boase, a seven-year stint in Asia inspired her to make products that she hopes won't be around too long. Not something you hear from the average entrepreneur!

In 1987, after graduating from SFU with a bachelor's degree in Marketing, Shannon enrolled in Capilano College's post-graduate Asia Pacific Management Cooperative Program (APMCP). "I couldn't face a desk job, which was surely awaiting me after I received my undergraduate degree," says Shannon, now 41. "I wanted to see more of the world and felt my business skills could be put to good use overseas – the APMCP was just what I wanted and the co-op opportunity seemed intriguing."

After completing her co-op in Bangkok, Shannon completed an MBA in France and then moved to Malaysia, where the annual palm fruit harvest is big business for the country and, as it turns out, for Shannon as well!

The palm oil extraction process involves burning off the leftover husk fibre, thus producing massive amounts of smoke. Irritating to her allergies as it was, it was the smoke that got Shannon thinking about other uses for the by-products, rather than letting them go to waste.

A few years later, while working for the venture capital arm of the Malaysian government, an idea began to take shape. Shannon and her colleagues devised a way to bring to market leftover palm husk fibre that could be made into compostable packaging for a range of products including food, consumer products and electronics.

"The great thing about palm fibre is that it's naturally oil - and water-resistant, is freezable and microwavable, breaks down in a compost in just 90 days, and comes from an abundantly renewable resource," says Shannon.

She decided to bring the benefit of her international experience, along with her new product idea, back to Vancouver and, in 2005, began producing the packaging through her new company, Earthcycle Packaging. It's been uphill from there, but not without some hard work.

"My day usually starts at 6 a.m. when I check my e-mail," says Shannon. "We do most of our business with the eastern U.S.A. and south-east Asia, so with the time difference, an early start is crucial."



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