



Expanding the Playing Field: Nike's World Shoe Project (A) *(ABSTRACT)*

For more than a decade, WRI's Sustainable Enterprise Program (SEP) has harnessed the power of business to create profitable solutions to environment and development challenges. BELL, a project of SEP, is focused on working with managers and academics to make companies more competitive by approaching social and environmental challenges as unmet market needs that provide business growth opportunities through entrepreneurship, innovation, and organizational change.

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“To bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world.”

-- Company Mission Statement

“We want to be able to shoe and clothe young athletes of the world regardless of where they live. To do it for really difficult socioeconomic situations is both challenging and rewarding.”

*-- Tom Hartge, Footwear Director
for Emerging Markets*

The words “Just make me the shoe!” echoed down the boardroom table to Tom Hartge a 17- year veteran of the running shoe company, Nike, Inc. Tom Clarke, president of the company in 1998, had attended the meetings, seen the presentations and reviewed the numbers related to the market potential of China: a rough gem with a booming population of 1.2 billion. He also knew that in many parts of the world, including China, people couldn't afford Nike's current footwear products. Clarke didn't want to listen to any more speeches. He wanted to hold in his hand a tangible prototype—a specialized shoe that could sell in an emerging economy. Nike's challenge was to “expand the playing field” with a range of affordable, durable, and easy-to-produce sport shoes. So with this command, Hartge, Director of Emergine Market Footwear, teamed up with long-time shoe designer Alex Gajowskyj, and in early 1998 began the development of the World Shoe Project, a footwear line exclusively intended for emerging markets in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.