

Pangea Organics

ENVISIONING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

“I think people focus so much on the problems of the world that they get overwhelmed,” Joshua Onysko says. The antidote to paralysis is to focus on what you can do. Take one step. And then another. That’s how change occurs. “Think about the history of the future and what you want that to look like, and then become part of that vehicle.”

For Onysko, tomorrow’s history is one in which corporations are as sustainable and socially and environmentally conscious as they are profitable. To make his vision manifest he turned to what he knew: making soap. His first step has blossomed into Pangea Organics, a producer of natural body care products and the country’s largest organic soap processor. His next step is to teach others how to do the same.

Onysko didn’t set out to become the Sultan of skin care. “It’s not like my passion is lotion and toner,” says the 29-year-old high school dropout who has lived with monks on an island off the coast of China, hung with the Dalai Lama in India, sold fake Rolexes in Tokyo’s red light district for the Yakuza and started



Pangea Organics’ Sultan of skincare Joshua Onysko

his business making soap in his Jackson Hole garage and selling it at country fairs and in concert parking lots. “My passion is trying to save the world.” Everything we create is an expression of ourselves, he says. It’s not so much what you do, as long as you do it with intent and integrity.

Pangea’s luscious creams, toners, soaps and cleansers are redolent with the exoticness of Onysko’s travels: Malagasy ylang ylang, Nigerian ginger, Argentinean tangerine, French rosemary, Italian white sage, Egyptian calendula, Pyrenees lavender and Japanese matcha. The fancy names are no greenwash—they remind us that our actions have far-reaching impact. What’s more important is what’s not in the bottles: petroleum-derived molecules, sulphates, synthetic preservatives

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Pangea Organics (continued)

or artificial anything. The earth's natural enzymes will begin to break down Pangea's plant-based ingredients within 48 hours of sending them down the drain. The other stuff takes over 200 years to biodegrade.

The body care products impart an important message about honoring our bodies and caring for the planet. But they're just the first step, the foundation for Onysko's visionary future. That future lies in the creation of the Pangea Institute, a non-profit that will act as an incubator, nurturing new ventures, helping companies embrace sustainability and inventing a new paradigm for tomorrow's businesses.

Pangea Organics is the poster child for Onysko's enlightened future. In Boulder, CO, its 10,000 square foot wind-powered facility is as socially and environmentally responsible as they come. Carpeting is made from recycled PET bottles. The paint is non-toxic. And there's an employee-run 3,000 square foot organic garden that feeds the entire staff for seven months a year. Employees receive a living wage (minimum \$12.50/hour), full health benefits, including coverage of alternative health modalities, and free state-wide public transport passes.

Each year, Pangea plants trees on three continents to offset its carbon emissions. Through its unique seed-laced recycled-newsprint-based biodegradable packaging it will empower customers to plant 1.2 million trees by the end of the year (just soak the box in water and plant to grow a tree).

Pangea also buys essential oils from 52 countries, supporting 45,000 acres of organic farmland and has pledged to source 20% of its plant-based ingredients from women-owned farms by 2010. Plus a chunk of its profits fund the Pangea Institute. "It's a lot to fit into a little building," Onysko says.

Speaking to Onysko is a bit like talking to a quietly passionate Zen priest channeling Yoda. He's thought deeply about the world and its problems. His koan is: "You can't go from here to there, but you can go from there to here." He's talking about crafting history again. "Once you know where there is, it's really easy to walk back. But sometimes people just start walking here and don't know where they're going and there is no there." It's a mind-twister worthy of contemplation. "Find out where you fit in the solution, not where you fit in the problem, and the solution will reveal the problems and allow you to act on them in a positive way." And that's how you can create the history of the future. **H**