

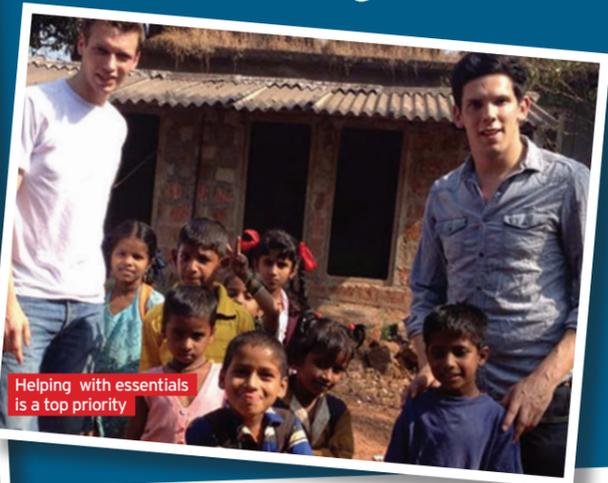
The biggest bonus is meeting the orphans



Gandys helps to fund educational equipment



Rob with two young orphans in Goa



Helping with essentials is a top priority

The Domino Effect

Today Gandys flip-flops are worn by a quarter of a million people, and their meteoric success is helping to improve the lives of orphans around the world

Believing in something is a huge part of the story behind the 'Orphans for Orphans' initiative, which Gandys established to improve the lives of children who have lost their parents. In fact, it is at the very heart of the flip-flop company's business philosophy. Rob and Paul Forkan - who have developed a highly successful range of flip flops - are orphans themselves. They tragically lost both their parents when the Boxing Day Tsunami struck the coastline of Sri Lanka in 2004. As two of six siblings, Rob and Paul Forkan then 13 and 11 respectively, had until that day lived a relatively charmed life. When Rob was 11 years old their parents took all the children out of school to travel around the world for five years. After spending a year in India and time in Africa, they moved on to Sri Lanka,

where the family was living in two beach huts by the sea. The day after Christmas their lives would change forever. If the Forkan brothers' parents were here today, they would be incredibly proud of what their sons have achieved. In less than 18 months, Gandys flip-flops were stocked in ten top UK retailers, and are now in the biggest shoe retailer in America. When FYM arrives at Gandys' London office, we want to hear what drives them - what keeps them going. We meet Rob, the elder of the two brothers. Although success seems to have come quickly, it didn't come easily. "It's been about eight months since I watched any TV," he says. At times they have worked for 48 hours without a break, and have even been known to be back in the office straight after Christmas dinner.

"Friends and family all thought we were mad. We had good jobs, making decent money - but I knew I could always go back to that. We believed in something and we had to take a chance and just do it," says Rob.

Giving back
Rob says that the company's business model is different to others. "We do reinvest in the business, but the giving goes out straight away," he explains. Gandys gives 10% of profits to charity, and they are doing it right now. Other ways that the firm gives is by purchasing monthly essentials for Mango House orphanage in Goa, India. This month's shopping list includes recruiting a community nurse who will not only work at the orphanage, but also support children and families in the area.

It seems this commitment to making a difference can really have an impact. When Gandys met the first big retailer in the UK, the head buyer asked: "What is the goal of your company?" We just said: "We want an orphanage on every continent." That is Gandys' big vision, and they want to achieve it by their 10th anniversary. It's an ambitious goal, but they're 100% committed to making it happen. It seems UK retailers want to help them too. "The head buyer literally just went: 'Done. I'm up for it' and wrote out a cheque," Rob tells us.

The buyer went on to say: "From now on, the rest [of UK retailers] are going to go like dominoes because you've signed this deal with us." He was right - they did.



Before: The two boys (centre) with their parents (back right)

Q&A Insights

FYM: What past experiences have equipped you for business?
Travelling around the world gives you lots of confidence, communication and negotiating skills. You gain common sense and become streetwise. When I was 19, Paul and I went around the world for a year - totally off-the-beaten-track. If you can navigate yourself around the world you should be able to navigate most things in life.

FYM: What other experiences have been helpful? My old boss is willing to invest in Gandys and that's all down to my work ethic. People who work hard get somewhere. You can get a job description on paper, and that's fine, but I always looked at how I could take on more to help and to learn. This adds more strings to your bow in terms of future jobs, pay rise and advancement. You can start in sales but then also learn other aspects of a business (read some of Gandys' great selling tips on p26-27).

FYM: What was the process from initial idea to design to getting your product on the shelves?
You don't have to invest mega money. We used alibaba.com (an e-commerce platform connecting small businesses) and ordered loads of samples. We came up with our version and spent a lot of time talking to overseas manufacturers to get samples made. The first product was made of

woven rope, but there's been constant development over 18 months. We started by ordering 100 pairs but we've got 100,000 coming in this month. This summer 250,000 people will be wearing our flip-flops.

FYM: Were your start-up costs insane? Our costs were manageable because everything slowly built up. When we got our original product we only had one set of samples...[they pitched hard knowing it was worth more investment once orders were in]. You learn to be creative. We started off taking pictures in our bath with our iPhones to get a white background - and save money!

FYM: What's been the best part of your journey so far? It's really cool to see your product in shops, or hearing people talking about buying a pair of Gandys flip-flops without knowing I am sitting there. But the best part would have to be going to India at Christmas and taking the orphans shoes and other necessities. That's what we are really passionate about. ■

