**Blake Mycoskie Speaks about “Sole” Inspiring Marketing Approach for TOM’s Shoes**

Statesboro, GA- Entrepreneur and Founder of TOM’s Shoes, Blake Mycoskie, gave a speech to Georgia Southern University students and public, on Monday, February 1st, entitled “The New Rules for Tomorrow’s Business: A Students Guide to Making a Difference in The World.” The event, sponsored by the Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, and the office of Student Leadership & Civic Engagement, had an overwhelming turnout. A substantial audience crowded into the 7 p.m. event, leaving over four hundred students stuck outside the Georgia Southern University’s Performing Arts Center, as Mycoskie discussed inside, his marketing ideologies and how he began his shoe company that is: half business, half charity, and all heart.

You may recognize founder Blake Mycoskie as a previous contestant of “The Amazing Race,” and from his long-running AT&T commercial promoting small business, but what shot Blake Mycoskie to stardom was his charitable business success, TOM’s Shoes.

Mycoskie told the packed theatre how he developed the idea for TOM’s Shoes during a vacation he took to Argentina, to get away from his job as a Driver’s Education software salesman. While sitting in a coffee shop in Argentina, he over-heard the only two English-speaking people he noticed, and upon introducing himself and talking casually about how the two local’s were going to a “shoe drive”, Mycoskie asked for an invite. It was at that charity event, that the idea for TOM’s Shoes formed, as Mycoskie assisted the locals in handing out donated shoes to young children in the nearby community.

 Mycoskie went on to explain how the two locals had told him that, not only were the children more susceptible to diseases when they did not own shoes to wear, but also they were not allowed at school without them; so children who could not afford shoes, were being denied an education because of an everyday item, they cannot afford. When he realized the positivity of helping these children, along with recognizing the fact that they would soon grow out of their “new” shoes, Mycoskie saw this crisis as an opportunity to give back to our global society, while also starting his sixth and most successful business yet.

 The TOM’s project started off with the name “Shoes for Tomorrow,” but was later shortened to just “TOM’s”. TOM’s then created the logo, “Ono for Ono,” which reflected their business tactic, which consists of donating a pair of Mycoskie’s updated design, on traditional Argentinean alpargata-style shoes, for every pair he sells. He told the students how he started off with just 250 pairs of shoes that he was selling out of his apartment along with his twenty “interns”, to expanding into a thriving global business, which has donated over 400,000 pairs of shoes around the world, and counting.

“What I realized in the last four years is that giving not only feels good,” Mycoskie said, “but it’s actually a really good business strategy as well, and that’s okay.” He went on to further explain his marketing strategies and how they applied to, what he called, “Social Entrepreneurship,” or the TOM’s idea of mixing business with a charitable donation drive.

His first major point was how he believes a successful business should have *sustainability*. “The word ‘sustainability’ gets thrown around a lot these days,” he said. “I don’t even think we know what it means anymore.”

“[TOM’s] to me, is what sustainability is all about,” Mycoskie said. “It’s about creating something that can continue to feed itself so you don’t have to go back to the well, to the investors, to the foundation, [and] the people making donations.” This is exactly what TOM’s does as each shoe sales feeds the donation cycle, while still creating enough profit to continue creating new designs and support Mycoskie’s global pledge to assist children in poverty.

Another successful approach Mycoskie discussed in effectively managing TOM’s, is allowing his customers to become his personal marketers. He described a story of spotting a pair of red TOM’s on a girl in an airport and how she enthusiastically, but unknowingly, told Mycoskie all about his own shoe company, as he acted as it was his first time hearing about it. It was then Mycoskie realized that by making a product that people could really care about, that word-of-mouth advertising would be enough to sustain his business and would allow him to put what money he saves in advertising, right back into his business.

Mycoskie shared with the audience TOM’s many triumphs in gaining positive global recognition, including the high honor of being featured in a magazine article with Bill Gates on “How to Fix Capitalism”. Other TOM’s spotlight includes a feature spread in Vogue, as well as being in the 2006 hit, “The Devil Wears Prada.” TOM’s has even had the opportunity of teaming with clothing brands, such as *Theory* and *Ralph Lauren*, who has never had his name associated with any product he hasn’t personally designed.

“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give,” Mycoskie said, as he summed up his speech. “Exercise your purchasing power as a consumer, volunteer and bring joy to those in need, and share your experiences, tell your stories, and inspire others along the way.”

For more information on TOM’s shoes, how to donate, or to purchase your own pair, visit [www.tomsshoes.com](http://www.tomsshoes.com). Additionally, on March 2, from 4-7 p.m., in the Russell Union Ballroom, a TOM’s shoe decoration activity entitled “Style Your Sole” will be taking place. Students are encouraged to bring, or purchase a pair of white canvas TOM’s shoes and customize them with their own designs with art supplies provided by the Student Activity Center.