



***Brand Analysis
Karhu***

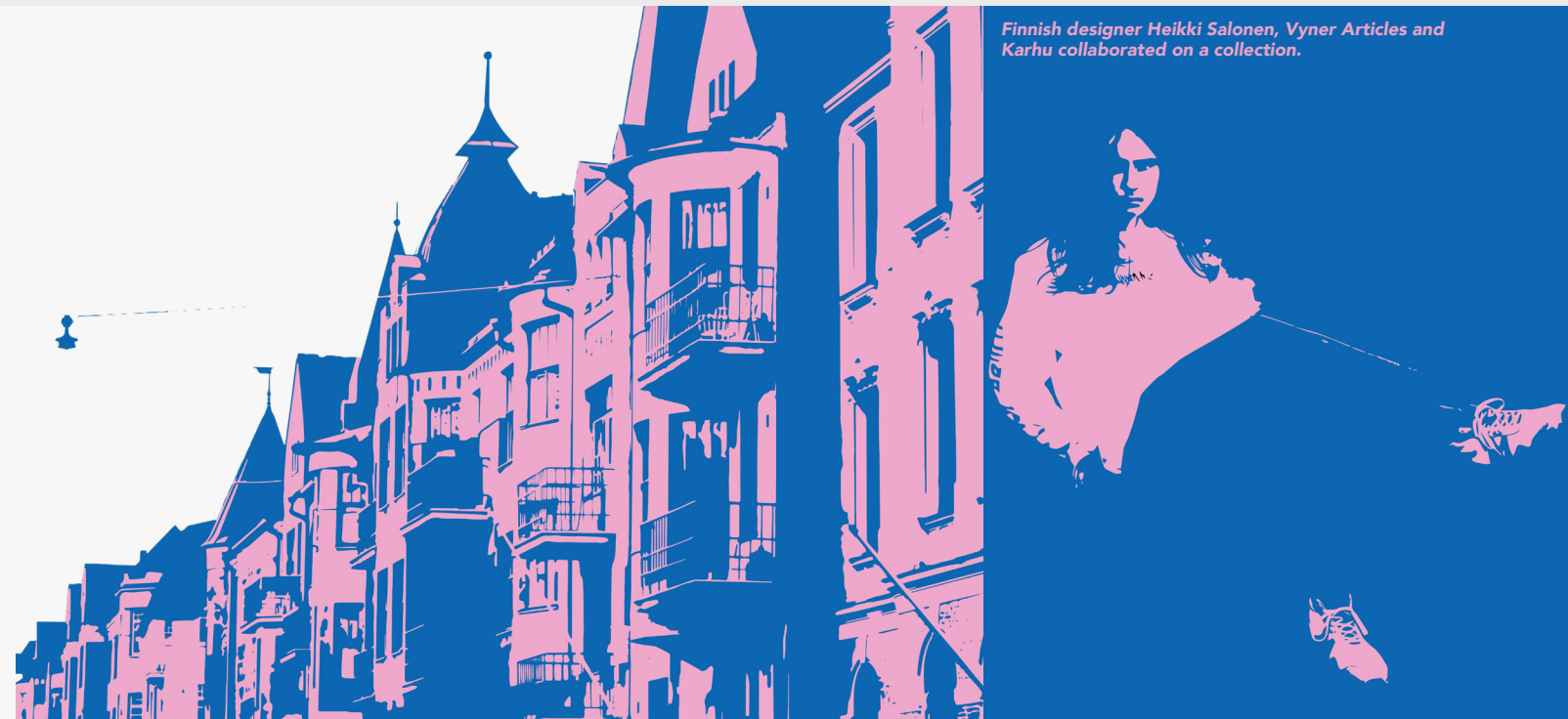
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First and last one standing

Let's run a mile in these mysterious sneakers! Karhu is an old brand but you've probably never heard of them. So in this article I'll tell you why you should know about them, why they work well and what they could do better. Ready, set go!

Interesting...

- ◆ Karhu was founded in 1916 as a general sports brand, making javelins and skis out of locally sourced birch. Eventually the brand developed into mainly making running shoes. Karhu was popular from the 1920 to the 80s. They first became known when the "Flying Finns" won many gold medals running with Karhu shoes. One of the most famous of the Flying Finns was Paavo Nurmi. He won five gold medals in track events in the 1924 Summer Olympics wearing Karhu.
- ◆ Karhu produced snow-camouflage suits, tents and skis for the Finnish military during the Winter War and Continuation War, from 1939–1945 (The wars that won Finland's independence from the Soviet Union).
- ◆ The three stripes were originally Karhu's logo but they sold them to Adidas on one evening at the Helsinki Olympics in 1952 for about 1,600 Euros and a couple of bottles of whiskey.
- ◆ Karhu invented the first patented "Air Cushion" air-midsole system for running (take that Nike).



Karhu's logo has a bear because that is what it means in Finnish.



Paavo "The Flying Finn" Nurmi set world records for most of the middle and long distance races.

What's up with Karhu?

Karhu is a Finnish sports shoe brand. They sell different type of shoes, some more street style sneakers, good for walking and hiking and some more towards running and racing. Additionally, they sell everyday apparel like hoodies, socks, shorts and headwear. The brand carries an oldschool, earthy, nordic sports feeling. What gives Karhu a distinctive style to their shoes is that they have unexpected color combinations. Their collections colours are inspired by nature and cityscape.

Karhu's current marketing technique is consistent soft selling. They build awareness for their brand by doing collaborations with other brands and creators and sponsoring sports events. Because of their collaborative projects with other creatives, Karhu stays fresh and interesting and by merging fan bases they reach out to new people. Being present in sport events, Karhu strengthens their sporty image showing their unwavering love for sports and their roots.

Their values include authenticity, exclusiveness and quality over quantity. Karhu is always evolving and innovating their shoes to be better than before. They believe that once a runner tries their shoes they become loyal to the brand. Their selling points are their fascinating history, innovative shoe technology, fun style and the interesting collaboration projects. They want to be the most authentic and sought-after brand. Because of their consistent approach I believe that they will be the last one standing.



Shinrin Yoku (forest bathing) is the Japanese practice of spending time in nature for the purpose of meditation or healing. Karhu made a collection inspired by this and the colours from nature.

Staying authentic

Their goal is to always stay authentic and they share openly about their process. This way the customer feels like they can trust the brand and that might just tip the scale to buy their shoes over some other brand. On their website they have blog posts of all the collaborations they have done. So that people who are interested in the process on how the collection and project came to be, can learn about it.

Karhu is transparent with explaining the science behind their shoes. They've had a lot of innovations with their shoe technology and they have proven with their studies that running with their shoes helps to run faster. An example of their advancements is the Fulcrum technology. It was adapted and tested with the university of Jyväskylä in 2018. It is designed for forward movement by offering balanced cushion, increased support and more energy at toe-off. The technology helps stabilize the runner which makes for a smoother and faster run. By showing data of how their shoes work and why it's better, it sets them apart from competitors who don't do that or that don't have the best background to them. Karhu also makes their shoes by hand in Finland which is quite rare, now that everything is outsourced to other countries and factories.

Double edged sword

Karhu is a great brand but it seems like they aren't getting enough fruit from their labor. The question is,

why isn't Karhu well-known even though they have been around for so long? Karhu has stated that their goal is to expand to America, which shows that they have a desire to be better known and have a bigger fanbase. On the other hand they have also said that they haven't gone the sports marketing route because it's a "big-brand thing". Perhaps Karhu fears losing their autonomy of their brand and messaging. There is an advantage for being independent, it allows them to make their own decisions so they can support the creators and causes that they believe in. But do they want to stay underground to keep their independence or is this statement just a way of camouflaging their descent in popularity from their golden age in the 80s. Is it possible to actively sell a product without selling your soul in the process?

The mainstream doesn't know about Karhu, only the "sneakerheads" in the Karhu bubble. Fans get to know about their upcoming collections mainly from their Instagram. The problem with not marketing their brand more effectively, Karhu is missing out on the people who would benefit from their products. It's such a hidden gem to find them. An area Karhu could work on more is their active communication with potential customers. Karhu trusts that the products speak for themselves. That might be a bit of a gamble. When someone is online shopping for shoes, Karhu doesn't show up, but all other major brands do. With some digging one can find Karhu's blog posts and their youtube videos. But the truth is that most people don't have the time or energy to start looking for a new brand and researching it. They want the answers delivered immediately.



Karhu stays competitive by always bettering their shoes technology

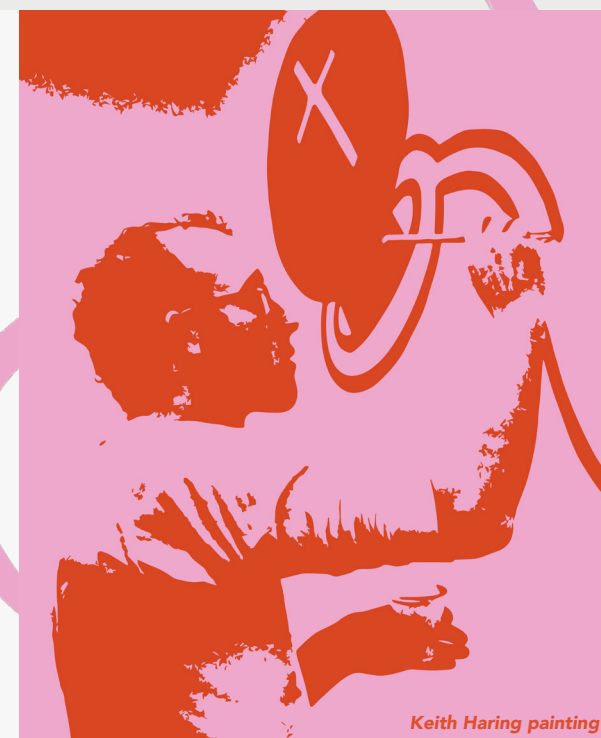
The M letter stands for champion on their shoes.



Karhu wants to expand to the US



Mural concept for collaboration with Keith Haring



His art has a lot of meaningful symbols



Artistic campaign idea

I think it's really awesome that they do projects that are interesting to them and that make a difference. But I feel like Karhu should concentrate more on reaching out to new people and actively advertising their brand in the outside world and not depending on instagram or twitter for example. Right now Karhu doesn't have any offline marketing, posters on the streets or what not.

I pitch a mural project that would naturally be launched with a new collection of shoes inspired by the mural. The goal with this campaign is to reach more people than the people already in the Karhu bubble. It's targeted towards young people that are interested in the outdoors and street fashion. The mural would be ideally in a busy city like Amsterdam or Helsinki for example, somewhere where a lot of people go by.

This would work for Karhu because it's something I could see them already doing. Murals are a strong stagnant message that catch the attention of people passing by. It's a piece of art in a busy city which speaks for itself, soft selling in an artistic way. A mural is also good in the sense that it stays up for a long time and pays itself back. People love art and a beautiful mural will get social media attraction. People who share a picture of the mural are spreading further the message of Karhu (for free). Other bold brands that have done murals are Oatly and Gucci for example.

Making a statement

Choosing the right artist for the mural is important. Artists are brands in a way. They stand for their own thoughts and represent different ideals. I suggest the mural to be inspired by the artist and activist Keith Haring. His style is bold, colorful and modern. In his work he has a lot of repeating symbols that have meaningful messages to them. Keith Haring was an artist for the people. He wanted to bring his art to the every day life and painted over 50 public murals. He devoted his career to bringing awareness to important world issues. This is why I believe Keith Haring would fit well with Karhu. By choosing an artist like Keith Haring, Karhu also states that they stand by the important issues that Haring stood by.

This campaign would work well in Karhu's favor, because he is very known, better known than Karhu so it would reach a lot of people. It also would tie well with Karhu's hopes to expand to the US since he was from New York. With Keith Haring's history with murals I feel like it would be a natural way of bringing them two together. Also the collection of shoes that would come out of this collaboration would be insanely popular.

Hope you have a better idea of the brand Karhu now and what kind of work they do. They are a cool brand and I hope to see them standing strong as the years keep rolling by.

