

Disrupting the Supply Chain

An Interview with
Scott Tannen, Co-Founder, Boll & Branch



Missy Tannen with Boll & Branch bedding products

EDITORS' NOTE *Boll & Branch (bollandbranch.com) was started in 2014 by husband and wife duo Missy and Scott Tannen. They didn't start out as "sheets people." Missy was a third grade teacher and Scott was a marketer-turned-tech entrepreneur. After searching for new sheets for their family, the two realized there was a gap in the market for quality, luxury linens at an affordable price. From their living room in New Jersey, Scott and Missy launched Boll & Branch to give consumers a better choice. Today, the team has grown to 22 people. In addition to sheets, Boll & Branch now makes towels, blankets, and baby linens, all while remaining committed to creating a better standard for quality and fairness.*



Scott Tannen

Will you talk about the vision for the Boll & Branch brand early on?

My wife Missy and I were shopping for new sheets a few years back, and after spending an entire day going from store to store, we realized that no one could tell us where the sheets came from, how they were made, or the difference between a \$500 set and a \$50 set. After doing some research on the textile industry, and more specifically the cotton trade, we came to find out that it was wrought with dishonesty and manipulation (and had been since its origin) – we knew we could do better. Upon this realization, we decided to start Boll & Branch and tackle the problem at its root, starting with the cotton seed itself and empowering those that farm one of the world's most sought-after crops, all the way through the supply chain to the moment our product reaches the customer's home.

In breaking into an industry that has many players, how challenging is it to cut through the clutter to tell your story?

Telling the Boll & Branch story is not the challenging part. The hard part is convincing the industry that they are stuck in a dishonest story that is hurting the environment and literally kills people and perpetuates the cycle of poverty. We could not be a party to that, so we decided to flip the industry on its head. When we tell our story to people, the message resonates. People lock onto those same truths that inspired us to go down this road in the first place. Hundreds of thousands of our customers are now marching with us, demanding change.

Will you touch on the quality of the product and how critical it was from the start to make sure that was at the forefront?

Boll & Branch is the fastest growing company in the home textiles category and the largest consumer producer of Fair Trade home goods in the world. Most importantly, our commitment to ethical practices runs from the ground up. Unlike most bedding brands, we know exactly where each ounce of cotton used to make our products comes from, down to the

farmer and the exact parcel of land it was grown on. Beyond the traceability of our cotton, we also have real, personal relationships with these farmers and consider them true partners in the business, valuing their skill and their personal success. Our business model is built around our commitment to ethical sourcing, so it is important to us that we directly oversee all aspects of manufacturing, from the spinning of the thread to the final stitches made in the factory.

We believe that consumers shouldn't have to spend hours researching in order to buy a great quality, ethically made product. Not only do we directly oversee every aspect of making our products ourselves, but we have trusted third parties like Fair Trade USA and GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standards) to constantly evaluate and audit our work, to make sure nothing slips through.

On top of our commitment to ethical manufacturing and practices, attention to detail is of the utmost importance as each Boll & Branch piece is constructed with exacting standards, designed with beauty, softness, and durability in mind, with minimal impact on the environment, as all of the products are toxin-free.

What does that mean to the customer? Simply that when they see a Boll & Branch product, they know we've done the leg work and research and have done everything necessary to make sure that our products will take as good care of the people who make them as they will our customers.

Are there natural extensions and new product lines that make sense?

We started off with our core bedding and introduced our bath collection in late 2015, with all products created from the finest 100 percent organic cotton, designed for beauty, softness, and durability. Throughout the past two years, we've launched flannel bedding and expanded to baby and kids collections, beach towels, hats, and scarves.

Will you talk about the company's philanthropic efforts?

When Missy and I began our research, we discovered the unfortunate truth about the cotton industry. Historically, traditional cotton farmers have relied on genetically modified seeds that require a huge amount of toxic chemicals and fertilizers to make their crops grow quickly and abundantly. They often fall into immense debt from having to continually purchase the expensive subsidies involved in conventional cotton farming, leaving them in a very difficult spot with few options. Additionally, working in direct contact with these chemicals marks a great health and safety risk for not only the farmers, but for their entire families and for the environment. Soil depletion, water contamination, and disrupted ecosystems are regular byproducts of conventional cotton farming.

By contrast, we learned that organic cotton farmers are able to implement sustainable, eco-friendly methods free from chemical additives, creating a healthier workplace and environment. Our farmers use natural techniques to ward off insects and threats, ensuring that all of our products are made of 100 percent organic cotton. We're also Fair Trade Certified, so the farmers of our organic cotton earn a fair wage, and a portion of the money earned by the farming cooperatives is put towards bettering the community, through building schools, purchasing clean water supplies, and teaching members of the community various trades.

Another unfortunate aspect of the industry is issues like sweatshops and forced labor, so we decided to work with Not For Sale, a group that is extremely active in combatting human trafficking. We can only reach so many people with our own supply chain, but by supporting this group, it extends our reach. They share the vision we do that, as we travel upstream and provide economic opportunity, there is strength in combatting human trafficking more so than by making a donation.

We founded Boll & Branch in order to create a traceable, sustainable supply chain that supports every member, from farmer to factory worker. We think it is important to tell this story to our consumers so they can feel good about every purchase they make from us. By driving up demand for organic cotton, we are finally making it possible for farmers to generate profits and support their families. ●