

# Success Is in the Bag

Orient Sports Gear

*From collecting scrap textile materials to sew into shorts, a couple's livelihood has grown into a booming enterprise that produces bags for local and foreign markets.*

**PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT**

It only took seamstress Jane Manansala 30 days to learn how to make bags. Orient Sports Gear makes travel bags, school backpacks, laptop bags, and hiking backpacks.



The Orient Sports Gear brand of Dioscoro Manansala and wife Jane has been getting high-volume orders from local and global buyers, including 4,000 bags from a Canadian businessman, 25,000 from a bookstore chain, and 8,000 from an international distributor.

The Orient Sports Gear brand is noted for melding fashion and function together, which, Jane, coming from a long lineage of seamstresses, is no stranger to.

With her mother and mother-in-law residing in other provinces, Jane had to resort to backyard hog raising to be able to look after her kids. However, complaints from neighbors about the smell forced her to stop the enterprise. Thus, began her foray into sewing.

Her enterprise started with only a capital of Php 11,000, with which she bought a sewing machine to produce shorts. After a year, someone ordered bags and Jane alternated their bag production with making shorts until 1997, when she went full-time into bag making for better margins.

As the couple's profits and captive market rose, so did their capital, number of employees, and equipment. Now, Orient Sports Gear can produce 3,000 bags monthly, but only after hurdling daunting challenges.

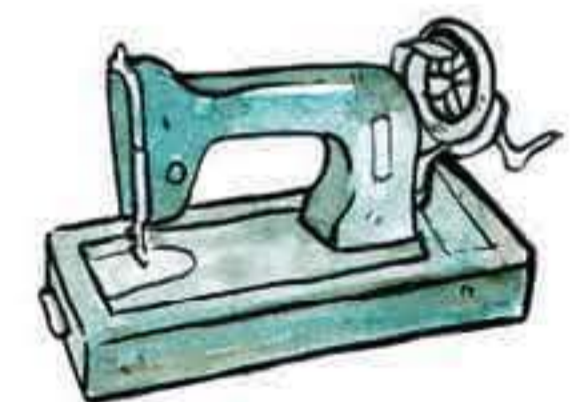
"Back when we started, my husband would go behind the factories to collect [scrap] textiles, threads, and other materials that were left there for the garbage trucks," Jane recalls.

Her husband then would sell their products mostly to friends as she had to turn down orders for bags she could not produce, making the couple eventually hire expert sewers who got laid off by the factories, or wanted to work close to home.

There were also times when Jane ran out of capital and had to borrow, but she made sure to keep her creditworthiness unstained.

The break came when the couple got help from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). "It's very reassuring that the DTI is behind us MSMEs (micro, small, and medium enterprises)," Jane points out.

"I was scared of [government agencies]," Jane laughed, "I had to go to the DTI to get a permit for an order. Then the DTI started inviting me to their seminars—accounting for non-accountants, branding, costing, etc.—all for free with coffee, lunch, and merienda!"



**DID YOU KNOW?**

The earliest sewing needles were made of bones about 25,000 to 30,000 years ago.



DTI's persistence eventually made Jane attend a workshop, then another. Soon, the DTI sent the couple to various trade fairs, where they met big institutional buyers.

"DTI is a blessing!" she stresses. The couple shares the DTI spirit with everyone, including an American product designer, who describes them as "the warmest, most caring people you will ever meet."

Inspired by DTI's assistance, Jane offers free training to the people in her community, graduating about a hundred of them over the last six years, and recommending them to other companies.

The Manansalas have also assisted in setting up a bagmakers cooperative in Mariveles, and encouraging members to partner with DTI and join its seminars. Mariveles is now known for excellent bags.

Moreover, Orient Sports Gear gives free bags to children at the beginning of the school year and raffles off some products during New Year's Eve, right outside the family residence.

Just like the couple, most of the employees are formerly displaced factory workers. Never forgetting where they have come from, the couple is sure to keep their success in the bag.

**EMPOWERING OTHERS**  
Orient Sports Gear now manufactures up to 3,000 bags monthly. The Manansalas have contributed to Mariveles' reputation of having excellent sewers. The company plans on increasing its online presence in the future. They have given back to the community by employing displaced factory workers.



## HOW DTI HELPED

Jane Manansala and her bag makers expanded the market for their brand, Orient Sports Gear, when the DTI Batangas Provincial Office invited them to participate and promote their products at the DTI-sponsored *Silbest Pilvey* trade fair.



**PRODUCT VARIETY**  
In only five years, the Orient Sports Gear brand already includes slings, backpacks, and totes, as well as bags for traveling, hiking, laptops, and school.

