

## The Left Shoe Company: Profile

### Company Background

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The Left Shoe Company is an Internet service selling customized footwear from Finnish shoe company Pomarfin Ltd. Pomarfin was founded nearly fifty years ago and is headquartered in Pomarkku, Finland. Since its inception, it has grown to become the leading manufacturer of casual footwear in Finland.<sup>1</sup> With 180 employees—nearly one third of which are located in Pomarfin’s main manufacturing facility in Parnu, Estonia<sup>2</sup>—the company produces shoes for men, women, and children. The Pomarfin brand is associated with shoes that are well-designed, made with quality materials, and built to be comfortable and durable in the climates of Northern Europe.<sup>3</sup>

In the late 1990s, the head of Pomarfin—Jarno Fonsen—explored the idea of providing customized footwear in addition to Pomarfin’s mainstream business of producing conventional shoes. He saw an opportunity in the fact that the current system of shoe-sizing focused on the length of shoes. Variations in width and other size measures were inconsistent among brands, and Internet and postal shoe sales were problematic because costumers could not try on shoes in advance. So in 1998, the company began to develop a system that used 3D technology to take detailed measurements of customers’ feet in order to create made-to-measure shoes.<sup>4</sup>

In collaboration with Stuttgart-based high-technology company Corpus.e, Pomarfin obtained special scanners that used advanced digital camera technology. Pomarfin also enlisted the help of three Finnish software companies to create a reliable content management system (CMS) that allowed the sharing and storing of data—an element crucial to Left Shoe’s business. The system needed to effectively link information from the in-store scanning hardware created by Corpus.e to Left Shoe’s Internet-based system and the factory in Estonia where the shoes were to be made.<sup>5</sup>

After three years of in-depth development, Fonsen launched The Left Shoe Company in 2001. Its purpose was to sell customized shoes over the Internet. By 2008, 10% of Pomarfin’s revenues came from Left Shoe.<sup>6</sup> Today, Left Shoe shoes can be purchased from nine retailers who have Left Shoe scanners in Pomarkku, Turku, Helsinki, Espoo, and Tampere in Finland and in Kuala Lumpur, Osaka (Japan), and Kaiserslautern and Grosswalstadt (Germany).



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