

Empretec Women in Business Awards

World Investment Forum

Abu Dhabi, UAE

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PAKISTAN

Nazish Hussain (Nationality USA)

Founder, Secret Stash
(e-commerce)

Website: www.secretstash.pk

"My biggest achievement has been educating about the merits of making sustainable fashion choices, while saving money and looking fashionable."

Nazish Hussain started Secret Stash in 2014 as an online resale platform for fashion items, championing sustainable fashion, economic savings and focusing in education the community about sustainable fashion choices to contribute to combat climate change through second-hand fashion.

Nazish conceived her idea of business inspired by the vintage shopping culture in San Francisco (USA) and took to Pakistan the idea of giving people the opportunity to make money from unwanted items, while giving someone else the chance to access items they could not normally afford. Thank to her previous knowledge of digital media, she left a thriving corporate career to fully dedicate to Secret Stash, only after some years of building the brand and creating the market.

Despite second-hand markets have existed in Pakistan for decades (mainly with donated items coming from western countries), Nazish feels that one of her biggest achievements has been the role of her business in breaking the cultural taboo surrounding second-hand fashion and educating Pakistanis about the merits of making sustainable fashion choices, while saving money and looking fashionable. Pakistan is expected to be one of the top 5 most vulnerable countries to climate change and we are already seeing the impact of devastating floods last year, and educating the communities in sustainable fashion can help contribute to combat climate change.

While Covid-19 pandemic critically impacted her business, she managed to keep her company afloat while deciding to avoid raising financing commitments. As a solo female founder, Nazish feels has felt the pressure to run her business, despite being part of support programs. "As entrepreneurs, no matter whom or where we are, we all go through an up and down journey and must proudly take ownership of our decisions", she acknowledges.

With her company employing currently six employees, 71% of whom are women, she finds leading by example is one of the most valuable entrepreneurial skills she learnt from the Empretec Entrepreneurship Training Workshop (ETW). During the past years, Secret Stash has held an annual charity sale, raising thousands of dollars and clothes that were donated to various organizations helping those most impacted by the pandemic, not only giving back to the community but also creating awareness among customers.

Regarding future plans, Nazish sees the opportunity for her company to become a leading voice promoting sustainable fashion in Pakistan and expanding to the Middle East market. She has plans to launch her platform in the United Arab Emirates by the end of 2023, and then explore for partners to launch Secret Stash MENA, where she sees a big opportunity to target the luxury market and where she would like to create a line of luxurious sustainable up-cycle product created from fabric scraps and leftovers.

