Vibram FiveFingers

Marketing 3473

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**Company and Product**

Vibram is an Italian company that manufactures the production of Vibram branded rubber outsoles for footwear. The company developed its name after its founder, Vitale Bramani. Vitale Bramani founded the company after six of his friends died in a mountaineering accident. Bramani believed this was due do to inadequate footwear. Now Vibram is the world leader in high performance rubber soles, targeted to the outdoor, work, recreation fashion, repair, and orthopedic markets. Vibram manufactures more than 34 million soles annually for more than 1,000 premium footwear brands worldwide.

Vibram makes numerous shoe soles for different sports such as rock climbing, snow sports, motorcycling, bicycling, running and trekking. Vibram rubber soles do not just specialize in sports. Vibram also makes soles for traveling, causal, fashion, work and safety, military and firefighting footwear.

One of Vibrams best sellers is Vibram FiveFingers. Vibram FiveFingers was created by Bramani, which became the first barefoot shoe. This shoe is different from others because it is based off of the bare human foot, bringing unparalleled flexibility, comfort, and balance to its wearer. The shoe is almost designed like a glove where each toe has its own section making it flexible for them to wiggle around. The shoe also improves posture by evenly distributing the wearer’s body weight. Vibram FiveFingers brings its wearers closer to the environment. The barefoot technology makes it feel as though you are shoeless.

**Customer**

A Majority of customers who buy Vibram FiveFingers are athletes. The shoe has been designed to fit men, women and young children.

Vibram has designed a FiveFinger for customers who exercise. FiveFngers are great for fitness workouts. They have a true grip and ideal traction. FiveFingers help keep you stable and balanced while training in the gym. People who enjoy yoga also buy FiveFingers. Vibram makes a FiveFinger with a thin sole for those who practice yoga or Pilates. The thin Vibram FiveFingers provides flexibility and protection to bare feet. The shoe has great traction for those who do not use a yoga mat. Vibram also makes a FiveFinger for customers who like to trek. The FiveFingers for hiking provides a sole with great grip for any surface you might come across in the outdoors. There is also a FiveFinger for people who enjoy watersports such as kayakers, suffers, stand up paddle boarders, sailors and fisherman. These shoes are great for watersports because they offer a good grip, which gives you more control. The main customer that buys FiveFingers is the runner. A majority of the runners I see run with FiveFingers. FiveFingers are great for runners because it’s a natural way to run and the shoe protects you from objects that might damage your foot if you were to run barefoot. Another customer that uses FiveFingers are athletes recovering from their sport. After being on their feet in their original sport shoe they will put on Vibram FiveFingers to relax. This helps the foot to uncast and allows the toes to stretch and spread bringing comfort to the foot. Because of the shoes stretch ability FiveFingers are also great to wear after your foot has swollen.

Most customers who buy Vibram FiveFingers are atheletes in some way or another, but there are some customers who buy the shoe for everyday use. The shoe is said to improve posture and strengthen muscles in the feet and lower legs. Even though there might be a few customers who wear the shoe for casual and everyday use we have concluded that most of its customers are those who engage in running, watersports, trekking, yoga/Pilates, after sport relaxation and fitness. This includes men, women and young children ages 7-50.

**Competition**

When looking for competition for Vibram FiveFingers really only one brand stood out, Merrell Barefoot shoes. Shortly after researching the company I found out that in 1995 Merrell shoes started using Vibram soles. Their current barefoot shoes uses Vibram barefoot soles. After finding this out I ruled them out as competition because they use a Vibram product.

Nike has a shoe called the “Nike Free.” This is Nikes version of the barefoot running shoe. The shoe does not have five separate sections for the toes as does the Vibram FiveFingers, but has the lightweight technology. This Nike shoe looks more like a regular tennis shoe than a bare foot like the Vibram FiveFingers. This shoe is supposed to give you the barefoot experience without sacrificing the feel of barefoot running. A Nike Free running shoe for men and women and cost you anywhere between $75 and $130.

Adidas version of the barefoot running shoe is called the “Adidas Adipure Trainer.” This shoe is light and flexible. Like the Vibram FiveFingers it has the five separate slots for the toes. The individual toe stalls are supposed to mimic the feet’s natural motion. The Adidas Adipure is advertised as a training shoe not a running shoe. This shoe will cost you $90.

After looking at the competition I see there is no shoe that closely resembles the Vibram FiveFingers looks wise. Nike and Adidas say they have “barefoot technology” but the footwear looks nothing as barefoot as the FiveFingers. Nike Free sales between $75 and $130, Adidas Adipure sell at $90, Vibram FiveFingers sell between $75 and $140. With my research I have concluded that Vibram FiveFingers is definitely the best selling barefoot shoe in the market.

**Benefits**

Vibram FiveFingers offer numerous benefits many of which affect your health. Vibram gives you **5 reasons to wear FiveFingers:**

1. Strengthens Muscles in the Feet and Lower Legs- Wearing Vibram FiveFingers will stimulate and strengthen muscles in the feet and lower legs, improving general foot health and reducing the risk of injury.
2. Improves Range of Motion in Ankles, Feet and Toes- No longer ‘cast; in a shoe, the foot and toes move more naturally.
3. Stimulates Neural Function Important to Balance and Agility- When wearing Vibram FiveFingers, thousands of neurological receptors in the feet send valuable information to the brain, improving balance and agility.
4. Eliminate Heel Lift to Align the Spine and Improve Posture- By lowering the heel, your bodyweight becomes evenly distributed across the footbed, promoting proper posture and spinal alignment
5. Allow the Foot and Body to Move Naturally. (Vibramfivefingers.com)

Vibram FiveFingers is a great shoe for someone who wants to feel free and comfortable. They are designed to let your toes move freely just how they would if you were barefoot. The shoe is designed to help improve your posture and better the way you walk and run. Running with normal tennis shoes prevents you from running the way your body would naturally. Running in Vibram FiveFingers lets your body run just the way it was intended to.

**Feature:** Lightweight, durable, comes in numerous colors

**Advantage:** no laces, multiple uses (running, walking, watersports, yoga).

**Benefits:** Strengthens muscles in feet and lower legs, improves posture

Vibram FiveFingers is less expensive than its competition Nike Free and Adidas Adipure. With the FiveFingers you get more of a barefoot experience than you would with the Nike and Adidas barefoot footwear. The individual toe stalls that the Vibram FiveFingers provides leaves you with a barefoot feel. The shoe is virtually weightless and you hardly know it’s on. The shoe has no laces so you can run free without any worries of laces coming undone. FiveFingers can be used for multiple uses such as running, walking, watersports and casual comfort wear. The shoe also comes in many colors to match your personality.

**SWOT ANALYSIS for Vibram FiveFingers**

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| **Strengths** | **Health benefits** | **No laces, Great color selection** | **Great stability** |
| **Weaknesses** | **No support for foot** | **Somewhat expensive** | **Hard to find, Mostly sold online** |
| **Opportunities** | **Better running experience** | **Helps you become a better runner** | **Teaches your body to run the right way** |
| **Threats** | **Competition** | **Generics** | **Injuries from beginners** |



**Selling Process**

**Prospecting**

For this sales call I am looking for qualifying prospects that enjoy outdoor activities such as running, walking, trekking, watersports and yoga/pilates. These individuals can be found at sports events (local runs, parks, lakes, and yoga studios) and sporting goods stores (Academy, Sun & Ski Sports etc.). One prospecting method I would use is E-prospecting on the web. I would target individual prospects and organizations such as local running organizations, outdoors organizations etc. I would also like to use the “Endless Chain-customer referral” method. I would like to think people would be talking about my product and sharing the information I have shared with them. I also would join a Sales lead club and get contact information from other salesman like myself. I believe in “It’s not what you know, it’s who you know” therefore I would network and keep in touch with as many contacts as possible to better sell my product.

**Pre approach**

Obtain interview with top sporting goods stores to sell my product to. Look into local Tulsa runs (Tulsa Run) where I can set up a tent and sell/inform Vibram FiveFingers to runners. Vibram FiveFingers is best known for its running shoe so targeting runners at a run would be very beneficial. There are many vendors and salespeople at running events and I think this would be a great opportunity to find prospects. Essentially I’m looking to sell to customers who enjoy running and outdoor activities.

**Approach**

Meet with sporting goods stores and explain the benefits of Vibram FiveFingers. Explain the many health benefits people can gain from the barefoot technology. Set up a booth at local runs in the city area. Show runners the benefits and affordability of the footwear. Pass out informative pamphlets that explain the shoe and its benefits. Have sample shoes that the prospects can try on and take for a test run. Explain to the prospects the numerous colors the shoes come in. Inform the prospects of the many uses the shoe has such as running, walking, hiking and watersport uses.