

STORES

MAY 2005

Climb Every Mountain

Expertise and a **dash of madness** lead Moosejaw's ascent

Faced with the prospect of attending law school, Robert Wolfe followed his adventurer's instincts and embarked instead on a dramatically different path. His Moosejaw Mountaineering store opened in Keego Harbor, Mich., in 1992, specializing in outdoor adventure gear and apparel.

Focusing on dedicated outdoor enthusiasts, Wolfe developed a three-fold business philosophy: offer only quality gear to customers; maintain an expertise in all things outdoors; and cultivate an atmosphere of overall craziness and fun.

"Instead of selling our customers on our exact product, we're really trying to create a culture," says Wolfe. "If you walk into a Moosejaw store and there's not loud music playing and people dancing, then we have failed. Our goal is to have a connection with our customer beyond the product."

Established base camps:

There are six Moosejaw stores in southeastern Michigan and the Chicago area. Each averages 3,000 sq. ft.

Climbing sales:

Nothing gets the adrenaline pumping like steady sales growth. In 2004 total sales were up approximately 20 percent. So far this year, sales are up about 30 percent.

Branded gear:

The North Face, Arc Teryx, Camelback and Salomon are among the 80 brands that can be found in the stores, online and via mail order catalog. Moosejaw's own brand accounts for more than 20 percent of sales.

Moosejaw enthusiasts:

Customers include hard-core customers making ambitious outdoor trips, such as climbing Mount Everest; families embarking on adventure vacations; and high school and college students who may not be taking an outdoor trip, but want to look the part.

Online Retail: Approximately 65 percent of Moosejaw's total business is transacted through its e-commerce site. In 2004, Moosejaw's Internet sales rose 30 percent, and are up approximately 50 percent thus far in 2005.

Future plans:

While Moosejaw intends to remain a small company, it makes one big move annually. This year, that means moving to a larger, 16,000 sq. ft warehouse and relocating one of its stores.

"Our goal is to be the best company as opposed to the biggest," says Wolfe.

--Jennifer Korolishin