

Rapid ascent

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The Clymb president Kelly Dachtler
// by Jason Kaplan

BY AMY MILSHEIN

Outdoor enthusiasts know what's important. They drive a \$1,500 car because the \$9,000 bicycle strapped to the roof is their real ride. They would rather be skiing or boarding or hiking the backcountry and spending big bucks to do it, about \$646 billion a year, according to the Outdoor Industry Association. This devotion to an active lifestyle, and the expensive gear that goes with it, inspired president and co-founder Kelly Dachtler to create The Clymb. Launched in 2009, smack in the middle of an epic economic

downturn, the members-only e-retailer has seen phenomenal growth. Dachtler wants it to become the next billion-dollar active-lifestyle brand.

Dreamed up around Dachtler's dining room table with co-founder and mountain biking buddy Cec Annett, The Clymb buys overstock from more than 800 outdoor retailers like Merrell, Patagonia and Oakley. They email-blast limited-time offers to their 3.5 million members, who can pick up the gear at big discounts. The business model sounds familiar, but Dachtler bristles at any comparison to Groupon.

"Groupon is a transactional marketing platform," he says. "We own and stand by the goods we buy." An admitted introvert, Dachtler, 36, works from a glass-walled office in The Clymb's Pearl District headquarters. He surrounds himself with artwork — such as a Peter Saville-designed skateboard deck — that inspires the former graphic designer.

Born in Wyoming and raised in Southern California, the tall, sturdy Dachtler grew up loving surfing, snowboarding and BMX biking. His entrepreneurial spirit bloomed early on with the launching of two apparel companies while still in high school. "It was mostly beachwear," he says. "They didn't go anywhere."

Dachtler supported himself through his college years with freelance graphic design projects that grew so robust, he dropped out of school to pursue it full-time. He landed a dream client, apparel designer and personal inspiration Mossimo Giannulli, eventually taking a full time role in Giannulli's company. He helped roll out Giannulli's brand for Target before being named creative director for Juicy Couture. "I have no business-school background at all," Dachtler admits. "I came to love the PnL [profits and loss statement] and the balance sheet out of necessity." A quick study, he oversaw Juicy's first national advertising campaign, the rollout of flagship retail stores and the licensing of a handful of different product categories.

Dachtler also saw the rise of e-commerce during his two years at Los Angeles-based Juicy. The medium's power and transformative nature gelled with him instantly, but as a husband and new father of a baby girl, Dachtler felt an even stronger pull for more work/life balance. He was recruited by footwear marketer Wolverine World Wide and moved his young family from Los Angeles to Portland, where Wolverine has a design studio.

“Dachtler wants The Clymb to become the next billion-dollar active-lifestyle brand.”

And that's where that iconic dining room table scene takes place. He and Annett, a former vice president at Adidas, saw a need for a "brand-positive channel for overstocks," which means simply a place for retailers to sell their out-of-season goods without harming their image. Before an Internet site like The

Clymb, brands unloaded their overstocks on discount retailers like T.J. Maxx or to websites optimized for price-driven search engines.

In contrast, The Clymb's members-only model means that price-crawling websites can't find their deals. The limited-time offers lend a sense of urgency to shoppers who already feel they are part of an exclusive club. It also means a hectic pace for Dachtler and his staff of 90 employees. "Having a merchandising cycle that refreshes every 24 hours is unheard of in retail," he says. "We have to be extremely acute in the management of all the parts of the cycle. A day's delay means nothing to another retailer, but it could have a big impact on us."

And the fast turnaround required means that Dachtler's desired work/life balance will have to wait. His company's mission statement is "to improve the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants by inspiring human-powered adventure," but Dachtler's last human-powered adventure involved taking his two daughters to the wilds of Beaverton; more specifically, to Nike headquarters, where his wife works, to play in the rock gym. The last movie he saw was Walt Disney's *Frozen*.

That's not to say Dachtler doesn't indulge in personal time. He often bikes to work. "It takes 20 minutes to get here from my house in the Southwest hills but much longer to get home." And he acknowledges his staff's commitment to their work. Rewards include guided meditation, in-house yoga, free mass-transit passes and bimonthly visits from a bike technician to service everyone's ride. They even pair up people who don't normally work together, give them lunch money and a tandem bicycle, and send them on their way. All employees are company shareholders.

These perks add up to The Clymb landing on *Outside* magazine's Best Places to Work list two years running, as well as CNN Money partner publication Great Places to Work.

In the past three years, The Clymb has grown an unbelievable 3,500%. The company has started offering its own line of products, including T-shirts, hats and cycling kits. As they carve out space alongside their main competitors, like REI and Backcountry.com, Dachtler says he won't rule out an actual brick-and-mortar store one day. What he doesn't see is a company that looks like Amazon. "Amazon's relationship with the consumer is incredibly efficient but transactional. We are building a brand and forging a long-term relationship with our customer based on authenticity and shared values."

And planks. To keep human-powered adventure on the forefront, employees will often yell "Plank!" after which everyone stops, drops and holds a hover for up to three minutes. It's a killer ab workout that builds core strength and camaraderie. "I haven't done one in a while," admits Dachtler, somewhat sheepishly. "I guess it's time to get back at them."