

When the Why Is Woven In

Vuori isn't just selling the coolest performance apparel—it's stitching purpose into every thread, straight from Carlsbad.

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Vuori /Voo-or-ree/, noun

A Finnish word for “mountain” and a Carlsbad activewear brand celebrating 10 years of ascending to great heights in a challenging global industry.

Volatile, uncertain, decelerating. The words describing the U.S. economy at the moment have entrepreneurs wringing their hands and shaking their Magic 8 Balls. Vuori, however, is celebrating its 10th anniversary. The future looks all rise and shine. An activewear brand that started in 2015, Vuori is headquartered in Carlsbad. We asked Joe Kudla, Founder and CEO, to tell us the company's success story.

He blanched at the the word “success” at first. “I don't think you ever quite feel like ‘we succeeded,’” Kudla

says. “That is the beauty of our business. We are always looking forward and asking ourselves whether we have the right products and brand message that will inspire our community of customers to feel their best on their journey of life.”

Yet he admits, “We have had some amazing moments, like the days we opened our first flagship stores in New York, London and Shanghai. It has been such a joy to see our vision being so well received all around the world.”



Internationally California Proud

Business guru Simon Sinek says, “People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it.” Vuori has a clear “why” vision. “I started Vuori out of a personal need; I was practicing yoga and training outdoors, but I couldn’t find performance apparel that felt right for how I wanted to live and dress. Everything was loud, flashy and overly branded,” Kudla says. “The idea was to build a product that fused performance with a modern aesthetic and a West Coast ease. The purpose has always been to inspire a vibrant, active life.”

Men were the first target market “because it was underserved, and from day one, the process was hands on; we

were customer obsessed, gathering feedback constantly to evolve the product.”

As the team developed its product within its why, the company’s nucleus crystallized. “Vuori’s core values revolve around creating exceptional products, fostering great relationships and living extraordinary lives. These values are interwoven with and embody our commitment to community engagement, aiming to impact not only customer happiness but also the natural environment and our local communities.”

Third Time's the Charm

Kudla got his degree (class of 2000) in accounting from

USD. Accounting, about the safest, non-risk-taking career you could plan for. But looking for a summer job after graduating, Kudla, almost accidentally, ended up doing a two-year stint modeling in Europe. That disrupted pure concrete thinking and ignited the creative side of his brain. And his risk-taking side.

Whenever a new business or brand seems to burst onto the marketplace, you can be sure there is a story of learning and handwork underneath. Kudla had two startups in the apparel industry before Vuori. “At the time [when those startups ended], I was feeling pretty defeated and beat up by the world of fashion,” he said in a Goldman-Sachs interview. Einstein said, “Failure is success in progress.” Kudla said every startup that flamed out lit a new learning cycle.

Vuori’s first office was a garage. And the handful of people that worked there called it the “garaffice.” “There was a point where Vuori nearly went under due to a lack of capital and a disconnect with our customers,” Kudla says. “We were focused on the wrong distribution strategy based on what we observed other up-and-coming women-oriented brands doing, but it proved to be more challenging with men. We found our engine of growth by listening to our customers. We sent post-purchase surveys and opened a pop-up retail store, which helped us develop a direct line of communication with our customers and ultimately informed our strategy.”

Connection in Community

Whether it was in the first brick-and-mortar store or the thriving company that now has 2,500 employees, community has always been the driver moving Vuori forward. “We strive for an upbeat and community-oriented culture,” Kudla says. “With a focus on doing meaningful work with passion and determination, balanced with the awareness that thriving teams and businesses start with thriving individuals.”

How did Vuori end up moving from the garaffice in Encinitas to Carlsbad? “Being headquartered in Carlsbad as the company grew was a natural fit—the proximity and the identification of the perfect home for our people and brand to thrive, and an office that supports both creativity and a team that is more and more in service to global operations.”

Now, the biggest challenge moving forward is “scaling while staying true to our culture and values. Growth is exciting, but we’re always asking: How do we preserve the soul of Vuori as we expand globally? And how do we continue to lead with innovation, not just follow trends?”

How does Kudla feel having seen all this happen in 10 years? “Honestly, it’s surreal. We still operate with a startup mindset in many ways, always iterating and staying close to our customers. But reaching 10 years has been a chance to pause and reflect. It’s a reminder of how far we’ve come and the amazing team that has come together to make this all possible, but also a reminder that there is a lot to do in order for us to fully realize our vision for this brand.”

a) Vuori began with an innovative line of men’s active wear. b) The company started in a “garoffice” in Encinitas. c) Founder and CEO Joe Kudla wanted clothes that worked for yoga and volleyball as well as on the street. d) In a short time, Vuori added women’s wear to its high-impact lines. e) Does it wick? Does it stretch? Does it breathe? For Vuori, it begins with the fabric selection. f) Made to move like we do (photos courtesy of Vuori).