BRAND PROFILE: JACK WOLFSKIN

Outdoor company Jack Wolfskin has plenty of vision for developing new products and expanding geographically. However, it is aware that building long-lasting relationships with suppliers, and caring for workers, consumers and the environment are just as important.



Making the outdoors feel like home

Back in 1981, Ulrich Dausien set up a new outdoor company in Frankfurt with the aim of helping people feel "at home" while they were experiencing the great outdoors. His vision was to make outdoor experiences fun, safe and comfortable by producing functional clothing, apparel and equipment that would support people who wanted to take part in a wide range of activities. Mr Dusien wanted as many people as possible to get outdoors and to be able to live active lives whatever the weather.

The company has its headquarters in Idstein, in the Taunus region of Germany. The area is popular with bikers and hikers, and its mountainous surroundings offer great opportunities for climbers, trail runners and even skiers. The first Jack Wolfskin store opened in 1993 in Heidelberg, another outdoor pursuits hotspot, and the brand now has approximately 2,400 sales locations across Europe and Asia.

Focus on innovation

Its latest financial results show that the company experienced double-digit sales growth for the sixth year in a row last year. Its sales rose 22% to €251.4 million compared with the €205.5 million in 2008. Manfred Hell, CEO and co-owner of Jack Wolfskin, believes the key to this growth was the "constant flow of new and innovative products".

While some firms have been relying on existing, popular technologies since the economic downturn began, Mr Hell claims Jack Wolfskin has committed itself to spending time and resources to continually come up with new and better innovations. The company opened a new development centre last year, which the CEO says reflects its desire to continue to invest



The Arctic Trail Jacket combines its highloft fleece fabrics with other types of fleece for better stretch and fit.

Jack Wolfskin

"above-average amounts in product development and quality assurance".

He says: "We will also keep making consistent and increased investments in raising our brand recognition. This will not only extend our leading position in the core markets of Germany, Austria and Switzerland, but will also strengthen our presence in growth markets such as the UK and Italy considerably. The potential for Jack Wolfskin is enormous and we are also expecting growth well into double digits for 2010."

Most of its growth in geographical terms last year was seen in Central Europe (Italy, Austria, Switzerland, the Benelux countries and Germany). However, while Germany was its strongest market, China, where it now sells in 79 stores, continued to be an extremely important region for the brand in 2009. The company also opened its first four stores in South Korea, another potential high-growth market, it believes.

The outdoor brand opened 38 new stores in 2009 including 25 in Germany, three in Italy, four in Switzerland, two each in Austria and Belgium, and one each in Luxembourg and Russia. At the end of 2009 there were 228 Jack Wolfskin stores throughout Europe. Store expansion is expected to continue at the same pace in 2010, when the primary focus will be on the UK, Switzerland and Italy, as well as Germany. The firm currently has a total of approximately 400 full-time employees, although it plans to increase its employee count considerably in 2010.

Progress in performance

The company built on the success of its functional weatherproof clothing range in 2009 as well as experiencing significant growth within its outdoor functional footwear and technical rucksack divisions. It specialises in products that offer weather protection, breathability and comfort.

New fleeces in its latest collection for winter 2010-11, for example, offer insulation and protection from the wind. The range includes 52 different models ranging from the brand's highloft fleece versions to classic 200 and 150 grade velour fleeces and windproof models. The new technical Arctic Trail range, combines highloft fleece fabrics with kinetic stretch fleece or classic 150 grade velour fleece. The combination of these two types of fleece gives the garment a distinctive look and helps to improve freedom of movement.

The new Arctic Trail jacket for men and women is made from the company's warm Nanuk 200 silkloft fleece. Following the body mapping principle, the men's version incorporates slightly thinner and stretchier Nanuk 150 fleece beneath the arms, on the sides, at the hem and in part of the back, while in the women's jacket these inserts are made from dual stretch Nanuk Dynamic fleece to offer better fit.

The brand has also extended its soft shell range for the winter season to include nine new developments from the alpinism, trekking and hiking product sectors. The range includes a new fabric which it claims improves the breathability of the windproof soft shell by 50% and a hybrid soft shell, which combines hard shell and soft shell fabrics.

Its unisex Evolution Softshell features Jack Wolfskin's propietary water- and snow-repellent



The company claims its Evolution Softshell is both windproof and air permeable.

Jack Wolfskin

Stormlock O2 Soft Shell Silkloft laminate, which has a 2.9 layer construction and a macro-porous membrane. The materials are naturally windproof, but the re-engineered membrane is now air permeable. The face fabric is a dual-stretch nylon with its robust ripstop structure, making it suitable for winter climbing on rock or ice. The reverse side consists of a very soft Silkloft fleece fabric with a medium length pile and a weight-saving waffle structure for improved breathability. It protects wearers from drizzle, snow and cold temperatures.

The company's breathable, unlaminated Flex Shield Thermic DWR fabric inserts at the sides provide comfort and freedom of movement. Both the shoulder sections and the chest pocket are reinforced with a laminated abrasion guard. Reflectors made by Swedish firm Recco on the arms allow for extra visibility. These reflectors are designed to help pinpoint people in trouble by bouncing back high frequency signals used by search teams.

Caring for the community

Looking forward, Mr Hell believes there is still ample scope for innovation and opportunity for growth. However, while these things are important, the company is also focused on improving other aspects of its business and supply chain. As part of its duty of care philosophy, Jack Wolfskin is deeply committed to protecting the environment in which its products are used. According to Mr Hell, reducing CO_2 emissions is a major goal this year. "As we have already done in 2009, we wish to make great efforts and contribute in all business areas by means of sustainable economic management to making a significant reduction in our negative footprint despite increasing sales."

While the company recognises that manufacturing and consumption of any kind impacts the environment, it is committed to keeping this impact as low as possible. "Global warming, with all its dramatic repercussions, is a fact and must lead us to modify our behaviour not only in the private sphere but also in industry," Mr Hell says. "We would like to show the way forward by setting a good example."

Some of the ways it is trying to make a difference include the installation of a photovoltaic system on the roof to facilitate environmentally friendly electricity production at its Idstein and Neu Wulmstorf facilities. It has switched to a green energy supplier which will reduce its environmental footprint by 1302 t CO_2 per year. The company is also restructuring its supply chain so that the ratio of air shipments to the overall shipment volume will be reduced by approximately 50%. Added to this, it was one of the founding members of the European Outdoor Group Association for Conservation, and supports a number of other environmental initiatives and wolf-related projects on top of this.



Jack Wolfskin says it is committed to investing in innovation despite the difficult economic climate.

Jack Wolfskin

Furthermore, the brand has an ethical approach towards its producers and consumers. In terms of its producers, it has carefully chosen the companies which make its products and has worked hard to build up relationships with manufacturers that will last and improve over time. By doing this, Mr Hell claims the company can be more confident that working conditions at its supplier companies—mainly in Asia, but some in Europe—are "decent", making sure there is no child labour, that conditions, work hours and pay are fair, that health and safety standards are maintained and that workers are free to join trade unions.

In terms of consumers, it has identified three key areas to focus on: chemical safety, product safety and ethical concerns. It has very stringent guidelines for chemical substances including products used for dying and reinforcing clothing. It regularly carries out checks through an independent, accredited laboratory on top of the tests commissioned by its suppliers. In terms of product safety, issues such as reflectivity and flammability are taken very seriously. For ethical reasons, it does not use real fur and tries to limit its usage of PVC. "We are well aware of our responsibility to Jack Wolfskin customers. After all, they are the reason why we aspire to move forward every day and put all of our energies and expertise into research for new and innovative products," Mr Hell concludes.