BRAND PROFILE: CAMP

From its roots in the foothills of the Italian Alps, family-based mountain hardware company CAMP has developed into an important brand with an international presence.

Keeping it in the family

In a tiny village in Northern Italy towards the end of the 19th century, Nicola Codega took some of the iron mined from the surrounding mines and crafted a wrought iron tool for home use. It prompted the founding of the company CAMP and Nicola's son, Antonio Codega, succeeded him a few years later. In 1920 the first ice axes were produced for the Italian Alpine troops. The neighbouring Dolomites and Alps served as inspiration for the numerous innovations that CAMP (Concezione Articoli Montagna Premana) has gone on to produce, and almost 123 years later, the company is a thriving, fiercely independent example of a successful family-owned business.

The most recent change within the company was in 2005 when the fourth generation of the Codega family took the helm—Eddy Codega, the president, is flanked by other members of the family holding strategic roles: Isacco, in charge of exports; Giovanni, sales director for Italy; Antonio, research and development director; Andrea, production director and Paolo, financial director. The family firm is still based in Premana, where there is also the research and development office and some production facilities, but most importantly, the small village upholds and reflects CAMP's core values. "Our company is the most important in the village and many of its residents work for our company, so there are social links that make sure we can stay there," says Eddy Codega.

Premana has a population of just 2,200 people and lies 100km north of Milan, a few hours' drive from the Dolomites and Mont Blanc. There are 50 in-house employees working at the CAMP headquarters, and a further 20 who are based in Premana but do not work in-house. There are 15 people among the subsidiaries, and another 70 or so working on the supply side exclusively for CAMP. Around 30% of the company's production still takes place in Italy, but the remaining 70% of

CAMP's aim has always been to equip a mountaineer with all the hardware necessary.

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production has been outsourced to suppliers in Poland, Slovakia, China, Taiwan and Vietnam. "We've worked with some of our suppliers for 20 years or more which shows that when we find a partner, we build a project together, which is really very important to us." says Mr Codega.

Innovation is key

"The idea behind CAMP has always been to equip a mountaineer, with the entire collection of tools needed – except for apparel and shoes, because we don't have specific expertise in these areas," says Mr Codega. "Our target has been to stay focused on equipment. So we design and manufacture everything related to climbing and mountaineering, from the ice axes and crampons that have long been in our portfolio, to harnesses, carabiners, rucksacks and sleeping bags." The range also includes gloves.

In 1980, CAMP created the first rigid crampon for ice climbing, which was followed four years later by the Hummingbird range of ice axes; the first to have carbon handles. As materials have progressed over the years, CAMP has developed its technology to remain at the forefront of innovation. "For us, keeping our know-how up-to-date is an important investment," says Mr Codega. "Our mission is to design, develop and manufacture all these products while making sure we have innovation as a driver, as a light that is guiding us to make sure that we can always be on top of what the consumers need for their climbing."

In 1997, CAMP acquired its Italian competitor, Cassin, and integrated its products into the portfolio. As a very technical brand, the Cassin name appears on products for the more niche mountain activities, such as ice climbing and bouldering. The CAMP label is used for more popular activities such as climbing and *via ferrata*, mountain routes equipped with fixed cables, stemples, ladders and bridges.

During the 1980s, CAMP expanded its product offering to include some 'soft' items such as backpacks, gloves and jackets. Its down jackets, technical backpacks and waterproof gloves now form an important part of the brand's product portfolio.

Outdoor brands often work with mountaineers in the development of their products, and CAMP is no exception. "Ultimately, mountaineers and alpinists are the ones who use our products and the strongest ones are the ones that drive innovation by giving us input for improving our products," says Mr Codega. "They allow us to make sure our products are relevant. For example, we have a couple of sponsored professionals who are very much focused on winter Himalayan climbing; they climb the highest mountains in the world, in winter. So they test our products in the worst conditions possible, and the feedback they bring home is very important and helpful in terms of development."

While CAMP products are clearly targeting quite a relatively small market, Mr Codega says the brand aims to provide the right tools for anyone who wants to "take a step on the vertical side". Over the years, the company has developed dedicated products for children, women, beginners and specialists alike.

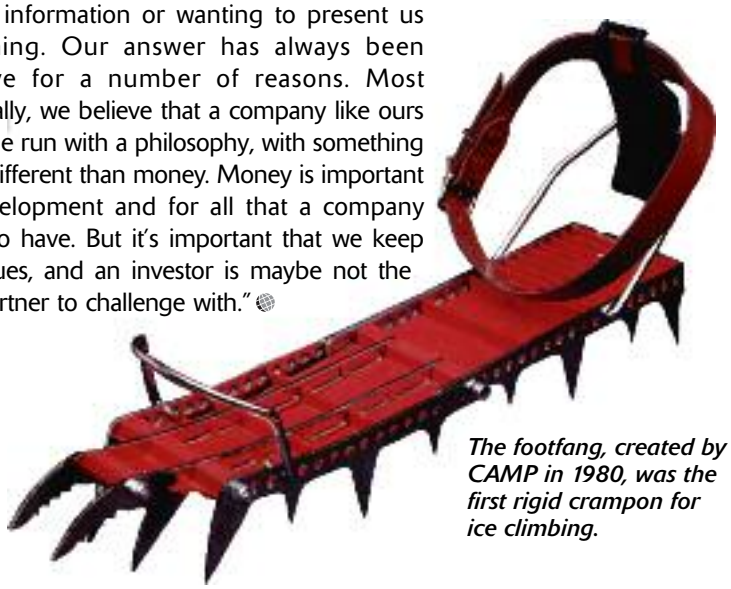
International presence

In 1988, the first CAMP subsidiary was established in France, and in 2000 CAMP USA was founded in Boulder, Colorado, to bring the brand to the large and competitive US market. "Our aim was really to target France and the US because in terms of hardware they are very important," says Mr Codega. "Some of our most important competitors are based in these countries and so it was important for us to challenge them in their own countries. If we could get a share of the market in those countries, we could get shares everywhere – that was the simple idea in our minds. And I believe that from a certain standpoint we succeeded. We are now exporting our products to 77 countries worldwide, and we have a number of different distribution models, from distributors and agents, to subsidiaries."

CAMP is a company that is very much rooted in its family history, and it is no coincidence that the animal in the brand's logo is a wolf – an animal which sticks with its pack for security while venturing out into the world. The company has always remained independent, and Mr Codega believes it will long continue to be so. "In the past and now there have always been private equity firms or investors calling us, getting information or wanting to present us something. Our answer has always been negative for a number of reasons. Most specifically, we believe that a company like ours has to be run with a philosophy, with something that is different than money. Money is important for development and for all that a company needs to have. But it's important that we keep our values, and an investor is maybe not the right partner to challenge with."



Since the 1980s, CAMP has been making 'soft' products such as the lightweight Campack XLP 290.



The footfang, created by CAMP in 1980, was the first rigid crampon for ice climbing.

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