BRAND PROFILE: VAUDE

German company Vaude has set itself the goal of becoming "the most ecological outdoor supplier in Europe" by 2015. So what exactly is the brand doing to achieve this?

Green dreams



Zimba is a performance shirt made from Bluesign approved Polartec Power Dry fabric.

Vaude



(l) The Shivling Jacket is built for tough mountain demands, yet is very lightweight at just 400 grams.

(r) The bi-stretch, windproof fabric in Vaude's Badile Pants has been manufactured according to the Bluesign standard.

Vaude

In an age where almost every company with a savvy marketing department is looking for ways in which to stamp 'eco' on its products, regardless of merit or relevance, it is refreshing to see a company that is genuinely pursuing environmental responsibility and therefore truly deserving of its 'eco' credentials.

German mountain sports equipment supplier Vaude has set itself the goal of becoming "Europe's most ecological outdoor supplier by the year 2015". Since it created the 'Ecolog Recycling Network' in 1994, in which high tech performance clothing could be 100% recycled for the first time, the company has been pushing its 'green' ethos, and was recently recognised with an ispo eco responsibility award at the ispo international trade fair 2011 in Munich, Germany.

"Vaude and its products embody mountain sports expertise, innovation and the responsible treatment of people and nature," read a statement from the ispo awards jury. "Thanks to a multitude of innovations, convincing concepts and a clearly holistic principle, outdoor manufacturer Vaude has become a leader in the area of sustainability. The brand's product-overlapping strategy, offering consumers sustainable products of high quality and functionality in all categories, has very much impressed us."

As part of its ecological outlook, Vaude began working with the environmental Bluesign standard in 2001, producing an entire baselayer range under the organisation's standards. In 2008, the company became the first outdoor company in Europe to attain EMAS registration from the European Union for its environmental management programme. The same year, Vaude also became an official member of the Bluesign standard, making a commitment to bring its entire range into compliance with the demands of the industrial ecological standard.

Keeping it in the family

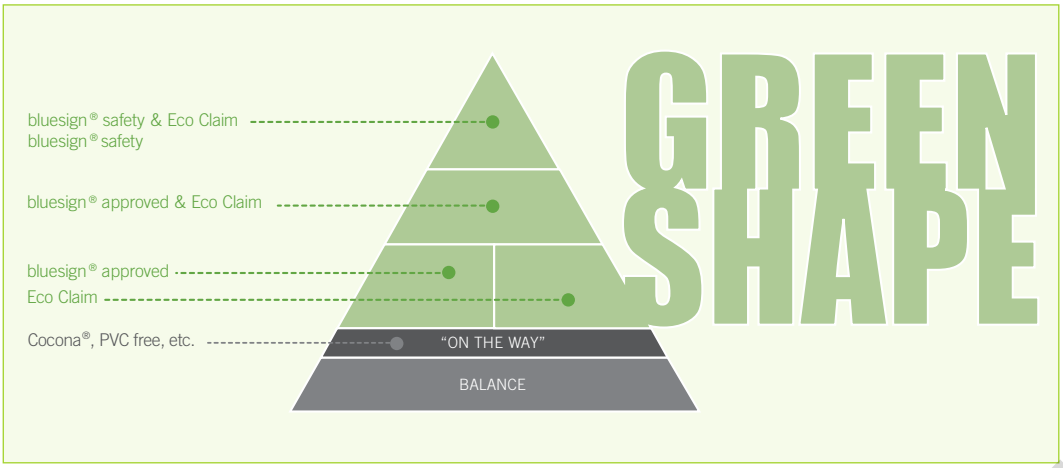
Vaude was founded in 1974 by Albert von Dewitz and remains 100% family-owned. The name of the firm is derived from the initials of its founder, VD (pronounced fau'de). Mr von Dewitz turned his hobby into a profession and created an outdoor apparel and equipment company with three product segments: mountain sports, bike sports and packs.

In 2006 the company acquired the climbing brand Edelrid, a manufacturer of climbing harnesses, ropes and helmets. In 2009, Albert von Dewitz' daughter, Antje von Dewitz, took over from her father's position as Vaude chief executive. The company has approximately 1,300 employees internationally, with Edelrid employing 100 people.

Last year, Vaude joined the Fair Wear Foundation, an international initiative which works to improve workplace conditions in international production facilities.

At the start of this year, Peter Sontheimer took over as product director for all three of Vaude's product segments. Vaude said that restructuring the company in this way and establishing this senior position were important measures for strengthening the brand and part of a new brand positioning initiative. "Our growth requires a new organisational structure," Ms von Dewitz said on making the announcement. "Changes in personnel for various teams are the logical next step. I'm very pleased that we were able to fill new positions almost exclusively from

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Vaude's Eco Pyramid, which depicts how ecological a product is.
Vaude

our own ranks with long standing, experienced Vaude employees."

Another element of the restructuring is the consolidation of the operating divisions for apparel mountain sports and bike sports. By merging these two divisions, collection developments can now be harmonised, according to Vaude. The head of apparel division will be Stefan Krause, who was previously responsible for the apparel mountain sports division.

Looking foward

Continuing the green theme into 2011, Vaude formed a partnership with Sympatex Technologies to advance the development of high-performance ecological textiles. Starting winter 2011-12, Vaude is using the recyclable Sympatex membrane in its mountain sports and bike sports apparel lines, as well as in its shoe collections. This partnership takes the mountain sports supplier a step closer to realising its goal of implementing environmentally friendly manufacturing processes throughout its entire range of products.

Sympatex has a production method that uses a material made from polyether and polyester, better known for the production of PET water bottles. The Sympatex membrane is comprised solely of oxygen, carbon and hydrogen and its production involves no use of PTFE (polytetrafluoroethylene) or fluorocarbons.

Ms von Dewitz said: "Our goal is to become the most eco-friendly outdoor manufacturer in Europe. In order to do so we need partners such as Sympatex who are pulling in the same direction. We are determined to make long-term investments in our common future; this includes coordinating joint development rounds that apply our combined know-how to advance innovations and a comprehensive marketing concept."

Vaude also recently introduced Green Shape, a label for products that "feature special ecological manufacturing". According to the company, the criteria for this label are very strict: only products that are made of at least 90% organic cotton or recycled materials, coloured using the eco-friendly Vaude ecolour dyeing process or made to conform to the Bluesign standard earn the Green Shape quality label.

The entire summer 2011 collection includes 16% Green Shape products – while in the apparel section this figure stands at 30%. For the winter 2011-12 collection, over 50% of Vaude's products will bear the Green Shape label.

As trumpeters of the necessity for ecological awareness, Vaude clearly sees itself as a forerunner in the outdoor sector, paving the way for better practices within itself and among its competitors. But in setting its goals and promoting its aims, the company has proven that its 'greenness' is much more than just a marketing scheme.



Antje von Dewitz, Vaude CEO and Michael Kamm, Sympatex CEO, celebrating their alliance.
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