

Business Unusual

Introducing SWAE Sports

Colorado-based SWAE Sports (Snow, Water, Air, Earth) just launched the first online repository of local guides and adventure travel, from climbing a 14er in Colorado, to rafting in Bhutan. Colorado resident and founder Daniel Epstein talks adventure with EO, and how SWAE Sports is poised to change the way we travel.

Where did the idea for SWAE come from?

My freshman year at CU, a couple of us decided to go paragliding, after seeing it done in the north foothills from our dorm windows. We couldn't find any information online, so I went to the yellow pages. It took three days to get a hold of someone to find out the cost, which was outside our budget. Instead of paragliding, we got some beer, hung out and talked about what was wrong with adventure sports. They just weren't accessible. You couldn't find basic information online, and big tour operators weren't affordable. SWAE Sports was founded on the notion of wanting to try an adventure sport using a local guide.

How do you find your guides?

To launch SWAE in the U.S., we biked from Canada down to Mexico last year. We wanted to find the best guides, on the coast and in the mountains, the ones you couldn't research without being there. We'd stop at local gear shops, and ask for recommendations. We'd get a handful of names and contact those guides. Most of them couldn't say no to a meeting, considering we'd already biked 1,600 miles and were offering to bike 60 more off-course just to meet with them. Partnerships were made in that way. For us, it was just a really awesome experience. From a business perspective, it was really effective. We signed over 100 guides—authentic, local experts. To kick off our global launch this winter, we're headed to bike one of the most beautiful, adventurous places on earth—New Zealand.

How are your guides different?

You want the person leading your trip to live and work in that location. You want your dollars to go directly to that community. There is nothing better than when your excursion leaders have real stories behind the places they're taking you.

How do you make money?

SWAE is a "for impact" organization, so impact drives our profit. We're proving that a business model that puts people and relationships first is not only sustainable, but also profitable. When we started SWAE, we wanted to create a business where every single constituency was better off—from shareholders to employees to the communities where adventure travel is taking place. What we do is fun, but it's also good business.

—Jayme Otto

Entrepreneurial Victory Dance:
Daniel Epstein at Crater Lake.



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