

Board-riding the wave...

The North Cornish coast has proven to be the ideal location to launch a surf, skate and snowboard clothing brand with a strong e-commerce presence.



Overview

Michael Hayes started his career in South Africa, where as a designer he worked for leading brands such as Quiksilver. His partner Carol Hayes has a background in retail and both of them have a passion for "board" sports. Whether it be surfing, skate boarding or snowboarding, they are "board addicts". They launched their initial concept for an adrenaline sports clothing business "IAMWHY" four years ago, with the launch of their first range aimed at board riders.

Carol explains "Having spent years in retail, I was becoming increasingly disillusioned and really wanted to do something on my own. Both Michael and I are very creative and we began to explore the possibility of setting up our own clothing company aimed at the board riding market, which we both know and love so well."

In 1999, they decided to move to the UK, and initially located to Hampshire. However, they both missed the coast and the access to the sports they loved.

"It was really important that the business was based in a location that reflected both its strong ethical values as well as the outdoor sports culture we are targeting," explains Carol. "Cornwall seemed the obvious choice. Surfing in the UK is Cornwall, there is nowhere else better to be, so for us, moving to the North Coast was the logical next step to kick start our business."

The company is more than just an adrenalin sports clothing retailer. It has very strong environmental credentials. It sources environmentally friendly and "fairwear" suppliers where possible to promote ethical trade.

Workforce

Michael Hayes is the company's designer and carries out the printing of the garments. Carol operates the marketing and retail element of the business. On a daily basis their work merges or crosses over. They have plans to recruit a print or design graduate in the second half of the year as the business grows.

Support

IAMWHY is receiving business advice from Business Link as it enters its next phase of growth. Cornwall Pure Business is assisting with the company's marketing and putting the business in touch with relevant organisations that can assist the business in moving up to the next level.

90% of the 2008 IAMWHY range is both fairwear and environmentally friendly. Even the bags the products are supplied in are paper, ensuring that at every stage, the environmental impact is kept to a minimum, where possible.

Not only that, but every item is manually printed to order, making each piece unique for the customer. The garments are sourced from leading suppliers in the garment industry. All their products are put through a strict quality procedure and they wash all their fabrics to ensure they meet the company's high standards.

Michael comments "I feel that in combining my two passions - design and board sports, our clothing appeals to a wide audience. We have kept our range flexible and are always looking at what can be improved upon or updated. The range is constantly evolving along with the design."

The name of the business "IAMWHY" was chosen as they felt "I AM WHY" speaks for itself. Using this effective strapline, their clothing features a number of different straplines include: "IAMY, because I am"

The business operates out of premises in Kilkhampton, near Bude. In addition to "IAMWHY" the business also runs a screen print facility, which they make available to other businesses. Michael concludes: "Moving the business to Cornwall has been the best decision we have made. The stunning environment combined with the support for the business has given us great confidence and we are really excited about the future of the company."

Clients

The majority of sales are generated through their online retailers and the IAMWHY website with online customers from all around the world purchasing. There is a showroom at their business premises for customers who want to come and look at the stock first hand. In addition, they are currently supplying their 2008 range to "Barefoot Island Surf Shop" in Helston.

The company is also very committed to working with local youth clubs and schools. For example, it is currently sponsoring the Bideford College 2008 ski and snowboarding team on its trip to Kitzbuhel in Austria. Students and teachers are having a specially designed hoodie printed for their tour.

