

A passion for parkas



Canada Goose President and CEO Dani Reiss plants the flag at the South Pole, wearing the signature outerwear that he likes to call “the Land Rover of clothing”. Reiss was named as Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year for Canada in 2011.

Dani Reiss transformed a solid but static family business into a heritage brand built on a proud “Made in Canada” foundation. Now one of Canada’s fastest growing companies, Canada Goose sets the world standard for extreme weather outerwear.

Fresh out of university, Dani Reiss had absolutely no intention of going into the family business.

“I joined the company in 1997, but I never intended to stay for long,” says Reiss, president and CEO of Canada Goose. “I’d worked in the factory summers while I was getting an English degree from the

University of Toronto, and my ambition was to be a writer. I had planned a big trip to Europe, and the idea was that I would work there for three months to save some money for my trip.”

Established by Reiss’s grandfather in 1957 (as Metro Sports Wear), the company grew into a major manufacturer of private label outerwear, supplying well-known retailers like Eddie Bauer and L.L. Bean under the direction of second generation David Reiss. Dani Reiss’s father also moved the company into supplying custom down parkas and coats for police forces, expanded into overseas export markets, and rebranded the company as Canada Goose. He also advised his son against joining the company full-time.

“I had never been passionate about parkas,” says Dani Reiss. “I wanted to do something with my life that had more meaning. But that changed as I got to know the company, how our jackets saved lives, just how much people loved our products. I had grown up with it, and eventually I saw an opportunity, because I didn’t think that there were a lot of products in the marketplace that were *real*.”



Reiss joined the family business “temporarily” in 1997. He has since established Canada Goose as an iconic world brand, with 10-year sales growth of 3000 percent.

Reiss made it to Europe, but not as a backpacker. He attended the company’s first trade show in Germany, where he saw the worldwide potential of Canada Goose.

“We had a terrible booth stuck in the corner, but when I walked around the show, I saw a huge display for Columbia Sportswear,” he says. “I’d read about them, and I knew that in 1985 they had been a \$5

million company. I also knew that we had been a \$5 million company in 1985 as well. Since then, we had actually shrunk, and these guys were now a \$1 billion-plus public company! So my question was, how do you do that?"

Reiss has answered his own question. While it's not yet a billion dollar company, Canada Goose is now the largest manufacturer of its kind in Canada. It has grown by over three thousand percent in the last 10 years, and is firmly established as an iconic world brand. Growth last year was 60 percent.

"The fact that our products are made in Canada has been a huge factor in our success and growth," says Reiss. "Back in 2001, everyone was saying that it didn't matter where you manufactured, that the consumer didn't care. When I heard that two more apparel companies were leaving Canada for China, I thought that if everyone's leaving, we'll be the only ones left in Canada. What a great advantage that would be!"

Capitalizing on Canada Goose's authenticity, Reiss first focused on building the brand in Europe. While Canadian retailers were leery of the "Made in Canada" strategy at first, European retailers embraced the company's unique approach, and sales (at premium prices) took off.

"The Europeans said, 'we don't need another brand made in China'," says Reiss. "Once we succeeded in Europe, we started selling a lot more in Canada. They were convinced by that external validation."

As Reiss points out, cold weather is part of the Canadian identity. The company's products are made in Canada and field tested in the world's coldest climates, from the Canadian Arctic to Antarctica. Specialized products include the Constable Parka (developed with input from law enforcement agencies), the Expedition Parka worn by almost every scientist at the South Pole, and the Chilliwack Parka designed for pilots in the far North.

"Our clothing is used by crews on cold weather film sets because it keeps them warm when they're outside for 16 hours," he says. "Now, our jackets are used on-screen to authenticate film in cold climates. We get product placement organically, because we are authentic. This is a great example of how authenticity works."

The company's growth and commitment to Canadian manufacturing has created hundreds of new jobs here. To meet the ever-increasing demand with greater manufacturing capacity, Canada Goose recently purchased Winnipeg-based Engineered Apparel. It also helps support the far North community of Pond Inlet. In 2009, Canada Goose partnered with First Air and the Northwest Company to open the Canada Goose Resource Centres in Northern Canada. Free fabric and materials supplied by Canada Goose are transported by First Air for local sewers who make jackets and clothing for the community.

The success of Canada Goose has one downside: the company has been a target of counterfeiters eager to steal the brand's good will. Canada Goose is fighting back with an innovative tool: a hologram that is sewn into each garment as proof of authenticity. The company also publishes a list of [authorized retailers](#) on its website. Despite this, the heritage brand remains strong.

"If you ask an expert what to wear to the North Pole, they'll answer 'Canada Goose'," says Reiss. "Word-of-mouth is probably our strongest marketing program, and it inspired our slogan: 'Ask anyone who knows.'"