

Tactics Gives Back With 1% For The Planet



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It's one thing to say you're pro-environment. It's quite another to put your money where your mouth is. Especially in the current economy. In 2007 Tactics Board Shop joined the 1% For The Planet program, a not for

profit that helps companies that commit to donating one percent of their net revenues to charitable causes. Recently the company delivered proceeds of the program to 16 non-profits in amounts ranging from 1,000 to 5,000 dollars. Transworld Business caught up with Tactics co-owner Bob Chandler to find out why this program makes sense for them.

TWB: In the current economy, and with already thin margins, how do you justify this program from a business standpoint?

BC: After years of struggling to answer that question, we finally decided to ask ourselves the question in reverse. How can we justify not doing it? From a philosophical standpoint, we had to ask ourselves what good does this business do? We thought, "OK, we sell this cool stuff that allows people to feel the stoke of being in the ocean or on the snow or anywhere they skate, or just plain look good doing whatever they are doing. We have a great (and growing) staff and we are doing everything we can to keep paying them more every year and provide better benefits, so we are providing what we hope are really cool jobs. And, we're maintaining profitability which allows us to grow." It wasn't enough, though. We decided that, in the end, if we didn't do more to try and improve the world around us, we couldn't justify to ourselves the company's existence. We wanted our business standpoint to reflect the Triple Bottom Line: People, Planet, and Profit, not just profit. Of course, the first two on this list aren't easily quantifiable, and the whole experiment is still a work in progress.

McKenzie River Trust's Joe Moll and Tactics team rider Forrest Shearer.

TWB: In addition to doing the right thing, what are the benefits of getting involved in programs such as this?



BC: Although it isn't talked about on a daily basis in the company, there is a certain sense of pride the every Tactics employee has when they think about how one out of every 100 dollars that flows through our company gets redirected to groups on the front line of environmental conservation. It also gives all of us a chance to every now and then step back and think about what is going on outside of our business. Our

next step will be to create more formal programs for our staff to get paid by Tactics to volunteer for a non-profit that speaks to them. One really cool thing that is still evolving is our 1FTP Team. For years, we have had supported a local snow and skate (and sometimes surf) team. However, until recently, we did not pursue trying to assemble a team of professional riders. We are now in the process of creating a team of talented, professional riders who want to back our environmental initiatives and associate themselves with Tactics and what we are doing with our 1FTP commitment. JJ Thomas and Forrest Shearer are our founding members. We're looking forward to expanding the team to include ambassadors from skate and surf as well.

TWB: What has the feedback about your environmental sustainability initiatives been like from your customers? How about your vendors? Can you give any specific examples?

Tactics co-owner Bob Chandler.

BC: A very small number of customers have been ambivalent, but for the most part, the feedback we have received on the issue has been very positive. We haven't been very aggressive about marketing our environmental responsibility initiatives or soliciting feedback, but we regularly receive emails from customers telling us they learned about our 1FTP membership, for example, and are stoked about our commitment. For better or worse, we've received very little feedback from our vendors. A few of the reps are really backing what we are doing there, but for the most part, we haven't heard much at all from our vendors. I think this is just a reflection of the general sentiment in our industry, though, which needs to improve. Even though we are one of the largest specialty stores in the Northwest we also fly a little under the radar.

Big checks for good causes. Forrest Shearer and Tactics co-owner Matt Patton (far-right) with the folks from Cascadia Wildlands Project.

TWB: How and why did you decide to get involved with 1% for the planet? Do you get to choose the specific organizations that these proceeds go to?



BC: We decided when we founded the company in 1999 that we wanted our company to act with a social conscience. Although we had spent several years improving our basic business practices (e.g., reduce/reuse/recycle) and ensuring that our operational footprint was as green as possible (e.g., ultra-efficient building systems, green paints and carpets, bioswale to filter rainwater, etc.), until 2007, we had not taken fundamental steps to really prove to ourselves and our stakeholders that we gave a damn. Joining 1% for the Planet was the most legitimate way we knew of to make that commitment. The organization itself is a non-profit and to maintain membership in 1FTP, all member organizations must receive yearly certification that the member gave a full 1% of sales to approved groups. (The approval process for becoming a 1FTP

approved non-profit is pretty straightforward as we worked with the SIMA Environmental Fund to get them approved last year.) We have complete discretion over which groups we donate to under 1FTP. You'll see that last year we chose a wide range of groups from Surfrider and Elemental Awareness to Western Environmental Law Center and the Wild Salmon Center.

TWB: How does this organization help you with these efforts, versus just making donations on your own?

BC: We could make these donations on our own without having them certified by 1FTP. However, the benefit to being a part of 1FTP is that stakeholders, especially customers, don't have to guess about whether or not we're telling the truth. There is a certain legitimacy now associated with 1FTP as well as a high level of trust. Additionally, by being a part of 1FTP, it's not like we skip a year and then maybe pick it up the next year which might be a temptation in lean times. Either a company is a member and they give away 1% of sales, or they aren't allowed to be a member.

TWB: How much did you raise during your first year of participation? What are your goals for 2008?

BC: In 2007, we gave between \$1,000-\$5,000 to 16 different non-profits (see <http://grind.tactics.com/environmental-responsibility/what-we-do/environmental-grants>). We're a private company and we don't really discuss our yearly sales figures, but I can tell you that we are on track to give a significant amount more in 2008 than in 2007. Again, it will be a full 1% of sales.

TWB: What advice do you have for other shop owners trying to figure out the best way to match their means with their goals of giving back?

BC: It would be great if more retailers in our industry would join 1FTP. Realistically, though, I realize there probably aren't a lot of retailers itching to jump on the bandwagon, especially in this economic climate. My main suggestion, in addition to taking a hard look at the retailer's operational practices and environmental footprint, is for all of us to demand more from our vendors. Have conversations with the sales managers, the reps, the designers, and the El Jefes if you have their ear. ALL the vendors in our industry need to go far beyond where we are now in terms of green product development, materials sourcing, and closing the loop on what they produce. Ask them simple questions like "why can't you figure out a way to incorporate more organic cotton in your line?" Then, ask them harder questions like, "why don't you have more products that are as sustainably produced as possible with absolutely no toxic inputs?" We need to continue to push them to shift their thinking - can you imagine how differently all the vendors in our industry would operate if they were required to take back and reuse every single item they made once it wore out or broke? Of course, as retailers, we need to bridge the gap between customers and vendors and call out the eco-friendly products you carry in your store and give props to those manufacturers that produce them, even if it is still only a small part of their line. Also, even if a retailer isn't doling out 1% of their sales to Enviro groups, why not pick your favorite one, two, ten, whatever, and give those groups a small bit of press in your store. Buy an easel or open up a bit of wall space and ask your favorite non-profit(s) to make a poster board and some flyers to educate your customers about some key issues in your area. It will give many of your "core" customers a chance to think outside their mental box. Lastly, keep an eye on ASEC (Action Sports Environmental Coalition - <http://asecaction.org>). At ASR in September, I had a chance to meet and talk with Frank Scura, the Executive Director and one of the founders of the organization and the guy is awesome - full of passion, inspiration, and knowledge. He truly wants to change our industry for the better and hopefully, speaking through ASEC, his voice will reach far and wide. He is in the process of starting a Retailer section of ASEC and I would encourage all interested retailers to join.

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