

## **Homegrown Brands; Austin Success Stories**

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Brands live in the hearts and minds of consumers and mean different things to different people. Successful brands are able to create a personality that transcends from products and services to engaged emotional responses from loyal customers. Three such brands based here in Austin are Kendra Scott Designs Inc., Whole Foods Market and Yeti Coolers. These companies have made names for themselves in the capital of Texas and beyond using a mix of advertising, marketing and public relations.

These three brands have a few things in common: they came from humble beginnings and they place a huge importance on corporate social responsibility and giving back to the community. All three also offer a superior shopping experience with specific needs and wants of their customers in mind.

#### **Kendra Scott Designs Inc.**

If you go to any restaurant or event in town, chances are likely that you will see women young and old sporting the distinctly beautiful Kendra Scott collections. But it's not just Austinites; Kendra Scott jewels have adorned the ears, necks and wrists of such celebrities as Eva Longoria, Brooklyn Decker, Selena Gomez and many more of Hollywood's trendsetting leading ladies.

Founder and owner Kendra Scott, the hometown jewelry mogul who began her company just over ten years ago with only \$500 startup money, now has sixteen stores nationwide, including the flagship location in the heart of the South Congress district. Kendra also makes her designs available for sale in more than 1,000 retail locations internationally.

In 2012, the year of its tenth anniversary, Kendra Scott Design, Inc. was named the number one Fastest Growing Company in Austin at the Austin Business Journal's Fast 50 Awards for the under \$10 million category.

Scott attributes her success to staying true to her core values and remembering to thank the people who have helped her along the way. Philanthropy and giving back have been at the core of Kendra Scott Designs since the beginning. Exclusive Kendra Scott jewelry collections have been created to donate 20 percent of sales to organizations like National Down Syndrome Congress, Seton Breast Care Center and more.

Creating an individualized experience in stores as well as online is another part of what makes Kendra Scott jewelry successful. Kendra Scott gives her customers the opportunity to create and customize their pieces at the Color Bar, offering 26 various colored stones and 23 silhouettes in gold and silver. Once customers are involved in designing the jewelry, they are much more invested than if they had just purchased it off of the rack. This experience not only helps increase brand loyalty but makes for great conversation starters as women are wearing their customized jewels out and about.

#### **Whole Foods Market**

Since their start in 1978, co-owners John Mackey and Renee Lawson have worked to create a health food store that provides honest information to their customers. Customers shop at Whole Foods Market because they like knowing where their food comes from; they like knowing that the animals were treated humanely and that farmers were paid fairly. Whole Foods Market has built a brand on creating a transparency where other stores put up a veil.

The open-air market makes Whole Foods Market accessible and welcoming while providing a superior shopping experience. Providing in-store information about where the products come from makes customers feel respected and in control of their purchase decisions. Whole Foods Market provides detailed information about products and services on their website and through social media so customers can stay up to date and in the know. Together this mix creates a brand that is honest, transparent and approachable.

Whole Foods Market's commitment to sustainability and giving back is apparent outside the store as well as within. The Whole Planet Foundation was established by Whole Foods Market to provide loans, education and financial services to the self-employed poor in Asia, Africa, the Americas and the Middle East. The company has also created the Animal Compassion Foundation to help improve quality of life for farm animals while still allowing farmers economic viability. This is done through research, education and connecting farmers so they can learn best practices from each other.

In this day in age, brands have to work to maintain and reinforce their image. Whole Foods has recently received criticism for its high price point when large stores like Wal-Mart have been introducing organic foods at lower costs. In response, Whole Foods rolled out a YouTube and television advertising campaign reminding consumers that while other stores may have organic items; Whole Foods places a higher importance on the quality of ingredients, life of the animals, the environment and American farmers.

## **Yeti Coolers**

After realizing that other coolers just weren't strong enough to withstand their rugged outdoor lifestyle, brothers Roy and Ryan Seiders founded YETI Coolers in their garage in 2006. Now the coolers have 1,700 nationwide dealers, international distributors and brand partners with their Custom Logo program. Hunters, fishers and others who love the outdoors have flocked to the YETI Coolers brand mainly through word-of-mouth marketing based on their peers' experience with the product.

One of the most recognizable aspects of the YETI Cooler is its claim to be "Grizzly Bear Proof", communicated by the seal on much of their marketing and advertising collateral. The Seiders brothers wanted to create a cooler that would withstand being sat on, thrown in the back of a truck and even being attacked by a bear. To test this theory, the YETI Tundra ice chests were tested by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee. After a number of field tests, the bears were unable to break into the cooler, proving the toughness and durability of the product. For outdoorsmen who dabble in grizzly bear territory, the message was clear: this cooler was worth it.

YETI Coolers also capitalizes on customer's interest in the unique shopping experience with the Custom Logo program which allows for consumers to have their own logos, monograms or images bonded to a cooler. YETI guarantees that the images won't fade or peel off thanks to their proven application process.

In 2014, the company has created one lone pink Roadie cooler to be auctioned off to raise money for the American Cancer Society. YETI has pledged to match the donation of the highest bidder up to \$10,000.

Today's consumer has more choices than ever before and has more information available to them about every kind of topic imaginable. This means that brands are forced to work harder than ever to cut through the clutter in order to be seen. Creating a superior product, empowering customers and treating them like individuals has proven to be successful for these homegrown Austin brands.