

An Entrepreneur's Startup Dream



Photo by Jim Craven | www.jimcravenphoto.com

GRANTS PASS, OR - Nathan Sleadd was raised in Grants Pass, Oregon. On one hand, Nathan had a classic American entrepreneurial childhood, operating a lemonade stand, picking berries and doing yard work for hire. On the other hand, it was Oregon. "It's just a bit unique; people aren't afraid to be different here." Homeschooling taught him to try things out "It was a little counterculture; it was okay to take risks," Nathan says.

When Nathan was 15, a family vacation to Out'n'About Treehouse Treesort that included playing on zip lines inspired him to successfully start a company selling zip line kits and equipment. For startup companies, Southern Oregon has a supportive business atmosphere with several organizations and even other business owners that are willing to mentor entrepreneurs like Nathan. In addition, Oregon is the only West Coast state with no sales tax; a perfect situation for Internet retailers. The result is there are more than 10 times the national average of Internet retailers in Southern Oregon.

by Heather McNeill

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- Nathan Sleadd, President
Zip Line Gear

SBA 2012 Young Entrepreneur of the Year

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At 15 years old, a family vacation to Out 'n' About Treehouse Treesort that included sleeping in tree houses and playing on zip lines inspired Nathan Sleadd to start a business selling zip line kits. That was 2005. Since then, Zip Line Gear has grown into a highly successful Internet retail business that is operating from their office/warehouse in Grants Pass. In 2012 he won the US Small Business Administration's Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

For Nathan, Zip Line Gear's enthusiastic "let's try it" spirit is a marketing edge. "A group of people that have fun together is very attractive to customers." Nathan knows he can train people, but they have to be excited, curious, fun and have a high performance drive. According to Nathan, when a company has a lifestyle product or service, it's important that they embrace that lifestyle. The marketing at Zip Line Gear is primarily done in house, which is a bit unusual for a company of 15 employees, but it gives them the ability to implement an idea immediately. An idea hatched at lunchtime can be in production by dinner time and on the Internet the next day.

For startup companies, Southern Oregon has an amazingly supportive business atmosphere. Several local businesses helped mentor Nathan. When he was a warehouse manager for Deardorf Fitzsimmons Corporation in Merlin, Oregon, they leased him warehouse space to get his business started. He was working 40 hours a week for them and eventually 40 hours a week on his zip line business. Within a year he realized his business could thrive if he gave it his whole focus. The Deardorf Fitzsimmons staff continued to mentor him through the sales and distribution challenges a startup faces.

Nathan also got involved with several business organizations. He attended the Grants Pass & Josephine County Chamber of Commerce, where he met several other businesses that were willing to let him shadow them. Getting connected with the Chamber got him connected with Rogue Community College Small Business Development Center. He still meets with RCC's SBDC throughout the year and any time he's planning a strategic shift.

As the only West Coast state with no sales tax, the region has great advantages for Internet retailers like Nathan. In fact, there are more than 10 times the national average of Internet retailers in Southern Oregon. Zip Line Gear is also one of many Internet retail businesses involved with the new Rogue Nexus, a professional organization that provides peer-to-peer networking and best practices for e-business leaders.

Nathan is just one example of how Southern Oregon is the perfect place for startups to get off the ground and build successful national brands.

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Nathan Sleadd was awarded the 2012 US Small Business Administration Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

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