

Timberland

Timberland is a third generation family firm which started life as a small shoe company in south-east Boston, USA. Today Jeff Swartz leads the company and it has extended its product range from durable outdoor footwear to include durable outdoor clothing as well as opening a number of prominently-sited retail outlets selling its boots and other branded products. The company has an annual turnover of some £700 million (\$1.3 billion) with profits in the first quarter of 2004 of some £16 million (\$31 million).



Whilst Timberland is a strong retail brand, the business is also based on strong ethical foundations. Like his family, Jeff Swartz is an orthodox Jew and the values of the business reflect those of the family and its religion. It has a motto: 'Doing good by doing well.' And Timberland believes that these values reinforce the brand, because customers care about the same things as the company.

Timberland has a volunteering programme which allows employees to spend up to 40 hours paid-time a year on community projects. 95% of employees use some portion of this time and in 2003 the Timberland workforce put in some 270,000 hours of community service. Alongside this Timberland has carved out a role as an industry leader in setting high working standards in its factories and in those of its suppliers. In part this stems from an accident Jeff's grandfather had when working late the night before his wedding when his hand got caught in a machine and his fingers were severed. Timberland is also aiming to be free of toxins, carbon neutral and use 100% renewable resources.



'Investment in the community is important to me because this is a family company. It's not just because my grandfather and my father grew up on the factory floor but because I did too. Workers' health and safety, for instance, isn't just an ideal. It's as visceral to me as the missing fingers on my grandfather's hand.'

The Times, 29 May, 2004

Case question:

How important is ethical underpinning to the vision, values and culture of a business as well as its brand?