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Casper's Adventure



YANIK SILVER

When you meet a CEO who founded multiple multi-million dollar startup companies before the age of 36, and puts his business plan for his latest company online for all to see, it's a safe bet that he has some interesting hobbies. But Yanik Silver, a serial entrepreneur by nature, couldn't help but turn his hobbies into yet another business—one that combines his thrill-seeking nature and his passion for work into a concept that is irresistible to his contemporaries.

The company, Maverick Business Adventures, began in 2008, the blossoming of an idea that had formed after one of Silver's friends', knowing his love of adventure (he cites running with the bulls in Pamplona as one of his best travel experiences) took him racing in Baja, California, going at breakneck speeds over part of the giant course. "We met a CEO there, a lot of businessmen, and that kind of sparked that idea in my idea," says Silver. "Unfortunately about six or seven months later, my buddy who had brought me died in a racing accident. We'd made all these plans to fly jets in Russia and things, he really got it, and that was part of the catalyst for starting it as well. I took a look at my internet businesses and thought it wasn't as fulfilling as it could be." His enthusiasm was something he wanted to share, but over the years, he had found that most of his friends either didn't have enough money or enough time to accompany him, so he decided to combine the experience with elements of business development opportunities, teaching, and philanthropy, and see who came along for the ride.

"The first group was a lot of friends, when I set the deadline for myself for the first trip in January of 2008. I knew nothing about adventure travel, but I decided that would be the deadline. We got Jesse James to come lead a Baja racing adventure, 24 guys that came there and they were all people I knew previously except for one or two. Some of our best members to this day were in that group. After that we asked people if they wanted to continue and charged them a membership fee." The adventure trips are combined with business sessions, including everything from a "hot seat" experience, where members brainstorm around one particular person "in a thatched hut in the middle of nowhere, with a beer in



their hand,” says Silver, to more formal sessions like sharing best practices, an informal Q&A with a celebrity business icon, who have included Jesse James, Tony Hawk, John Paul DeJoria, and Richard Branson, to small brainstorming workshops done in small groups. “We’ve also done really out-there sessions where we have everyone take paper airplanes, write their business problem or opportunity on it, fly them and pick one up, and everyone has a minute to come up with their best advice, and then launch them again.” The qualifications for entry strictly require members to be a founder of a million dollar plus business, so the members all have proven success with entrepreneurial ventures, and with the intensity of activity, members form particularly strong bonds over the course of a trip or several, and are highly motivated to help one another.

The mix of participants have happened organically, with about 15% of the membership female, “which runs along with the stats I’ve seen for business overall. It’s grown word of mouth, we haven’t necessarily sought women out, but we love our female members, they bring a great diversity to the group.” Though the activities may

seem particularly male oriented, Silver’s enthusiasm for his adventures could entice anyone to give it a try. He lists of several of his favorites, including the third year of racing in Baja, diving the tectonic plates and snowmobiling an active volcano in Iceland, zero-gravity flights, flying planes, and a road rally in exotic cars with a twist—participants were required to deck their cars in 80s gear and drive in mullets and wristbands. “It takes a certain kind of individual to roll with that,” he admits. “Next, we’re doing Costa Rica, ziplining and bungee jumping, then South Africa, cage diving and bungee jumping as well as attending the World Cup. It’s mostly along the lines of what I like to do, which is how it originally started. There’s enough golf in the world, nothing boring. I want to do stuff that the members can’t do on their own. We’re actually setting up a HALO skydive, where you jump out at 30,000 feet wearing an oxygen mask. My wife was not happy about that. It wasn’t too bad, it was just a whole experience,” he says placidly.

As for his business interests, MBA is a counterintuitive fit for his lifestyle. Though it’s a very different model and focus than his other endeavors, it provides him with







something he feels enhances his lifestyle. “I think most executives don’t get away enough, so it gives me a real chance to put five things on my calendar where I know I’ll be away.” To his members, to ensure they have a similarly rejuvenating experience, he says “I really recommend that to our members, not to bring a laptop or a cell phone, it’s incredibly liberating to give yourself that kind of re-creation experience, recreating your business or your passion, getting back to your ideas. You get so stuck in your email boxes. I get SOME of them to do that, not all—some of them are very addicted to their Blackberries or iPhones.”

They’re equally committed, however, to MBA’s philanthropic goals, spreading their collective knowledge beyond their own tight circle. Silver believes passionately in teaching and sharing, and reaching out the global community was a goal from the beginning. “We bring in kids, for example there were a hundred of them in Iceland, and discuss entrepreneurship. We have some of our members there to help them home their ideas. It’s something we want to get going even more, I have a goal by 2020 getting a million kids aged 13-23 to start their own companies. The live learning wont reach a million kids, but online learning is getting up and going, we’ve just finished a virtual test with the Branson School in South Africa, to see how the curriculum works. It teaches

free business basics to local students, they create a business plan, and the best plans actually get funded. We’ve had a small group mentor their students and engage with them. We’ll be down there for world cup and we’ll be able to teach in person.”

Going forward, they plan to open up regional groups, the first of which will be in Philadelphia, and run shorter trips. “We’ll have regional directors who will be running them, it’ll be a recurring group of members so you get the same people, the same adrenaline but a quick weekend, instead of six days in Europe.” Currently, MBA does about six trips a year, five or six days apiece on average, though there are exceptions on both ends—the trip to South Africa will be 10 days, while a planned covert ops trip in October will be three days of combat pistol shooting and surveillance, “very James Bond,” says Silver.

Even as he’s created a vehicle to indulge his dreams, he still has a long list of places to go. “There’s a life list on my blog of things that I still want to do. A couple of them I’ll hit this year, like attending the world cup, but I’ve never been skiing in the Alps, Id love to do that, to go bobsledding up there or something. I want to see more of the Scandinavian countries, go dogsledding, see the ice hotel, get out there, go heliskiing in Canada. I’ve definitely done a lot, but you want to keep adding things to your list.” While entry to his group is naturally inac-

cessible to many, he focuses on finding a different kind of special experience, not necessarily of the five-star variety. “Every once in a while we do luxury hotels, but we definitely want to create something a bit more memorable. My goal is to make them unable to stop talking about it. We try to build in some surprises. In Baja, Mexico last year, one of the nights—I was a little nervous about this—we had tents at Guadalupe Canyon with natural hot tubs. The first year we went to Scorpion Bay, which was in the very first issue of Surf magazine, you need to get down there in dune buggies, and it’s the second longest surf break in the world. We literally stayed in a converted water sewage plant, but you look up at night and I’ve never seen the stars that bright. At the same time, we’ll try and make it really special with exclusive access, like when we did air combat in Vegas, we did a private dinner at Simon restaurant with a special menu created by Kerry Simon and the CEO and COO of Zappos, which you can’t really do generally. Personally, while he loves the Sky Lofts at MGM, the Mandarin Oriental, and the Ritz, for his purposes, Necker Island is the right kind of five star—unpretentious but very, very private.

For the world’s most successful entrepreneurs, Silver knows he’s filling a niche that many don’t even know exist. “I think it helps people who have been extremely

successful in their lives and who on paper have everything they want, but at the same time they still have things they’ve never gotten around to doing it. It almost gives them an excuse to do these things they’ve always wanted to do without taking the time away from their business. There have been some significant deals that have happened, an international resort developer met Carl Banks from the New York Giants on our trips, and they did a deal where he’s opening a new restaurant at a resort in Pennsylvania. We’ve had members go into business together, and make millions in a month, or on a smaller scale but still worthwhile. It’s a real return on their investment, or else it wouldn’t keep going. I know they need it because I’m the same way; left to my own devices I would be a workaholic—unless I have something scheduled that forces you to take the time away. The other thing I think they get from the group is the platform to help that next generation. We tend to be a giving, sharing kind of group and they’re happy to help the next person, but they don’t have a platform. The live sessions and virtual mentoring give them a way to have a significant impact. On the entrepreneurial success continuum, between start up to growth to legacy, this give them the opportunity to share between the growth and legacy phases, and look ahead to the future.” ■

