

STRATEGIES

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Stretching out their product line

Portland's "oddballs" add tequila to their large-sized shoe biz.

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Portland-native brothers Seth and Zac Longaker were always known as the tall kids. As they continued to grow, eventually passing six-and-a-half-feet tall, it became harder and harder for them to find shoes.

"Our options back then were pretty far and few between," Seth Longaker said.

They couldn't find any shoes that fit, let alone trendy shoes that they'd want to wear or ones that were affordable. Frustrated but inspired, the brothers got their business degrees and opened Oddball Shoe Co. in 1997, which sources and sells shoes sizes 14 and up.

The business has at times thrived and, through the pandemic, persevered, leading to a product line diversification that makes sense given the Longakers' penchant for surprises and innovation: The pair have begun marketing their own branded specialty tequila line, made by a small distiller with whom they connected in Mexico.

Acre Largo is carried in 40 state-run liquor stores and dozens of bars and restaurants.

It's a different tack for a company that fills a needed niche. When NBA players would come to town to play the Portland Trail Blazers, many of them ended up at the shop because it's one of the few in the country specifically tailored to provide cool sneakers in their size.

Along with that audience, the shop grew as a community formed around the "weird" people with the big feet.

"The first few years were pretty good, we had a pretty steady stream with guys. And then as we evolved, we started finding more inroads with companies," Longaker said. "We got featured on 'The Today Show,' we were in 'People' magazine, we were in all these things and now big-size shoes were becoming more common."

Eventually though, the joy the brothers felt about the shoe world becoming more inclusive to people their size wore off. Shoppers suddenly had less incentive to come into the Oddball store and warehouse at 1801 N.W. Thurman



St. because the bigger companies like Nike were making big shoes more mainstream.

That, and the supply chain woes of the last few years, led the brothers to seek ways to spice up the business. At first they thought they'd make dress shoes, so they went to Mexico to meet with some factories and shoemakers.

That's where they were introduced to the idea of creating a tequila.

"During our trip to Mexico, these guys had said 'You guys love Mexico so much, you understand the culture, the familial aspect, the language. You know what would be really cool to make your shoes even more authentic, and have a piece of Mexico, is every time you sold a pair of your shoes, (customers) get a little bottle of your own personal tequila to go with it,'" Longaker said. "The idea that we could have our own private label of tequila really spun Zac and I out."



ODDBALL SHOE CO.

What it is: Sells large shoes (size 14 and up) and has a new brand of tequila from a small Mexican distillery

Owners: Seth and Zac Longaker, brothers who are each at least 6'6

Founded: 1997

Audience: Along with taller Portlanders, the Longakers have a steady income stream from NBA players who stop in when they face the Blazers.

The tequila, available at liquor stores, allows them to share their love of Mexico with a name that holds a special meaning: Acre Largo in Spanish means long acre, which is their last name.

Though it doesn't have any business affiliation with Oddball, Acre Largo has provided a larger stream of revenue to bolster Oddball after business slowed during the pandemic years.

Longaker said it has also given their friends and family who don't need large shoes a new way to support them.

"We're entrepreneurs, Zac and I are not qualified to go work for anybody else at this point, and so we just kind of keep creating businesses," Longaker said. "For the first time in a long time, Zac and I are actually happy to come to work again."

The twice-distilled 100% agave tequila can be purchased online or in liquor stores across Oregon for \$44.94.

Top: Zac and Seth Longaker began the company two decades ago.

Left: A sample dress shoe, and tequila, produced for Oddball Shoe Company.

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