



“

OUR BUSINESS IS ABOUT

# MAXIMIZING HUMAN POTENTIAL.

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FROM STARTUP TO GLOBAL SPORTS NUTRITION SENSATION, NUTRABOLT CEO **DOSS CUNNINGHAM** TALKS BRAND DIFFERENTIATION, CUSTOMER FOCUS AND THE POWER OF TEAMWORK.

WORDS **JULIE COOPER** • IMAGES **JOHN DAVIDSON / NUTRABOLT**

**T**here's no denying it – living the fit life is on trend. According to the Global Wellness Institute, the wellness industry is worth a staggering US\$4.2 trillion. What was once a casual touch-point with wellness, like booking a massage or popping into a spontaneous spin class, has become an essential part of daily life for many. Everyone from high-level executives to soccer moms and your best friend's great aunt is riding the wellness wave.

Due to this complete lifestyle overhaul, people around the globe are more determined than ever to eat healthier,

be fitter and perform better. And Nutrabolt – a global leader in sports nutrition – is providing the necessary fuel for maximizing this potential in us all.

“For us, it's all about trying to take the capabilities we have built over the years and our strong understanding of science to bring products to the market that actually deliver while thinking about the consumer,” says CEO Doss Cunningham. “We want to take our highly specialized, technical-product categories and mainstream them.”

Since the beginning, Nutrabolt has catered to the athlete and fitness diehard who's in the gym for hours every day. »



The company's flagship functional performance pre-workout solution C4® delivers the energy necessary for this type of fitness enthusiast. And, it's been incredibly successful – it's number one in the world, with a 40 per cent market share in the pre-workout energy category.

Likewise, the company's post-workout recovery hydration formulation Xtend® is a leader for its performance capability in the sports drink category. Thanks to the success of each and the up-tick of the wellness-curious, Doss is currently looking to capitalize on their broader applications.

"If you look at the rise of gym memberships and studio memberships like Orangetheory and SoulCycle, there's a huge movement of people pursuing fitness, wellness and trying to live longer," he says. "We've been on the far end of the fitness spectrum within the sports nutrition world, and now we're trying to move towards the middle. We want to capture the people who are just living a healthy lifestyle. We want to build a portfolio that speaks to those consumers with our ability to build brands that are differentiated."

Cashing in on the functional drink category is one way Doss hopes to accomplish this. Like the way bottled water gets upgraded with added minerals or a more balanced pH to create a new product, Doss hopes to do similar innovative enhancements to Nutrabolt's umbrella of product offerings.

"There's a big trend in elevating mature consumer-packaged goods with a functional benefit," he continues. "So, we're taking our C4® brand equity and building a strong differentiated position that we think consumers

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are really going to gravitate to. There's a lot of growth in this category and we're confident we can do that."

Doss has also been focused on making the products even more accessible to the average Joe. Once only available in powder form for easy mixing at home, C4® now comes in convenient on-the-go drink options that are available virtually anywhere, and its reach is expanding. The brand is headed outside the US and Europe to high-growth markets in Asia, in areas such as Japan, China and South Korea.

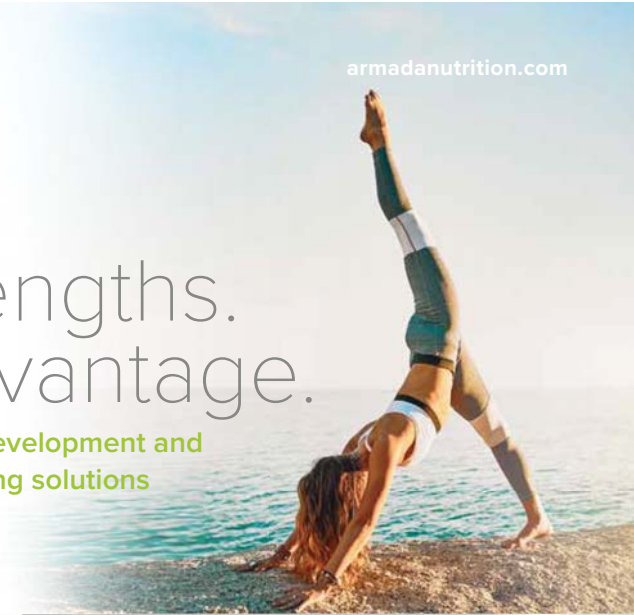
"We're really going after those markets. There's a ton of growth in those regions of the world," he shares. "We think we are more of a platform than just a collection of brands, and we are going to be very aggressive in looking at opportunities to acquire companies we think we can be »




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“MY GOAL HAS ALWAYS BEEN TO HELP DEVELOP AND GROW THE BUSINESS, AND DEVELOP AND GROW PEOPLE – I DIDN’T WANT TO HAVE TO GIVE UP ONE FOR THE OTHER.”



successful with. We’re trying to expand within performance and beyond performance. There’s a lot of exciting things happening within active nutrition and functional food and beverage, so we are looking to continue to broaden our portfolio.”

The company has certainly come a long way from its humble Texas startup roots; it’s now recognized as a global nutrition powerhouse. Doss credits Nutrabolt’s explosive success to the team’s holistic insight into the customer journey.

“NutraBolt has been able to stay ahead of some of the disruption, such as how consumers are shopping, by building an incredible digital competence. So, as specialty bricks-and-mortar has declined in relevance, we’ve been right there to pick up the ball and achieve growth within the online channel,” he explains. “We’ve also been pretty perceptive that, not only are we moving into a bigger market, moving into energy drinks and trying to bring the functional benefit to our products, but we’ve also been able to understand what consumers are looking for. Our movement into some new formats has really allowed our brands to continue to expand, grow and meet the consumers’ needs. Being very consumer-centric, knowing where the consumers are and where they’re headed while being very iterative with our business strategy has been key.”

It’s a strategy that Doss says is always evolving. “Our mission is to deliver products that maximize human potential and make those products accessible to all. Within that mission, there’s a lot to unpack, but accessibility is really about us having a brand architecture that supports multiple

entry points. We don’t want to only cater to high earners or those with a disposable income. We want to bring performance solutions to everyday, middle-class people. To do that, we’ve had to have a product strategy, a distribution strategy and a price architecture that supports that. We’re building a business around the consumer.”

In order to deliver on those strategies, strong partnerships have been fundamental. “The key to us having fruitful relationships is about us staying in close communication, doing a substantial amount of joint business planning and being able to really look at our suppliers as partners – not just transactional vendors,” Doss says. “We’re talking about what’s happening next year, allowing them to make investments and be of service to us while growing their own businesses. It’s a joined-at-the-hip type process that has worked well for us.”

Just as Doss expects Nutrabolt’s suppliers to buy into the dream, he also expects the same from his employees, and it’s been like that since day one. “A lot of work early on was about casting a vision and getting people to dream a little bit bigger,” he remembers. “If everyone was clear on the vision of the business, the objectives we were trying to achieve and what success looked like, then from there, we would be able to build out strategies more easily. I had to get people to really buy into what we were doing, first and foremost.” »



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**“FOR US, ULTIMATE SUCCESS IS NEVER LOSING SIGHT OF WHAT MAKES US A GREAT COMPANY.”**

More than a decade of global success later, Doss still remains true to those early values. As the company has grown, relying on those values has made navigating the unknown that much easier. “The business changes a lot, so we put a huge emphasis on being resilient to adversity,” he explains. “For us to continue to be successful, we have to evolve and be able to overcome external factors. What’s critical to me is that we have people who are resilient and have a passion for our mission.”

And, they all have to have their heads in the game. “We are team-oriented,” he says. “It’s all about collaboration and being able to win as one. We have an expression within the company – One Nutrabolt. It means we do things together – not as silos, not as departments or individuals, but as one. It’s been really effective. There’s this competitiveness, a constant pursuit of improvement. We want to get better and we set the bar high. Resilience, bias for action, one team, passion for the mission – these are our core values. They’re our backbone.”

They enable Nutrabolt to lead with veracity, which can be hard to come by in the business world these days. “Everyone is very results-driven, but we don’t sacrifice integrity,” Doss says. “We don’t cut corners. Not every company is successful in doing that while maintaining scale. A lot of companies win but lose their integrity along the way. For us, ultimate success is never losing sight of what makes us a great company. That’s our commitment to doing things the right way.”

It’s a commitment that’s paid off. Nutrabolt has quickly become a fixture in the global fitness space. Currently, it’s the largest independently owned sports nutrition platform in the world, with retail sales exceeding US\$650 million. As for the future, only time will tell. But Doss hopes Nutrabolt will continue being known as a disrupter and a company that is laser-focused on delivering consumer solutions that advance overall health and performance.

“Our business is about maximizing human potential. It’s about continuing to build and curate brands into a portfolio that allows us to speak to those customer needs,” he says. “We’re really excited about what the next 10 years will look like.” ■

Doss joined Nutrabolt while he was still a student at Texas A&M University. He was responsible for overseeing the overall business operations while founder and former-CEO Poul Bodholt focused on product innovation. Shortly thereafter in 2007, while Doss was doing his “final lap” of grad school, Poul stepped down and the company was suddenly in his hands.

While anyone else might have been overwhelmed by the notion of running a company straight out of college – or, in his case, just finishing – Doss felt right at home in his new role. “Leadership came naturally to me,” he shares. “I played sports my whole life growing up. I’ve been part of teams, and I knew the key to winning was to get everyone going in the same direction. You have to get everyone focused on the ultimate goal.”

Although he credits taking notes from his mentor Poul and other notable, respected leaders he admired, for Doss, leading became more about the people than anything else. “People have always been first. They’re the core of everything we do,” he says. “I’ve always tried to direct the business first by considering how it affects the people within the company. My goal has always been to help develop and grow the business, and develop and grow people – I didn’t want to have to give up one for the other.”

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