

The Licensing Book®

◆◆◆ Graj + Gustavsen and Old Toledo Team to Form TradeMarc Productions

BY DUSTIN GLICK

Marc Kaufman, CEO of apparel manufacturer Old Toledo, had everything he needed for a hot new apparel-based leisure brand, including a name — Couch Potato. But something was missing, and that's why Kaufman got on the phone and placed a call to his good friends at brand strategy firm Graj + Gustavsen. A few meetings later, the two companies announced they had not only partnered for Couch Potato, but joined together to form TradeMarc Productions, a new company focused on developing innovative brands.

"The truth of the matter is that when I thought up Couch Potato, I only thought of one company, the best in branding — Graj + Gustavsen," says Kaufman. "And I immediately got on the phone and told them about this idea and they felt as strongly as I did about it."

When Simon Graj, founder and CEO of Graj + Gustavsen, met Kaufman, he says it was like meeting a kindred spirit.

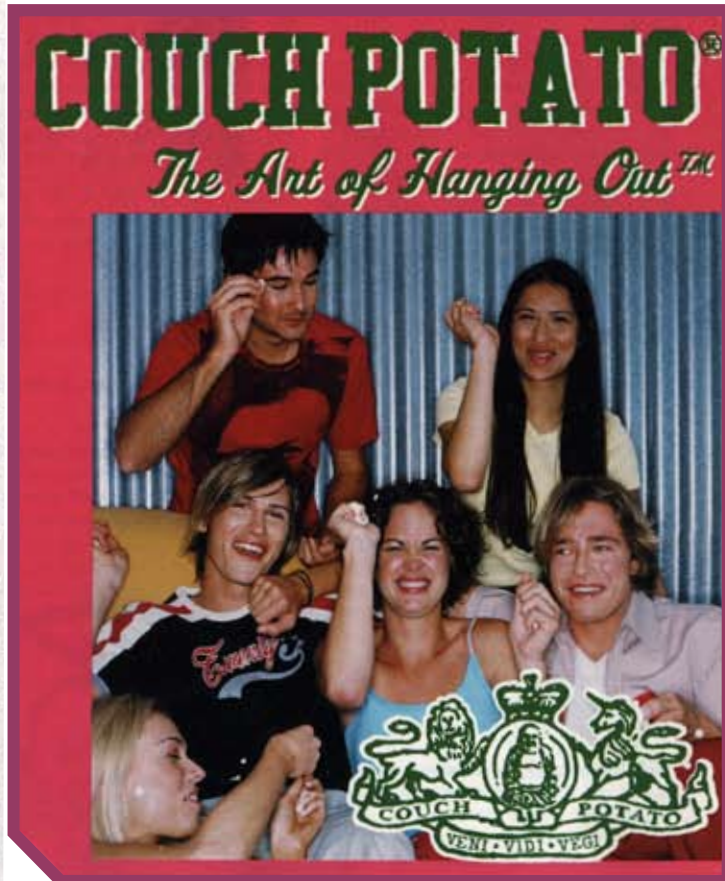
"One of the things we love is that all of the products that come from his company are very authentic and simple," says Graj. "His workwear categories combine both utility as well as fashion without too much fanfare. It's a very powerful company that delivers great product that sells."

TradeMarc Productions is intended to be a "one-stop-shop" for brand invention and manufacturing, with an equal focus on both the product and the ideas behind it.

"Most manufacturers focus on product. We think in this day and age, the concept for the product is a product as well," says Graj. "You need two pieces of the puzzle — a great idea and a strong contextual image of the brand, and then great product that delivers it."

Graj + Gustavsen takes pride in its ability to develop great ideas into powerful physical environments that combine signage and imagery to help attract customers from a distance. During its 15-year history, the agency has worked with a large number of brands, from MTV and Mudd to Target and Timberland. Meanwhile, Old Toledo Brands Inc. has been manufacturing high-quality workwear, outerwear, sportswear and headwear for years, finding success with its popular line of licensed Jeep apparel. The combination of the two companies will take effect with the Couch Potato brand.

"We love the idea of products for the art of hanging out, so we're creating a culture, philosophy and lifestyle that really helps people embrace their inner Couch Potato," says Eric Gustavsen, principal, Graj + Gustavsen. "These are products for downtime, home, sport and leisure management."



The licensing masterminds at TradeMarc are excited about Couch Potato because the concept is already established in the minds of the consumer. Everyone knows what a couch potato is — and TradeMarc is set to take advantage of this well-established consumer awareness with a lifestyle concept, image and attitude that Graj believes is very saleable.

"We've lived in a 20-year cycle of lifestyle brands pioneered by Ralph Lauren," says Graj. "We think the next level of aspirational qualities are less about cookie-cutter dressing and more about the way you think and feel — how spiritually inclined you are, how smart you are and how laid back you are. And that's why Couch Potato is going to work so well."

After launching Couch Potato, TradeMarc plans to develop more original concepts and brands, and doing what it takes to make them succeed at retail, whether it's designing special in-store displays or teaming with retailers for exclusives. With the power of two successful design-oriented companies like Old Toledo and Graj+Gustavsen behind it, TradeMarc Productions should be churning out innovative new brands for a long time to come.

TradeMarc Productions' first project is the Couch Potato brand, an apparel-based brand appealing to consumers' love of comfort and relaxation