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almost famous

Old Guys Rule Sea Potential

The active baby boomer market provides a swell of opportunity for one entrepreneur.

VITAL STATS Thom Hill, 40, of Old Guys Rule in Ventura, California

COMPANY Apparel featuring vintage-inspired graphics

PROJECTED 2008 SALES \$8 million

SURF'S UP In 2003, professional surfer Don Craig was riding high, thanks largely to inspiration he drew from his father, legendary surfer Doug Craig. As a tribute to his dad, Don crafted some bumper stickers that said "Old Guys Rule." The saying struck a nerve with the general public—especially the 40- to 65-year-old set—so Don slapped the phrase on T-shirts and put them in several Southern California surf shops. They sold out immediately.

POINT BREAK Seeing the potential but not wanting to helm a big business, Don enlisted Thom Hill, president of sports apparel company Coastal Classics, to take over. Meanwhile, Don promotes the brand as a national sales representative. Says Hill, "With the aging boomer population being as active as they are, we jumped on it and created a lifestyle brand for people who were still active and have discretionary time and money."

TIDAL RETURNS When gift-giving women unexpectedly emerged as the primary customers, Hill followed the current by educating retailers and choosing appropriate store placement. Still, inspiration for new designs and accessories is never far away. "Our lead designer, our sales manager, Don and I get together two or three times a year, rent a house somewhere in Mexico, go out in the water and come up with a bunch of ideas," says Hill. "It's all about having fun."

ON THE HORIZON Today, the brand has come to symbolize a state of mind popular among surfers, golfers, bikers and boaters. While the company has vibed well with retailers in coastal communities, it will gain more momentum this year as Hill partners with specialty chains and lifestyle department stores nationwide. —Sara Wilson

OLD
GUYS
RULE