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Upsize

PEOPLE, IDEAS AND STUFF TO HELP GROWING COMPANIES

By Beth Ewen

APPAREL

Done with day jobs, Twin Six founders focus on growth

Ryan Carlson's last day at his old job was this June, when he quit to focus all his time on Twin Six in Minneapolis. He joined his business partner Brent Gale, who left his job as a t-shirt designer at Target in May 2006.

The two moved out of their basements into a storefront in south Minneapolis earlier this year, where they run their business designing, manufacturing and delivering apparel for bicycle riders that doesn't feature the typical blazing colors or promotional logos.

"He wanted to do a fashion-forward take on riding apparel," says Carlson, referring to Gale, who had the original idea for the company. Both men are avid bicyclists. "As designers, we're always finicky people. He was fed up with the options."

Their kits, as the jersey and shorts com-

[Quote o' the month]

"I came in one day and one of our employees was sitting on a Pilates ball with a laptop. Every chair and every desk was taken. I said, if we add any more employees we're going to have to get more Pilates balls."

— **Dave Rowley**, president of **Imagewerks Marketing** in Maplewood, who's adding 8,000 square feet to his office space in part to accommodate a new press (and people): 952.252.7906; dave@iwmarketing.com; www.iwmarketing.com

bos are called, include a houndstooth pattern, an argyle pattern, and a green-and-white "cabbie" pattern that evokes Minnesota's Suburban green-and-white cabs, rather than the yellow and black one might envision. The two take their design cues from Minnesota, they say.

Two years ago they designed samples and brought them to Interbike, the biggest annual show for the bicycle retailers' industry, in late September in Las Vegas. "We got picked up by a lot of great shops. One was REI, and a lot of mom-and-pops," Carlson says.

Next came finding the manufacturers to make the orders, and getting them delivered on time for spring sales. They did it all over again the following year, and this year in mid-July were preparing for their third big show.

"They place a pre-order, and we have to front the money and find the manufacturers and then deliver in the spring," Carlson says, adding they weren't prepared for those aspects of the business. "That was the rude awakening for us."

They simply asked questions and tried to solve their way through problems that came up. "We asked people to be patient with us."

Carlson says leaving his job at an established public relations/advertising agency was a leap. "It was scary, and exciting, and scary," he says. "Neither one of us thinks the hard times are behind us. We have to more exacting. It doesn't take long" to ruin a good initial reputation.

They're also working harder than ever, barely having time to ride their bikes more than once or twice a week.

"We anticipated this as an escape from The Man, and we'd be riding every day and collecting checks," says Carlson with a laugh. "And it has been anything but that. Every day is a work day."

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» Ryan Carlson (left) and Brent Gale

