




TACTICS

# REJECTING THE CO

TRAVIS BOERSMA  
Co-founder of Dutch Bros.

PHOTO BY JAMIE LUSCH



IT'S HARD TO MISS the blue and white windmill embossed on dozens of Dutch Bros. drive-through coffee stands planted around the state. The quirky logo is going to be even more common as the company plans to expand in the middle of one of the worst economic downturns in U.S. history.

What makes the Grants Pass company seemingly recession proof? Convenience and value, according to co-founder Travis Boersma. Dutch Bros. puts more espresso shots in its steamed drinks and charges less than Starbucks. And raising prices is the last thing Boersma plans to do.

"Customers want value; they want more bang for their buck," he says. "Especially when times are tough."

Since 1992, Travis and his brother, Dane, have grown their operation from a handful of pushcarts in Grants Pass to more than 135 coffee stands and \$50 million in gross annual revenue. Nine of these stands are in Grants Pass and the rest are throughout Oregon and six other states. In the past two years, Dutch Bros. has added 50 stands and plans on 20 more this year.

The company began franchising in 1999 and now has 1,500 employees and 45 franchisees. Boersma says choosing the right franchisee is critical; 85% have worked their way up through the company, and the others are required to work for Dutch Bros. a minimum of three months to make sure they're grounded in the company's culture.

Preventing that culture from disintegrating into a robotic corporate grind has always been one of Boersma's top priorities. "My mission is to be a ray of sunshine and spread positivity; connect with people," he says.

The 38-year-old Boersma got his attitude from older brother Dane, whom he describes as "my role model, business partner

**DUTCH BROS.**  
dutchbros.com

**FOUNDED:** 1992

**EMPLOYEES:** 1,500

**HEADQUARTERS:** Grants Pass

**ANNUAL REVENUE:** \$50 million

**BESTSELLING DRINK:** The Kahlua Kicker

**BEANS:** 1 million pounds used in 2008

and best friend." Dane, 55, was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or Lou Gehrig's disease, in 2005. Dane's illness, a degenerative nerve disease, struck Dutch Bros. a heart-wrenching blow. But a second generation of Dutch Bros. has taken leadership roles in the company, applying the skills and attitude they learned from their father.

Dutch Bros. dealt with another difficult setback in 2004. Right after moving their headquarters to a new building in Grants Pass, a fire broke out in a plastic dumpster, torching almost half-a-million dollars in coffee and equipment. Instead of the scheduled growth spurt, the company was scrambling to continue business as usual. After a few phone calls, Boersma connected with Dick Boyd, co-president of Portland-based Boyd Coffee.

"They helped us out, bent over backwards and gave us a ton of products so we could get through without a roaster and a home," says Travis. "And the community got so involved and helped us out in so many ways."

It underscored Boersma's belief that fellow specialty coffee roasters are compatriots rather than competition. "Anyone in the coffee trade, in my mind, is an ally," he says. "I think it's a privilege that we're all in this together."

**JENNIFER FURNISS**

# CORPORATE GRIND