



Speaking Volumes
One book blisters
the shoe industry.

Run This Way

The author of *Born to Run* learns the ultimate retailing trick: education. BY CHRISTOPHER MCDUGALL

RIGHT BEFORE meeting a few hundred running-shoe retailers, I warmed them up with a little banter in the media. Just a few icebreakers, like:

“Running shoes may be the worst thing to ever hit the human foot.”

“Running shoes are a failed experiment.”

“If running shoes were a drug, they’d be yanked off the market.”

Me, on *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart:

“The key is the stinking shoes. The shoes are the root of the problem. Without the shoes, you can run joyfully and painlessly forever.”

Stewart: “So this book basically takes on the Mexican drug cartels and the American sneaker cartels.”

Me: “That’s it. Lump them all together.”

Stewart: “Lump them all together in one big stew.”

So it was thus, after trashing their product

on TV and radio and in my book, *Born to Run*, that I flew to Salt Lake City this past July to meet my public at the Outdoor Retailer Summer Market Tradeshow. I'd made it pretty clear that I believe running shoes are a racket and cause the very injuries they're supposed to prevent.

On the shoe sellers' side of the debate, they had biomechanical engineers, expert designers, over-

I'd written a book that takes a flamethrower to the running shoe industry; but instead of burning it in the village square, shoe sellers were lining up for signed copies.

whelming popular support, and the awesome R and D power of a \$17 billion market. The best-known guy on my side was "Barefoot Ted" McDon-

ald, a public speaker and online sandal salesman who rides a high-wheel Victorian bicycle and likes to run barefoot through the streets of Seattle pulling tourists behind him in a rickshaw.

I expected the shoe sellers to really let me have it. And they did—except "it" turned out to be a steak dinner, high fives, and requests for autographs. The owner of a running store chain in Michigan offered to rent an auditorium so I could give a speech and invited me to stay at his home. A British shoe manufacturer offered to put out a signature model in my honor.

Where was the anger, the arguments, the photos of children who would no longer have bread in their little mouths because of my big one? I'd written a book that takes a flamethrower to the running shoe industry; but instead of burning it in the village square, the shoe sellers were lining up for signed copies.

It was utterly bewildering. Gradually, though, it dawned on me: Maybe I knew something about running shoes, but I knew squat about running shoe sales. My mistake was thinking that what's on sale at specialty stores is the stuff on the racks with the bar codes. Not even close. Only after that weird love-fest at the Outdoor Retailer Tradeshow did I begin to understand that the smartest retailers aren't salespeople at all. They're in the same business as lawyers, Mafia dons, White House speechwriters, and journalists like me: the protection racket.

And that is a Business Idea worth examining, especially now that anyone who sells anything has to contend with the long arm of the

Internet. The protection racket makes its money by convincing you that if you don't take its advice, you'll get hurt. Sure, you can go right ahead and defend yourself in court, ignore an offer you can't refuse, riff off the top of your head during a State of the Union address, or disregard the sports page before betting on the Super Bowl. But you won't, because you know the tiniest mistake could mean catastrophe. And the two keys to the protection racket?

No. 1: mystery. If you could figure out the tax code or calculate just how long a loan shark will wait before breaking your legs, H and R Block and the Gambinos would be mowing your lawn.

No. 2: misery. In the protection racket, failure can be good. Without a few convictions, concussions, and congressional rebellions, you couldn't say, "See? He should've listened."

The best retailers have the mystery-misery formula down pat. Take running shoes. They hit the consumer big-time during the seventies. The major companies came out with a limited number of models that they continually updated. Shoes get radically redesigned every year. You never know whether the particular shoe you love this year will love you back the next. One company spent

"midfoot thrust enhancer," and an "infinitely adaptable heel component that isolates and absorbs impact to reduce pronation and aid in forward propulsion."

Wait. What the heck is a "midfoot thrust enhancer"? Ah, for that you need the translation skills of a running-store specialist. Their job is to watch how you run, mull your goals and weekly mileage, then scan the

It was utterly bewildering. Gradually, though, it dawned on me: Maybe I knew something about running shoes, but I knew squat about running shoe sales. My mistake was thinking what's on sale is the stuff on the racks.

\$3 million and eight years—three more than it took the Manhattan Project to create the first atomic bomb—to invent a shoe that boasts "multi-angled forefoot gel pods," a

Bewildering Wall of Footwear and pluck the perfect model. And it has to be perfect, because as Curt Munson, co-owner of Michigan's Playmakers Performance Footwear and Apparel,

Life made easy.



Life pulls you in every direction. With GoToMyPC, you can go wherever your personal life takes you without missing a beat at work. Instantly access and safely use all of the programs and features on your office computer with ease from any Internet-connected computer – worldwide. It's just like being at your desk. When life gets busy, try GoToMyPC to keep everything in perfect balance.

FREE 30-Day Trial
gotomypc.com | promo code: spirit

GoToMyPC

by **cmpr**

BODIES
THE EXHIBITION



REAL HUMAN BODIES

Now Open!

**One Location.
Two Unforgettable Exhibitions.**

LUXOR

LAS VEGAS
3900 Las Vegas Blvd. South
Las Vegas, NV 89119

luxor.com
1-800-557-7428

Open 10am - 10pm daily.
Last ticket sold at 9pm.



TITANIC
THE ARTIFACT EXHIBITION



real objects | real stories

Sams^onite®

\$134.95

MSRP \$495

5 PIECE SET

100% GUARANTEED
LOWEST PRICE + FREE SHIPPING
*EXCEPT FOR SELECT ITEMS



SET INCLUDES

26" Upright, Carry-On Upright, Duffel, Boarding Tote, and Toiletry Kit. 1800 Dealer Heavy-Duty Polyester Fabric. 10 Year Warranty. Available in Black or Red.

*Free shipping on orders over \$99. No sales tax except PA/NJ. While supplies last.

LuggageOnline

Packed with over 150 Brands. Priced to move.

www.LuggageOnline.com/sw | 800.958.4424

warns: "The wrong running shoe design can make runners more susceptible to injuries."

So advice became the bread-and-butter of the running shoe business, and business boomed. Until people realized something: The advice stunk. Somewhere between 60 per-

Munson came up with a solution—one that not only lets him make a profit by challenging his own industry, but also provides a service that no online store can compete with. He teaches.

cent to 80 percent of all runners get hurt every year. Instead of decreasing since Nike created the modern running shoe in 1972, the rate of some injuries has actually gone up. Scientists began taking a closer look at the shoes, and came up with a shocker: There is no evidence that running shoes do anything to prevent injuries. In fact, it's possible they're causing the harm by encouraging a sloppy, heel-first running form, which is impossible in a natural, barefoot state.

"I believe when my runners train barefoot, they run faster and suffer fewer injuries," says Vin Lananna, associate athletic director of the Nike-sponsored University of Oregon track and field team. Gerard Hartmann, an Irish physical therapist who works with world record holder Paula Radcliffe and is himself a Nike consultant, compares running shoes to a plaster cast that causes our feet to wither

and weaken. The very best shoe, in other words, may be no shoe at all.

Fine. But how do you make a buck off a bare foot? That's what the shoe sellers who greeted me in Salt Lake City were wondering. I like to think that *Born to Run* sparked the barefoot-running revolution, but the truth is, the movement has been growing for years.

Really smart retailers, like Curt Munson of Playmakers, saw the uprising coming. Shoes that look cool and feel great in the store can make you miserable during a race. So Munson went back to the mystery-misery formula and came up with a solution—one that not only lets him make a profit by challenging his own industry, but also provides a service that no online store, not even almighty Amazon, can compete with.

He teaches.

Now, every Thursday, Munson gives a free "Good Form" seminar where customers run barefoot for 20 yards and learn what a more natural form feels like. Every day, he shows them to test if a shoe is safe by balancing with it on one foot. "When the foot is strong, it's capable of supporting itself," Munson says. "But the reality is that most people like the comfort and protection from the elements that a shoe provides."

Likewise, Ed Camelli of Trail Creek Outfitters in Glen Mills, Pennsylvania, has brought in a barefoot-style running coach and become a vocal champion of Vibram Fivefingers, a rubber foot-glove that provides no more cushioning than a callous. He not only invited me to lecture his customers on the Tarahumara Indians, who run in homemade sandals, but treated me to a mighty fine steak. Munson, meanwhile, has gone beyond advising his customers and started communicating with shoe companies to change their designs.

Flying to Chicago's northern suburbs?

NEXT TIME, SAVE TIME.

Use Milwaukee's Mitchell Airport.

An easy 45-minute drive via I-94... visit flyMKE.com



fly smart. flyMKE.com

AIRPORT PARKING

Why pay the high prices?
We are the alternative.



No Walking, Better Lit Parking Spaces, Car security 24/7, Fast Airport Turnarounds, Comfortable Buses (not vans), Free Coffee/Tea, Baggage Handling, Friendly Employees w/ID Badges, Free Parking Rewards, all of this and better prices.

20% OFF

Valid including weekends. Requires email address. Must present ad/coupon upon exit. No copies accepted. Does not include airport access fee, tax or one-time per-stay service fee. Cannot be combined with any other offer. Expires 4/30/10.

800.621.PARK (7275) www.avistarparking.com/fasttrack

Your required email address qualifies you for future special deals.



5412

THE ROSS-SIMONS CLASSIC PEARL NECKLACE

No jewelry box should be without it

14KT GOLD CLASP

\$95 VALUE ONLY \$29.95

- 6.5-7mm cultured freshwater pearls
- Individually hand-knotted
- 14kt gold clasp
- Classic 18" length
- Your choice: white (412083), pink (416089) or black (416605)

LIMIT 3 PER ORDER. FREE SHIPPING & HANDLING.



ORDER NOW
1.800.556.7376
www.ross-simons.com/ClassicPearls

ROSS+SIMONS

OFFER CODE: PEARL3

Happily, they seem to be listening. After years of boosting the cushioning and heel pads until runners' feet hovered more than an inch off the ground, the new trend is toward more stripped-down soles. "The buzz from shoe companies now is all about lower, lighter weight shoes that are still stable and supportive." Munson says. "Long overdue."

If he's right, the running shoe industry and the Bewildering Wall of Footwear are about to go through a dramatic shift from beefy-and-bouncy to barely-there. When they do, the retailers who remained true to their core product—knowledge—will be nicely positioned to ride out the crash. No matter what you're selling, you

The running shoe industry and the Bewildering Wall of Footwear are about to go through a dramatic shift from beefy-and-bouncy to barely-there.

can build customer loyalty by being dedicated enough to criticize your own products, and proving that while the Internet is an information wonderland, it doesn't compare to the wisdom and expertise of a great teacher. As Munson says, "The big focus going forward is going to be education."

A teacher like him gives the protection racket a good name.

Christopher McDougall is the best-selling author of Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, Superathletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen and a contributing editor for Men's Health.



PRIME TIME TOP TEN

USDA PRIME STEAKHOUSES

www.primesteakhouses.com

- | | | | |
|-----------|--|-------|---|
| 1 | POLO GRILL | EY YY | Tulsa, OK 918-744-4900 |
| 2 | Donovan's
<small>AMERICA'S BEST STEAKHOUSE</small> | EY YY | San Diego, CA
Los Angeles, CA
Phoenix, AZ
San Jose, CA
877-222-2222
<small>Call for number of locations</small> |
| 3 | Bob's
<small>Steak & Chop House</small> | EY Y | Dallas, TX 972-352-2448
Fort Worth, TX 817-550-4100
Aurora, TX 817-521-8885
Ft. Worth, TX 877-806-8887
San Francisco, CA 415-573-3085
Tulsa, OK 900-577-8877 |
| 4 | RINGSIDE STEAKHOUSE | EY YY | Portland, OR 503-522-1812
Portland, OR 503-555-0780 |
| 5 | Overly's | EY YY | Orlando, FL 407-851-7180
D'Iberville, FL 407-855-0888
Kissimmee, FL 407-558-8085
Tampa, FL 813-555-8706 |
| 6 | CRISP PRODUCE | EY Y | Palm Springs, CA 760-850-4800
Palm Desert, CA 760-778-9888 |
| 7 | LE BISTRO | EY YY | San Antonio, TX 210-472-2800 |
| 8 | Mo's
<small>Steakhouse</small> | Y | Milwaukee, WI 414-572-0780
Indianapolis, IN 317-534-0780
Houston, TX 713-677-0780 |
| 9 | NEW YORK DELIC | Y | Atlanta, GA 404-546-0644
Myrtle Beach, SC 252-443-3061 |
| 10 | Rocky Point's STEAKHOUSE | Y | Richmond, VA 804-573-0777 |

Call 866-88-STEAK (872263) to request with copy of *Chase PrimeTime Top 10 Steakhouses*.



Send Comments to Prime Time Top 10
4388 D'Ereretz Circle, Pensacola, FL 32544