



OPTITEX

OPTITEX HELPS EAGLE SPORTS WIN HIGH-END CUSTOMER



AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: EAGLE SPORTS
LOCATION: USA
WWW.EAGLESPORTS.COM

Chuck Gleason's company Eagle Sports makes high-end wet-suits mainly for the competitive water-skiing market. He wanted to build a product with more value for the customers wearing them and used Optitex to achieve this.

"Since installing Optitex," Chuck says, "we have gone from making five or six suits per day to making 20 to 25 suits per day. We save hundreds of man-hours each year on new suit designs and patterns alone. We've gone from \$350K in sales to \$1.5M in three years and we continue to grow without the need to add more shifts or people."

The Optitex advantage, he says, is the ability to design and produce a higher performing, yet highly customized product in just days.

"We have been able to offer 100% custom size suits in the same amount of time as a standard size. The custom-fit business has grown over 400% for us. We have reduced returns due to improper sizing down to almost zero. Our dealers have little to no returns. And our reputation for being the #1 quality suit in the market has stayed true even though we've tripled in size the last three years." It's a reputation hard won in a sport where fractions of an inch can mean life or death.

STIFFER REQUIREMENTS

Barefoot skiers tend to be in better physical shape than board skiers since they are literally standing on water that hits their feet at 42 to 48 miles per hour. Chuck understands this, because he was paralyzed from the neck down after a barefoot skiing accident in 2000. That same year, he chose to pursue a different career path, first managing an water sports website (Barefoot Central), and then running Eagle Sports. Fortunately, his paralysis only lasted 15 minutes, but he learned the lesson that barefoot skiers have "stiffer" requirements.

"We decided to go after the extremely fit athlete," Chuck says. "So, we taper our products to fit perfectly. If you're a guy who's working out, it's hard to find suits that fit right. It's hard to find anything that fits right. But our equipment is tapered to your body's shape. If you're a bigger person, we can fit you as well. But our target audience is that lean athlete that's trying to be the best he can be."



Chuck competes by helping his customers win. "We can't compete head-to-head in the surfing market," he says. "Barefoot waterskiing is a small niche market that calls for high-end suits with built-in padding. Slalom skiers don't need that. They want something that's really flexible. They can use a vest as padding that gives them just enough flotation to stay above the water if fall. In barefooting when you go down, you don't want a real flexible Neoprene. You want a stiffer rubber that will glide on the water and not grab the water. You want something more than what you can buy at Wal-Mart. And you want it in the suit."

RAPID PROTOTYPING

Lower-end suppliers can't match his suits for performance. Nor can they match him on another key success factor - rapidly prototyping great custom designs. As Chuck says, "The motto in this sport is 'if you can't ski good, you should at least look good when you ski.'" That means meeting customer requests for fast turnaround of new suit designs - requests he can meet in a few days rather than the weeks an offshore supplier would take.

Before he was the company's owner, Chuck was a customer. And in those pre-Optitex days, Chuck says, things were different. "I used to call up the owner of Eagle and say, 'You need to come up with a new design.' And he'd say, 'I can't do that. It's all new patterns. It's a pain in the butt.'"

So, what's changed?

"Now I have several pro skiers and coaches as customers who want a private label suit. They'll come to me and say, 'Chuck, will you design me a suit?' And I'll ask the customer to come into the factory, sit with me at the Optitex station and I'll say, 'Tell me what you think you want.' And we'll draw the line on the suit right on the 3D model. Then I may point to a line and say, 'Okay that's a four-needle flat lock stitch or an overlock stitch,' and we'll change it to black. Then we'll apply it to the model and they can see that what they think looks good flat may not look good in 3D. Then I might say, 'Well, let's move that line down a little.' Or I could say, 'Let's curve it a little bit.'"

"Within about three or four back-and-forths we'll have a completed suit. And not only a completed suit, but we will have it across all sizes because the software performs all my gradings automatically." That saves time - and so do tension maps that show where the suit is tight or not. "When I look at the waist want to see yellow or red because that means it's tight," Chuck says. "I am designing something that's skintight so I use those tension maps a lot."





Optitex outputs finished patterns directly to an Autometrix cutting machine. It also outputs designs directly to Adobe Illustrator, so artists working on new decorative graphics can see how their designs will look to scale when printed on the final product.

All of this means less rework, less materials wasted, and faster time to market with more cutting edge designs. That is obviously great for business. But it's also great for the skiers.



ABOUT OPTITEX

Optitex empowers apparel and soft goods companies to revolutionize the way they develop, produce, and market their products. Optitex is the world's leading provider of an integrated 2D/3D software platform that enables customers to quickly create true-to-life 3D digital garments that inspire. Brands, retailers, and manufacturers can now view their collections in all styles and colors months earlier, and leverage digital garments to collaborate, market, and sell better than ever before. Since its founding in 1988, Optitex has worked to keep thousands of companies and tens of thousands of users at the forefront of technology, enabling them to greatly reduce their time to market and costs, and increase their competitive advantage.

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