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“respecting the process. The end result is due to the detail.”

The pair laughed about some of their early media successes, like burying a writer in the snows of Mount Hood, Oregon for the first Avalung demonstration, which was picked up by Dateline Television. Or partnering with Polygamy Porter beer and poking fun at Utah by creating the tagline, “Bring some home for the wives,” which was picked up by The Economist.

The “furor that it created was so fun for us,” said Simmons. It helped them realize that “with a great product, you can make this happen.”

In the formative years, Backbone strove to simply outperform the competition.

“We were always gonna be the agency that showed up,” said Simmons. “We really wanted to hustle.”

As their client base expanded, they diversified the types of brands they work with. Now, it’s all about inclusion.

“We were skiers and climbers and hikers. Now a lot of our business is in hunting, angling, travel and tourism, and libations. Our purview is anyone who likes to go outside, do some outdoor activity, and maybe have a cocktail at the end of the day,” said Newhart.

They enjoyed some notable milestones in their timeline that helped broaden the business.

Greg Williams came on board and advocated to take on media planning and buying, helping brands determine a target audience, when and how to reach it, how much to spend, and then make the buys.

This year, Backbone expects to purchase approximately $45 million worth of advertising.

“That’s a significant spend just for the active lifestyle consumer,” said Simmons. “That’s instrumental to leading by example.”

Soon after Williams’ advent, Ian Anderson joined the team. He was working at the Vail Chamber and established a relationship. He wanted to move to Carbondale, and was offered a job overseeing the Public Relations side of the business, where he quickly was “instrumental to leading by example.”

Finally, in 2016 Backbone hired Charlie Losener, who brought an impressive skill set behind direct digital and email marketing that is credited with transforming the business.

Both Penn and Nate continue to foster a strong appetite for their favorite outdoor sports, as do their employees.

“It’s hard to tell the difference between work and play, profession and passion.”

“There’s a blurred line that’s a beautiful thing,” said Simmons.

At home in Carbondale

Backbone has more than sixty employees, some of whom work from a Denver office. But the core of the operation remains in Carbondale, and they hope to keep it that way.

Though they acknowledge the difficulties with affordable housing for their employees, they believe that “Carbondale has a great feeling.” Its close proximity to Red Hill, Spring Gulch, and Prince Creek make it ideally suited for the business.

“We’re a compelling story to the town,” said Simmons. “We’re bringing young, talented, bright community members.”

Newhart agreed, and pointed towards the ancillary economic benefits the growing, if still small business has brought to the community: “It’s a big jigsaw puzzle, and it’s fun being a couple pieces.”