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SPOTLIGHT

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WOODCHUCK® BUY ONE. PLANT ONE.

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A broken iPhone led to a booming business for Woodchuck USA founder Ben Vandewymelenberg. As an architecture student at the University of Minnesota, he was used to building to-scale models using a specialized laser and wood veneer. In 2012, after breaking his iPhone, he created a wood sticker for it, and Woodchuck USA was born. The Minneapolis-based company now employs 26 full-time employees (and many additional part-time workers) and has experienced whopping growth since its launch.

Woodchuck USA specializes in creating customized wood products—journals, coasters, pens, phone and tablet cases, business card holders, planters, maps, and even pocket squares—for corporations and small businesses. They're also more than happy to accommodate fast turnarounds: "We do anything from one unit up to 500,000 units," said Vandewymelenberg, "and for most of our projects, companies are calling us within the week that they need that product."

These gifts come with the added bonus that for each product Woodchuck USA sells, they plant a tree. Launched in 2015, the Buy One, Plant One program's original goal was to plant a few thousand trees per year. That quickly turned into tens of thousands, then hundreds of thousands, and today, Woodchuck USA has planted 1,843,204 trees across the U.S., Canada, France, Peru, Madagascar, Indonesia, New Zealand, and Nepal.

"Our mission at Woodchuck is to put nature back into people's lives and bring jobs back into the U.S., and I was continuously thinking about how to connect people to nature," said Vandewymelenberg. "A couple of years after starting the company, I was jogging in a park in San Francisco and I saw

a sign that said, '100 years ago, there were no trees here.' That's when I realized we had to plant trees. The next day, we developed the Buy One, Plant One slogan and started planning the program."

Local communities are involved in planting and maintaining the trees, and local governments are also brought on board so the trees don't end up being cleared for development. Woodchuck USA also makes sure that the locations are self-sustainable, and that there's an end goal for outside funding. "We learned all this stuff through our initial failures," said Vandewymelenberg.

In addition to corporate gifts, Woodchuck USA also creates commercial interior paneling through its Woodchuck Interiors sidearm, which launched in 2017. The rest of its revenue comes from website sales of its customizable wood products.

For Vandewymelenberg, becoming FSC®-certified was the clear next step in the company's growth. "Internationally, FSC is the gold standard for sustainability," he said. "As we continued to expand internationally, this is something companies and clients were looking for, and even though we had our Buy One, Plant One program, the confidence and understanding of what FSC means added value to our products."

Another part of the appeal to becoming FSC-certified was being able to meet other companies in the network. "We wanted to connect with other FSC-certified companies because they're like-minded," said Vandewymelenberg. "We wanted to help each other grow."

American Green Consulting is proud to have Woodchuck USA as a client, and we can't wait to see where they go next!