

# Justin's<sup>®</sup>

Justin's Nut Butter  
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*The Justin behind Justin's Nut Butter purveyors of spreadable nut concoctions, started out grinding nuts into all natural spreads as cheap fuel for climbing expeditions. Today, he is a nut butter tycoon, which sounds kind of gross, but then their motto is "Show us You're Nuts."*

- mountain, January 2012

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The Justin behind Justin's Nut Butter, purveyors of spreadable nut concoctions, started out grinding nuts into all natural spreads as cheap fuel for climbing expeditions. Today, he is a nut butter tycoon, which sounds kind of gross, but then their motto is "Show us You're Nuts."

Justin Gold bought a corduroy blazer with western yolk styling at a thrift store yesterday, but the 34-year-old seems genuinely surprised it's missing buttons. Gold is the founder and CEO of Justin's Nut Butter. Annual revenues might hit \$20 million this year. Yes, he could probably buy a new blazer with buttons. But you're missing the point.

When Gold landed in Boulder, Colorado from Pennsylvania 11 years ago, the frugal, protein deficient vegetarian salvaged for organic nut butters to fuel his adventures, but he couldn't find much on store shelves. Nothing he could afford anyway. So he started grinding his own nuts at home. What followed is your typical "climbing bum keeps day job at 9-5 while making delicious nut butters on weekends" success story. He sells some jars at farmers' markets and develops a cult following around about the time that the health benefits of a diet rich in nuts hit the mainstream. He cracks the national distribution nut. Angel investors offer funding. The company grows fast, but it's hemorrhaging money. His nut butters are unimpeachable in terms of quality, but new customers raised on Peter Pan balk at the \$9 price tag. By 2004, Justin's nuts are in the grinder; his company near bankruptcy.

Queue the "aha!" moment. Gold pulls out a packet of energy gel on a bike ride. Squeeze packs. What if my nut butters were in squeeze packs? He quickly raises \$500,000 for manufacturing equipment, and packs single servings of buttered nuts into 99-cent pouches. Starbucks includes the squeeze packs in pre-packaged meals. Adventure junkies and endurance athletes throw them in their packs and jersey pockets. Hooked on the sample size, Justin's converts customers. Major retailers start calling.

From 2009 to 2010, Justin's grows 130 percent. Last year, the company released an organic, chocolate peanut butter cup. In 2012, Justin's will unveil a candy bar with nougat, caramel, chocolates and nuts, lots and lots of nuts. Gold credits his business acumen to lessons learned outside. "When you ski trees, you focus on the space between them," he says. "In business, just look between the trees. Focus on what you want, what's right for you, and drive hard toward that."

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88 mountainonline.com

by Rachel Wal photograph John Johns