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FROM THE GROUND UP

How Kizik Found Its Footing

The hands-free shoe brand's CEO Monte Deere speaks about Kizik's past and vision for the future on 'From the Ground Up.'

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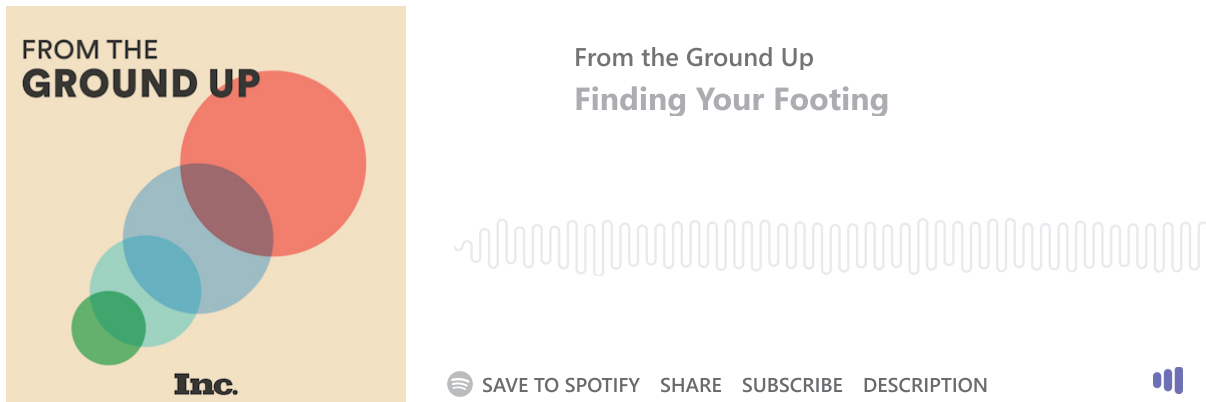


Monte Deere. Photo: Courtesy Subject

Monte Deere, the CEO of shoe brand Kizik, imagines a future where we no longer need to learn how to tie our shoes.

Kizik's patented technology, created by founder Mike Pratt, allows people to put on and take off shoes without using their hands. It's

of young children, Deere tells Inc.'s *From the Ground Up* podcast. But he says Kizik isn't solely focused on these customers—after all, hands-free shoes are “faster and more convenient for everyone.”



“We all wear shoes, and tying our shoes causes a friction point for every one of us,” Deere says. “And as much as we don’t think about it, we really like it as consumers when those friction points can be taken away.”

Kizik’s sales back this up. The Lindon, Utah-based brand hit \$100 million in revenue last year and has grown by more than 1,000 percent over the past three years—making it number 407 on this year’s Inc. 5000 list.

When Kizik launched in 2017, the company targeted a male audience by selling leather sneakers in boutique shoe stores. Then, in 2019, the brand pivoted to direct-to-consumer and had to adapt its style accordingly.

going to succeed online, so we went toward athleisure,” Deere says. “It wasn’t until about 18 months later that our sales started to really move up and to the right. And then, into the pandemic, we just crushed.”

According to Deere, 2019 was a big year for the brand for another reason: that was when Nike approached Kizik about investing in the company and licensing its technology. Deere, a mergers and acquisitions attorney who worked tirelessly on the Nike deal, decided to leave his law firm when the agreement was signed. Pratt named him CEO that year.

Kizik now has another licensing deal with first responder and military shoemaker Original Footwear, although licensing is a small portion of Kizik’s current revenue stream, according to Deere. But he’s hoping it’ll expand, as a core part of their mission is to “keep the hands-free revolution going.”

The brand is now turning back toward retail. Kizik’s goal this year is to be in 1,000 stores and open six storefronts of its own, Deere says.

“Our vision is in all ways to get Kiziks and hands-free shoes to the people,” Deere says. “Putting on shoes breaks the momentum of every one of us, every day. And so, we’ve got to tell that story across

comes.”

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