

A little brother is growing up

I started Xtravel a few years ago after I had been working in the traveling industry for several years. I felt there were many flaws in the industry and wanted to make a difference – improve it. Many people advised me against pursuing the traveling industry since the margins per traveler are very small and because it would be hard to compete against the big companies. In addition to that, there are also many external factors that can affect a guest's experience. External factors outside our control, such as a grumpy guy at check-in or a girl that drives the transfer bus as if she was in a chicken race. Today, however, I am glad that I did not listen to the warnings, but embraced the challenge.

My dream was to create a more flexible travel company offering a more personal experience. Something the big charter companies can't or even want to offer. In my opinion, the industry was missing more than just great service. In my opinion, the whole market needed a new injection, a new niche that could capture the large crowd of active people that want to experience something during their time off rather than just lying on the beach or just sliding down newly groomed slopes. Xtravel, one of today's fastest growing companies within its market, was born out of these types of thoughts, ideas and desires.

The different trips we offer at Xtravel sprung out my own personal interests such as surfing, skiing, snowboarding and all kinds of exciting adventures. Our goal is to offer active trips where you learn something new and will bring home a unique memory along with a whole new set of experiences. Take that concept in combination with unique destinations, small groups, experienced guides and competitive prices, and voila, you have the Xtravel philosophy in a nutshell. On our first trips in 2004, we headed to Chamonix and the guests were mainly friends or friends of friends. It was an instant success and I immediately went on a journey, exploring new destinations for the following winter season. After reading all the ski magazines available and getting tips from friends and family, I rented a car and began my search. Andermatt was my first stop. I was received with kindness and immediately felt that this town and ski area was exactly what Xtravel needed. In addition to being just an hour away from the Zurich International airport, Andermatt had a cozy main street with charming hotels and guaranteed snow and plenty of off-piste opportunities. High on, what seemed like the perfect location, I also wanted to offer some of Italy's charm so I continued my way to the "Freeride Paradise," Alagna, which is part of the Monterosa ski area. It felt as if the little winding road up to the village would never end, but about an hour drive from Milan, I finally arrived. Once there, I sat down at one of the local restaurants and leafed through a stack of tourist brochures. After I had visited the five hotels in the village I knew exactly which ones I wanted Xtravel to offer its guests. As it has turned out, my decision was right on target. Once Xtravel could offer Chamonix, Andermatt and Alagna as destinations for the winter season 2005, I felt more than ready to market Xtravel all across Sweden, and then eventually – to the rest of the World.

Now a crucial question remained, how was I to achieve this with my limited resources? The process of starting Xtravel went pretty smoothly, but coming up with a name that would work both internationally and in Sweden turned out to be a challenge. A few months and million of name-ideas later, I felt that the equation of X would stand for the unexplored and had a great potential to capture what we wanted to offer. The immediate association to extreme sports also felt OK, since that's what we offer anyway. I got some nice and really appreciated help with the design of the logotype, from my brother. The color green felt like a natural choice, since it is a well-known symbol of our environment. As the environment is essential for human beings to survive, it is also essential for a company like Xtravel as we can continue to offer trips to white snow, blue oceans and green forests around the world. Marketing ourselves through magazines or similar media outlets did not feel right, according to my own philosophy on how Xtravel should be perceived. In order to set the standard and stick out from the norm, I started by adding our first summer surf destination right away. After a few personal surfing trips and many, many more phone calls: Hossegor in France, Bahia in Brazil, Taghazout outside of Agadir in Morocco and Lagos in Portugal became our first surfing destinations.

Regarding marketing I followed my gut and mainly promoted Xtravel by word of mouth and via friends and family. I had thousands and thousands of ideas and proposals on how to market Xtravel but the endless factor, money, cut many ideas short. Though hard, this also made the challenge even more exciting. Slowly but surely the reputation about us spread within the traveling and skiing industry and so on. A lot of ad salesmen called (and they are still calling) but my policy is to never pay more than we can spare at the moment no matter how good of a deal it might be. We need to keep our costs down and focus on what we do best – offering great new trips. Advertising in magazines sounds nice and all that, but is not the strategy we have been focusing on. Until now and in the future I will prioritize different collaborations and projects to create interest about Xtravel. During Xtravel's first winter season I ran into Kaj Zackrisson, one of Sweden's and probably one of the World's best freerider on skies. This resulted in a fun project with him and the rest of Swedish Posse; a film production consisting of Kaj, Sverre Liliquist, Jon Örarbäck and Jerk Looman. After some discussion we decided to do a trip down to Lebanon. Eleven months later, we left for Lebanon and started recording the ski movie, "Five O'Clock News" partly sponsored by Xtravel. Lebanon also became one of our new and exotic skiing destinations. And only one month after I met Kaj, Meter Film (a Swedish TV production company) called and asked if Xtravel wanted to help them out with some of their "När & Fjärran" episodes for TV4. You have probably already figured out that we said yes. By now, we had received a whole lot more bookings and I could no longer sit at home working in my bed room, so I went looking for an office space. I found with great help from my girlfriend at the time a nice storage space, close to Karlaplan in Stockholm that I renovated and it's still our office. Many co-workers, guides and instructors have jumped on and off the train, since the start and have helped making Xtravel what we are today. We now also have our own guides on location that take care of our guests at most of our destinations around the world. We are also soon expanding with more offices in more countries and also adding more activities and destinations to our selection of trips. "När & Fjärran" contacted us again only weeks after we finished the first program and members from their crew came along to our surfcamp in Hossegor, France. The show turned out great and our purpose and feeling was reflected correctly on the TV screen.

In addition to our marketing strategy, we select new destinations carefully. In planning new activities, we religiously keep in mind to never forget how important it is to deliver good service and to keep your promises to the guests. Ahead, we are presenting many new destinations around the world and fun activities such as, motocross, diving, windsurfing, rafting and much, much more.

Many people say you have to be lucky to achieve success, others say you have to work hard; I say you have to have a little bit (or actually a lot) of both together with many ideas and the ability to make these ideas come true. To reach company goals you also need the right people for the right job. Finding them is not always that easy, but definitely a challenge I enjoy. I treat my colleagues like they are the best in the world, so they really feel appreciated and inspired enough to do their best in taking care of our guests and do their job. Along with this comes great responsibility and trust, something I value a great deal and really believe in. A great team is essential in order to deliver the spirit I want Xtravel to project. I want everyone, who invests their energy, money and effort, to feel involved and part of the Xtravel family. THANK YOU!

The last winter season showed a great deal of new individual and corporate bookings, which led to a huge challenge we embraced and now looking back, are proud to have managed well. If you have not visited us yet, please do so at www.xtravel.se immediately and hopefully you will join us surfing, skiing or something else adventurous on your next vacation. Also, please take a second to read through our environmental thoughts at our homepage, presenting our actions for a greener planet. The little brother is about to grow big, but our goal is still to maintain the feeling of a comparatively small travel company and to keep all parts what is making us unique. Enjoy!

Eric Asmussen Founder and President of Xtravel