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Kristin:

Welcome back to another episode of the Channel Mastery podcast. Kicking off a brand new season here today, I'm so excited to have two of my esteemed colleagues from GORE-TEX on the show today to talk about the brand new launch of EPE. Please help me in welcoming Matt Decker, who is a technical associate, and Nora Stowell, who is a sales and marketing associate with the fabrics division of GORE-TEX. Welcome to the show. It is so great to have you here.

Nora:

Thanks, Kristin.

Kristin:

So we are recording this right before Thanksgiving, and we all participated in a very exciting launch a couple months back of EPE. I'm so, so thrilled to have Nora and Matt here on the show today, because ultimately we've had some time to kind of see how the market reacted to both the visibility from the announcement as well as, just the business of going through the selling cycle since we've introduced this. I wanted to first just say what a landmark accomplishment this was, bringing EPE to market and securing relationships with leading brands, which we're going to get into for fall, like an upcoming fall 2022 collection, which is really kind of unheard of in terms of incorporating a brand new material set like this. So we're going to get into all the details of it, but ultimately what the main takeaway is today and what we're going to be talking about is how GORE-TEX is elevating the value equation of ingredient branding. It's super exciting to be part of that. It's something I covered as a journalist prior to opening Verde, and we've always had a strong showing of ingredient brands on our roster. So it's something that has just been personally super meaningful for me, and I'm so proud that we were able to bring this to market with you. So with that, if both of you could kind of give a quick introduction of yourselves in terms of what it is that you do at GORE-TEX, we'll get right into kind of the value equation of EPE in the market. Nora, do you want to start?

Nora:

Sure. So I'm the Fabric Sales and Marketing Global Leader, and what I do is really fun, because I get to work with 350 of the best brands around the world and our market-facing teams, both in the consumer side of our business and the technical side of our business.

Kristin:

Awesome. How about you, Matt?

Matt:



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My name's Matt Decker. I'm the global technical leader for our GORE-TEX consumer fabrics business, and so I get to work with the R&D teams as well as our engineering teams to develop the next generation of materials that go into GORE-TEX laminates, as well as manufacture the ones that we're making today.

Kristin:

So both of you have really small, easy jobs.

Matt:

Correct.

Kristin:

Especially when it comes to introducing a brand-new material set, the first in the 40 year history of GORE. I'd love to start there. Matt, can you talk a little bit about kind of just the meaning of this to you? Obviously, you did work on this with Bob Gore and were able to bring this to market while in your career trajectory at GORE. This is a landmark moment for your brand. Can you talk about what it was like to, first, what is the innovation? Then let's talk about how it's really accelerated the position of GORE in the global marketplace today.

Matt:

Yeah, so a lot there, but I agree with you, Kristin. It really is a seminal moment for the GORE-TEX brand to a really large extent. So EPE, or expanded polyethylene, is the next iteration of the GORE-TEX membrane for us. So similar to the membranes that we make today, it's a micro-porous material with billions of tiny holes per square inch that allow it to be breathable, but at the same time waterproof. But it is a different material. So it has different attributes and different properties that we've had to develop along the way to meet all the rigorous standards to be a GORE-TEX laminate.

Kristin:

Okay. Obviously, all of the work that was done in house to bring this to market, which we will get into, because truly, GORE-TEX is the only company that can facilitate all of that, end-to-end and bring it to market in a way that major global brands will adopt and that's really the point of impact. That's you, Nora. Can you talk about what this has been like for you in terms of, I think, not only appeasing demand, but exceeding demand with your global brand partners?

Nora:

So I would say that this is a big deal for the GORE-TEX brand. It's the biggest deal since we launched ePTFE 40 years ago, and what's been great for our partners in the past 40 years, we've



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been focused on performance and, as Matt mentioned, making footwear, garments, gloves, and accessories waterproof. So that performance element has been a big baseline for what we've done over the past four decades. Well, by launching EPE, we now add responsibility to that performance. So our intent here is to hold responsibility to the same standard that we do performance, and that really resonates with our consumers and customers based on the sustainability journey that they're on.

Kristin:

Let's talk about the brands. Of the 350 global brands that are partners with GORE-TEX, let's talk about the brands that are adopting this, because I really love the group that you all have launched with, specifically because they do really embrace both the sustainability and the performance. That really is the proof of concept around this coming to market for a very ... Season one, I mean, it's pretty remarkable. Talk about some of the brand partners that you've launched with here.

Nora:

Yeah, and the brand partners are leaders in the industry. You have brands like Arc'teryx and Patagonia on the garment side. You have brands like Adidas and Solomon on the footwear side, Reusch, Dakine, and Ziener on the glove side. So some pretty leading brands that are making moves, whether that's in premium performance, but also being sustainable and protecting the planet at the same time.

Kristin:

It is a very, very tall order. So Matt, I would love for you to talk about just a little ... We don't want to get super into the weeds, because obviously this is what you do and we could spend probably a couple hours talking about the technical attributes. Everybody, please know that we will be posting supplemental links in the podcast notes for a full transcription of our launch webinar that we did with a group of 45 media here a couple months back, as well as the press release and links to some of the articles. So we'll have a lot of information for those of you who do want to go deep, because this is a really big, important story from that standpoint. We would not have gotten out of the gate if it wasn't completely solid that way.

But that's what I wanted to talk with you about, Matt, because ultimately Nora's probably fielding demand and knows that GORE-TEX has been working on this as a team. Tell us what it was like for you to feverishly be working with your global team to bring this to market. Talk about the testing standards and everything, because that to me feels like it is such a story that you could only hear about and actually have a product from, from GORE.

Matt:



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Yeah. To your point, Kristin, we've been working on this for a long time, and kind of part of our nature is that we're always looking for new materials, both inside of GORE and outside of GORE. We're constantly screening things. So over time, we've seen different materials that come close to meeting the types of properties and attributes that we need. But EPE was the first one where we saw a real opportunity to engineer at a really basic polymer level into it what we wanted from a lightweight perspective, a really high strength perspective, and thinness. So once we start getting those attributes, we start making garments and started making footwear and trialing them in the field, because that's still our gold standard.

The first time I got really excited about the potential here was when we saw a footwear field trial come back and of probably 50 different pairs shoes that we had in the field. All of a sudden, those EPE-base laminates were looking from a durability, waterproofness perspective and from a consumer perception perspective were looking a lot like the existing GORE-TEX laminates that we field today. So that was really the, "Oh, maybe we really have something here." Then after to that, it was about finding the right textiles to partner with the membrane to get the full story in terms of strength and breathability and environmental footprint that we wanted and then continuing to build that out over time with different technical components and then also taking it from footwear and looking at it in garments and other apparels, gloves as well.

Kristin:

I love that, because it really touches on ... I love to say on this show that we're special snowflakes in the outdoor recreation markets who tune in here. Product is literally king and queen and has been in this industry for so long. I think our consumers, our media, everybody is trained to see what's new, and they really trust these brands that they've fallen in love with to provide literally the gold standard in what they need to go enjoy what they love to do outdoors. It makes it really challenging for brands such as GORE-TEX to work with brand partners, who all have different audiences. Obviously, they all feel a lot of, I think, pressure in terms of elevating and modernizing the products that they're bringing to market. So what you all have done I think has really opened the proverbial floodgates to bring an entire new level of, I think, more environmentally friendly, yet very strongly performance and technical-minded product across these categories to market.

We would be completely stuck as an industry from a product standpoint if we didn't have ingredient brands like this to be furthering our stories. So I just really want who's listening here today to understand the absolute monumental push that it took to bring this to market in a way that can have the GORE-TEX name, because the brands that Nora has been working with have literally been waiting for this and feel confident to adopt it. Nora, I would love to have you tell the audience why do you feel that the brands are able to bring this in? As consumers, we're trained to maybe wait for the second iteration or the third iteration. "Oh, I'll let them work out the kinks." But no, you have A+ brands that are launching with you in fall '22. Let's talk about how that adoption happened. What was it that really kind of got them over the line, and how did they feel that trust with a brand-new material set like this?



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Nora:

Well, I think there's a lot of trust we've built up over the past 40 years. Our brand partners know we stand behind our products. We know they know that we test to the guilds. We are actually accused of being over-testers in our fit for use requirements. So it starts with that. If we didn't have that 40 years of trust and confidence built up, it would be a different story. They'd maybe be followers, not leaders. The other piece of it, though, that's critical is we worked with them every step of the way. These brands weren't finding out about it at the 11th hour when we were ready to launch, as they were handholding. Matt talked about the field trials. They were doing field trials right along with us. So they were really invested in the process, and they had to be, because these brands have put their own sustainability goals out into the market.

Most of you following the press, you see brands have set up, "We're going to be PFC-free by 2025." Yvon Chouinard at Patagonia challenged his teams for that to happen even sooner. So these brands can't hit their targets unless all of their suppliers, frankly, are offering sustainable solutions that are PFC-free, that have a low carbon footprint, a low environmental footprint, that support our Higg MSI goals or OEKO-TEX's Bluesign, which are some of our sustainability attributes in EPE. They can't do that if we're not coming to the table with a solution. So to answer your question, Kristin, there's a lot of trust and confidence. There was handholding. They were right there with us. They were motivated to help us succeed because they needed to hit their goals. In a lot of cases, there wasn't a lot of other options. So we're all in it together, I guess is the right answer. This was a team effort. This wasn't all on GORE, either.

Kristin:

Matt, let's back up a little bit and talk about the decision within GORE to develop this material set and specifically how Bob Gore was involved. I mean, this is really, I think, emotionally a very important topic for anybody in the outdoor active lifestyle markets tuning in here and the community of business leaders that listen to this, because ultimately, the founding entrepreneurial thread of GORE-TEX, I think, was a big part of the propelling this forward to success.

Matt:

Yeah. So I think you're spot on that developing this was a challenge internally, not just from the technical perspective, but also overcoming a lot of mythology. So there was a lot of belief internally that we couldn't do this with any material set beyond what we had available to us. To a large extent, we were actually very fortunate that Bob Gore became an advocate. So pretty early on, he was very aware of what we were doing, and he had a prototype garment. He did his traditional Bob Gore shower test with it, and it held up to that, which is a real kind of almost entry into any development. Bob's got to buy into what you're doing. At that point in time, he



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could have said ... He was the original inventor of GORE-TEX with ePTFE. He could have said, "We don't need to do this. I don't want to do this," and that really would've been the end of it.

But he very much understands or understood that products and technologies need to evolve as markets and the needs around those markets change. He appreciated that a need for a complementary material set like EPE was something that GORE-TEX and W.L. Gore and Associates needed to develop and invest in. So he became a really strong supporter of that. With that, as well as the technical data set that we developed and the confidence that we built internally over several years, was really what enabled us to feel like we could make this decision. We could start to transition some of our consumer-based products in this direction and then start to build the confidence with our brands like Nora's been talking about.

Kristin:

Well, and I love that you worded it that way specifically, because this is a complementary material set. So I'd love to have Nora, if you could address our brands out there in these markets are evolving quickly because the consumer is evolving incredibly fast. I mean, as we all have heard and have lived through, COVID has just accelerated everything. One of the things that we know will become a demand from consumers more and more going forward will be more sustainability in products. That has to do with durability. That also has to deal with environmentally friendliness, if you will. All of it kind of ties back together in terms of the imprint that we leave with our business, our industry on this earth, and our backdrop being outdoor recreation. Will you please give a little bit of, I think, an overview in terms of how these two material sets fit together from a solution standpoint to these leading brands, such as Patagonia and Arc'teryx and Adidas and some of the other launch partners that you have?

Nora:

Sure and the first thing I can say about both materials is that they're both engineered for a long product life. So ePTFE, EPE, they're both engineered to last a long time. So ePTFE garments that are in the market today, I have many Arc'teryx jackets that I've had for 15, 20 years. So there's something to be said about call it slow fashion and having one beautiful jacket pulled up for a very long time. But with that said, EPE is also engineered for a long product life. It has a lower carbon footprint measured by Higg MSI, and that low carbon footprint is very important to consumers. It's also 50% lighter and thinner, which means it consumes less raw materials, which also plays into the sustainability message.

Another label that consumers are very interested in right now is being PFC-free. Customers are also interested in that label because consumers are interested in that label, and they're making choices based on products being PFC-free.

Kristin:



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Awesome. That's great. I would love to have Matt address how our EPE is different from other PE products in the marketplace. I think that's an important distinction to put out there.

Matt:

Yeah, that's a great question. So we invented or Bob Gore invented ePTFE. I can't say that we invented micro-porous polyethylene. It's been available in a number of markets, including the apparel market, for a number of years. But why GORE has never trended towards that in the past has been it really hasn't been suitable in our perspective for apparel usage because of the lack of mechanical robustness or durability. So we talk a lot about fitness for end use, which means it's going to do what we say it's going to do, and really durability of waterproof-ness ties back to what Nora was saying around garments that last a really long time. That's the single biggest way to minimize your environmental footprint. So the existing micro-porous polyethylene membranes didn't do that for us.

So what's different about ours is that we were able to take all of the knowledge that we built up over 40 years around ePTFE and know what mechanical attributes you need in order to be highly durable and long-lasting. We were actually able to engineer them in to a micro-porous polyethylene. So that's what's fundamentally different about us, is we took the 40 years, the four decades of knowledge that we have, and we imparted that into these unique membranes that do have the long life and the long-lasting durability of waterproof-ness that are necessary to call it GORE-TEX apparel.

Kristin:

Thankfully, you got it to market when you did, because, again, we're seeing so many greenwashing headlines in a lot of the categories, footwear, apparel. Other than the standards that Nora was speaking about earlier in our conversation, there seems to be a little bit of a free for all happening in the press, and right now we see it in the B2B side of the equation. Soon we'll see that more so, I think, in the consumer side of the equation from both media and an influencer standpoint. But there will be, I think, some gut checking happening. As we've seen through COVID, there's definitely a call-out culture beyond media with influencers, et cetera. So consumers are going to become quite discerning, and they're going to dig a little bit deeper. That kind of brings me to the last important topic of our conversation, which is educating consumers on this. Retailers play such a significant role there. Also, the brands that we're partnering with in this launch have tremendous global reach. So I wanted to spend a few minutes talking about the responsibility that we have as GORE-TEX to help our brands communicate this in a consistent and believable way and also some of the innovative ideas that we're hatching around retail, because I love talking about that. So Nora, if you could help us on that one, that would be great.

Nora:



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Sure. As an ingredient supplier, we're focused on holding hands with our brand partners every step of the way. We work with designing jackets and footwear. We work with the factories. We work with the sell-in for their teams. We work with how to educate retailers on our products. Then we also have a massive consumer reach, too, because consumers need to come in asking for GORE-TEX in order to help sell our products from our brand partners. So every step of the way, we have boots on the ground to help educate, and with EPE, it's going to be no different. We're underway with that right now. We just did our customer launch. We continue with more educational events in January around traditional trade show. We then have what we have called Experience More Tour, which we do virtually with retailers where we're educating retailers on what's coming. Then that will be followed with a consumer campaign next fall. So we've been working on this for 10 years, and we're going to be working on the rollout probably for another 10 years as well. But what I will say, one critical piece for us in our marketing and advertising efforts is our hang tag. Anyone that has walked into an REI or what have you will see a big, black diamond on a jacket that calls, "Guaranteed to keep you dry," and our GORE-TEX logo. That will be no different with EPE. However, to be in line with our sustainability efforts, we have made some changes. We have shrunk that hang tag down to a smaller size. We've reduced it. It used to be several pages of content. We've reduced it. Now it's just a front and back. There's a QR code on there that will take you to a landing page so you can learn more about materials that we're using and our sustainability journey or responsible performance. The paper and the ink is made out of soybeans. So there's a sustainable aspect there, too. We joke internally that you can eat our hang tags now. So it's not just showing up with a new product, and we're being deliberate around responsible performance in every step of the way. So our customers can choose. There'll be an insert to our hang tag that they can choose to put on the product or not. My guess is they're going to choose to have that on the product, because it's so important to the consumer in making their choice, to your point, Kristin.

Kristin:

Absolutely, and I think it's something that you've really set a standard and trained the consumer to find that. It's literally like there's so much great information provided, but it sounds like at every touchpoint, we will be conveying and showing rather than telling, I think, on a lot of occasions how we're going to be responsibly marketing this. That goes very deep in terms of how the consumers can learn about it online and kick the tires, if you will, because ultimately there is a lot out there that I think is confusing. What we're about to launch I think is going to also set a great standard at retail and online for how to bring a consumer into this type of innovation and enable them to wear it as part of their identity more as a sustainable-minded consumer. So I'm super excited about all of that, and I really appreciate so much that you both have taken the time. Before we sign off here today, I mean, Matt, as Nora just said, this was in the works for about a decade, maybe a little bit more, if I remember correctly. You must be working on more things. So it's almost like we have to pause and kind of share the high five on this innovation actually coming to market. We're in the middle of a B2B launch right now, but



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can you also just let us know what it's like for you to balance kind of bringing this to market, but also continuing to innovate, because that's the GORE-TEX brand?

Matt:

Sure. So I think exactly what you said. This is a really exciting and seminal moment for us, and we do want to celebrate that. But this is very much the beginning.

Kristin:

I've heard in our markets that brands that we've worked with over the years have been invited to REI's 100 year. "We're going to be here in 100 years." This is the only other brand who I've interacted with on the podcast who has a 40-year ... I mean, right now with COVID, I feel like we're more kind of, "18 months is a long time," but I hear what you're saying that, and my point in bringing that up was just letting the audience know these people do not rest. There will be a lot of accelerated innovation coming, and I'm so grateful that you have built the trust base that you have, because it's only going to accelerate the top tier product that will be pushing all these brands to reach their sustainability goals and enable consumers to even be more aware of the importance of choosing different purchase options around things that are more sustainable. So you really helped so many facets of this community with this launch. I'm super honored to work with you on it, as is our team, and I just wanted to say thank you so much for having the time to be with us here today. Thank you.

Nora:

Thanks, Kristin.

Matt:

Thank you, Kristin.