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March 17, 2008

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URL: http://blog.oregonlive.com/playbooksandprofits/2008/03/interview_with_keens_new_presi.html



Playbooks & Profits

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Interview with Keen's new CEO James Curleigh

Posted by [Playbooks and Profits blog](#) March 14, 2008 04:54AM

Categories: [Keen footwear](#), [Marketing/Promotions](#)



Brent Wojahn/The Oregonian

[Keen Inc.](#)'s new CEO/president James Curleigh in a footwear-laden conference room at the company's Portland headquarters.

They're instantly recognizable - those colorful webbed sandals with toeguards - and they breed extreme customer loyalty, according to their makers.

But Keen Inc. is finding out that as a five-year-old brand, it's still not made a footprint in the average consumer's psyche.

That will be one of the challenges facing James Curleigh, whom Keen owner Rory Fuerst recently picked as the footwear maker's new president and chief executive officer. Curleigh

officially started at the Portland company last week, [replacing Kirk Richardson](#).

Like customers of competitor [Merrell](#), Keen execs say its customers are hooked on its shoes. According to Keen vice president of marketing Bobbie Parisi, Keen's recent awareness attribute study found that 65 percent of customers owned two or more pairs of Keens. But among a broad sample of all consumers, only 6 percent of respondents reported being familiar with the brand.

Merrell's Jordan Wand, vice president and general manager of the brand's Portland-based apparel division, recently spoke of a similar disconnect between customer loyalty for its footwear and overall awareness of the brand. It's one reason why Merrell decided to start [a line of clothing](#), Wand explained, because – clothing serves to help market the brand logo.

Is clothing next for Keen, too? P&P Blog posed that question to Curleigh. Read his response in the [Sunday Oregonian business section](#). The interview that also touches upon Keen's continued expansion into international markets that has pushed the footwear maker to offer far more than "hybrid" sandals. "(Retail) customers are looking for us to be a consistent year-round business," said Tim Bartels, Keen's vice president of sales.



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