



Kevin A. Plank (above); Under Armour Highlight cleat (right)

**EDITORS' NOTE** In 1995, Kevin Plank, then special teams captain of the University of Maryland football team, set out to develop a next generation T-shirt that would remain drier and lighter. He created a new category of sporting apparel called performance apparel and built Under Armour into a leading company. Plank has served as Under Armour's Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Board of Directors since 1996 and as President from 1996 to July 2008 and since August 2010. Plank also serves on the Board of Directors of the National Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame, Inc. and is a member of the Board of Trustees of the University of Maryland College Park Foundation.

**COMPANY BRIEF** Headquartered in Baltimore, Maryland, Under Armour® ([www.ua.com](http://www.ua.com)) is a leading developer, marketer, and distributor of branded performance apparel, footwear, and accessories. The company's products are sold worldwide and worn by athletes at all levels, from youth to professional, on playing fields around the globe. Under Armour's European headquarters is in Amsterdam's Olympic Stadium, and there are additional offices in Denver, Hong Kong, Toronto, and Guangzhou, China.

**You developed this brand out of personal experience and need. What was your vision and could you have imagined it would have developed as it has?**

More important than knowing exactly what it could look like, I never believed it couldn't happen; it wasn't about one big vision but about tomorrow being better than today and about moving forward. It's about a mentality more than anything and we have always approached it that way. I'd like to think that will and belief have something to do with it, as well as a really good product and an unbelievable team of people.



# An Empowering Brand

An Interview with Kevin A. Plank,  
President, Chief Executive Officer, and Chairman of the Board, Under Armour, Inc.

**You created a new category of performance apparel. How did your innovation process work early on and how do you differentiate your products in such a crowded space?**

Prior to Under Armour, athletes would wear a short-sleeve cotton T-shirt in the summer and a long-sleeve cotton T-shirt in the winter. Innovation in sporting goods had been limited to shoes and equipment.

A dry cotton T-shirt weighs six ounces but once it gets wet, it can weigh anywhere between two-and-a-half and three pounds. So my idea was to make the shirt technical with synthetic material that wouldn't get wet or heavy. Our T-shirt weighs about seven ounces.

**As the company has grown in size and scale, how have you made sure not to lose that innovation edge?**

Our mantra is that we have not yet invented our defining product as a brand. Under Armour started out on the field and it will always be authentic on the field, but our opportunity is bringing innovation to many parts of life.

**Is most of your growth potential still coming from the U.S. market or are there more opportunities coming from emerging and international markets?**

We can grow in three ways: the first is through any new product categories – we have a good North American wholesale apparel company and we decided to start making shoes, so now we're in footwear; the second is through new distribution channels – we have been primarily in sporting goods but we've moved into the mall channel with Foot Locker and Finish Line, and gotten into partner stores such as Macy's with underwear this year; and third is that we can build through geography – for instance, the business we are building in Amsterdam, after opening there more than six years ago, is starting to make headway. We've also been in Japan for nearly 13 years and for the first eight years, it went from \$0 to \$35 million; by 2009, it went from \$35 to more than \$70 then to \$90 then to \$110, and in 2011, it came close to \$150 million. So creating the right culture and building the right team takes time. We're fortunate to have both with our great partner in Japan.

The brand translates well and building out our international team will be a huge focus going forward. Ninety-plus percent of what we do is still in the U.S. today, so there is a ton of opportunity for us abroad. Our definition of a global brand is where 50 percent of our revenues come from outside of our home country.

**What do you look for in recruiting talent? Is it more about an intellectual fit or a cultural fit?**

You hire for competency, you fire for fit. We hire qualified people and they often have a unique skill set. However, the one thing that will certainly get you fired from here is being someone who does things the way we've always done them.

We are getting more recognized for our culture; it's a very strong, get-it-done culture. But the biggest compliment I can issue about us is that there is no Under Armour way – it evolves every day because we're a young company growing up to be a bigger company and hopefully a better one.

**How important is it that the brand is based in Baltimore?**

Baltimore is probably one of the best kept secrets on the East Coast and we take great pride in that. There is a blue collar feel to the town and we embrace it, and that exudes from our brand.

I want to create a sense of pride beyond the people that work at Under Armour or some of our athletes. I want everyone in the mid-Atlantic region to be proud of the fact that we are a regional company, and as we get bigger, I want people to be proud as Americans that Under Armour is representing the U.S. on a global basis.

**If I was speaking with some of the people who work with you and asked about your management style, what would they say?**

Hopefully, there is a sense from people that, not unlike our brand, I inspire others to do more. Under Armour is an empowering brand, not only on the product performance side, but also on our story side. We have proven that you can start small and find a way to build a billion-dollar business. We live in the greatest country in the world and it's competitive out there. Ours is not just an American story anymore and it should inspire people to go build something. ●