

# Case Study: Under Armour

A new race series leverages the brand's urban foothold to introduce rookie trail runners to the mountains.

**F**OLKS MAY HAVE BEEN surprised when Under Armour—a brand deeply rooted in a spectrum of team and urban sports—debuted its annual Under Armour Mountain Running Series in 2017. But Topher Gaylord, general manager of run at Under Armour and former Mountain Hardware president, had a vision to bridge the gap between diverse communities.

“In essence, we want the race series to create unforgettable experiences for all of our participants in a format that challenges elite runners and makes trail and mountain running accessible to every runner and every ability,” Gaylord says.



So Under Armour partnered with Powdr Adventure Lifestyle Co., which owns nine mountain resorts in North America, to host trail races in Colorado, Vermont, and Oregon. Each event featured a festival-style day with a recovery zone, an athlete testing zone where racers could measure their baseline ability, and four race distances: a 5K, 10K, 25K, and 50K, plus prize money for the top male and female ultra-distance finishers.

“If you’ve never trail run, running on trails can be intimidating,” Gaylord says. “We want a race series that is more inviting. The 5K and 10K distances make events at each location accessible.”

Naturally, Under Armour marketed the event to the brand’s existing consumer base—which is diverse across ethnicity, gender, and culture—and the mountain races became some of the most diverse trail run events in U.S. history.

A central component helping Under Armour advertise the races, capture user-generated content, and develop a broader customer base is building grassroots relationships with urban run crews worldwide.

The brand works one-on-one with each community, providing product or gifting entry fees. Highly influential ambassadors, who activate their community and bring in more crew members, receive a flight stipend. The brand also partners with Trail Sisters to help drive awareness among female trail runners nationwide. Then, Under Armour uses a comprehensive marketing dashboard to measure each ambassador’s influence—including social media engagement and reach—which drives brand awareness.

“Conversion is difficult to measure one for one, but the elements of the marketing mix holistically—the crews, run series, and grassroots work—in order for us to be authentic in the community,” explains Gaylord.

Competition is found at race events, but the camaraderie of the trail running community creates a sense of approachability for newcomers, regardless of their background. “I don’t think many brands really know a way to invite urban runners and really diverse runners into the space,” Gaylord says. “There’s more work to be done.” —*MT*

PHOTOS BY (LEFT) UNDERARMOUR/COURTESY

## THE NEW OUTDOOR RETAILER SHOW CYCLE



NOVEMBER 8–11, 2018  
DENVER, CO

- Launch of the winter outdoor season
- Influence buying decisions
- Efficiency: connect retailers + brands early
- Sets the stage for innovation, trends and sourcing
- Co-located with Grassroots Connect



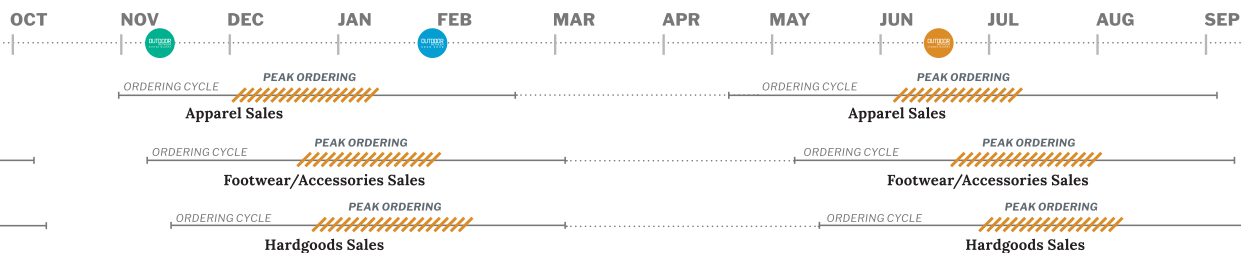
JANUARY 30–FEBRUARY 1, 2019  
DENVER, CO

- Product influencing the whole mountain experience
- Peak of the snowsports buying season
- Snow + outdoor under one roof
- Elevated education + industry engagement
- Co-located with SSL/SMC's Winter Market



JUNE 17–20, 2019  
DENVER, CO

- Launch of the summer outdoor season
- Influence buying decisions
- Efficiency: connect retailers + brands early
- Epicenter of the outdoor community



Right time. Right place. Right stuff.