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GO > VENTURE

By Brad Wetzler
Portrait by Brooks Kraft

Crashing Courses

ENTREPRENEUR YANIK SILVER BELIEVES THERE'S INNOVATION IN THE COLLISION BETWEEN BUSINESS AND ADVENTURE

"ARE YOU OK?" The scratchy voice crackles over the tiny speaker inside my tightly padded crash helmet.

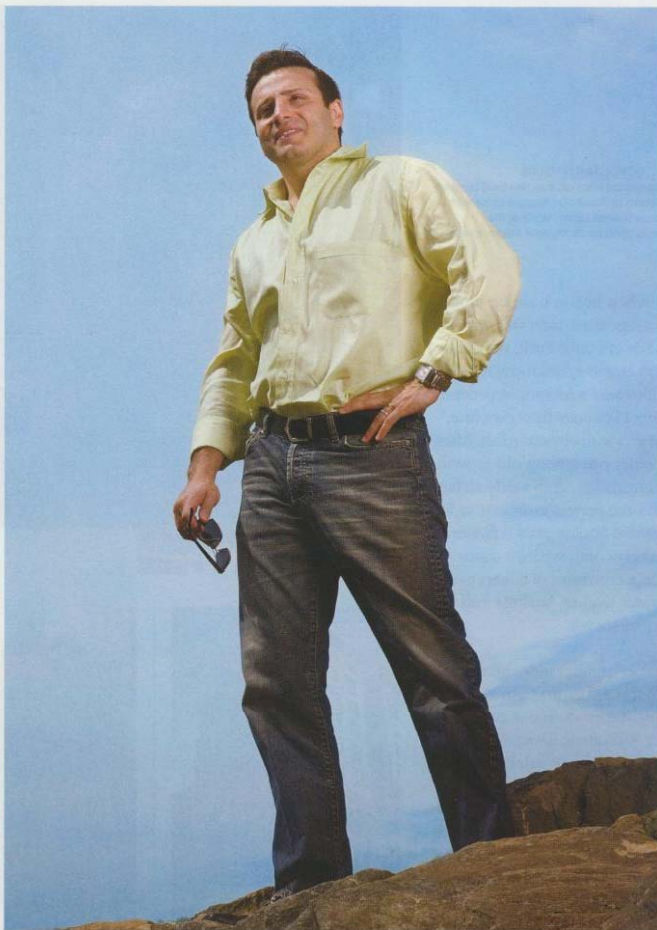
"I think so," I respond, not really telling the truth. I'm actually terrified.

"That was crazy!" the voice in my helmet exclaims.

Yes, it was. I've been riding shotgun across the southern Baja desert in a green dune buggy with Yanik Silver, a 34-year-old adrenaline junkie who has made millions in Web-based businesses, and we just missed a hard right turn, overshot the rock-lined left bank, and came perilously close to flipping the car. As we flew through the air, then slammed into the ground, the left front wheel buckled and the tire exploded with a force that felt like Mount Etna blasting through the floorboards. "Don't worry! I'm in control," Silver cried, laughing over the crunch and grind of metal against rock. Then came the still after the crash, the ensuing silence, and finally Silver's not-quite-reassuring voice.

A little less lead in the foot could have prevented the entire mishap. But that's not Silver's style. The entrepreneur lives with the throttle wide open, and he believes everyone else should do the same. That's why he started Maverick Business Adventures (MBA), a Maryland company that marries business-leadership conferences with exotic, high-octane adventure. This sunny week in January, the 30-strong Maverick crew is outside Cabo San Lucas, driving souped-up dune buggies provided by a race-car outfitter called Wide Open Baja, reaching speeds of up to 80 miles per hour on cactus-lined dirt tracks with more than a few blind turns and rocky obstacles.

Such is the daily adrenaline fix during a typical MBA program, and according to Silver, there's a method to the rush. "Maverick is a far



cry from normal networking, on the golf course and in hotel ballrooms," he says. "The idea is to take very successful people out of their comfort zones and break through their defenses so they then learn from each other. Being an entrepreneur can be lonely." After each day's outing, participants spend evenings networking with fellow millionaires and listening to one another give short, confidential presentations about what is working in their businesses and what isn't. MBA's plan is to offer four trips a year, ranging from zero-gravity parabolic flights to whitewater rafting and rock climbing.

If nothing else, the sessions—like the brand-management one on the Baja trip by celebrity guest Jesse James (of West Coast Choppers fame)—spark the attendees' creative drives.

"I came because I've been spinning my wheels lately," says Denis Betsi, owner of two Internet companies, NutraCore Inc. and

LIFE IN THE FASTEST LANE
Silver wants to get successful entrepreneurs in touch with their colleagues and their wilder sides.



M57Media. "I want to make 2008 different from 2007. I want to build an empire. I want to be a billionaire."

That might sound far-fetched to most, but Silver's response? "Why not? Let's figure out how."

Access to the supportive feedback that comes with a slot on a Maverick Business Adventures trip isn't as easy as plunking down an American Express Platinum card. Members have to meet two basic criteria: You must have a million-dollar business, and you must pass MBA's subjective "coolness" test. In other words, Silver and his executive team, Dan Schorr and Tim Warren, must think that you have something to add to the group in terms of both business savvy and natural adrenaline lust. Pass that and you're invited to pay \$10,000 for the pleasure of scaring the crap out of yourself.

Silver certainly meets his own criteria. Though he's laid-back—he typically wears an old T-shirt, faded jeans, and flip-flops—he's widely considered an Internet-marketing guru. Having started out of his one-bedroom apartment with just \$1,800 to invest, he has done more than \$12 million in sales with his various self-help Web sites, such as InstantSalesLetters.com and UndergroundOnlineSeminar.com, two bare-bones businesses that drive more traffic than huge multinational conglomerates. With his online-publishing acumen, he's written and sold e-books on subjects as diverse as fitness, drawing techniques, and horticulture. Along the way, he has amassed a small fortune, some of which he uses to fund an adventurer's dream life: He's run with the

MBA founder Yanik Silver lives with the throttle wide open, and he believes everyone should do the same.

drive up the coast to catch tiny skiffs for an up-close whale-watching excursion. And of course there's the day spent blasting over sections of the Baja 1000 route in dune buggies.

Back at our crippled vehicle, Silver and I take one look at the ruined wheel and radio for support. While we wait for the mechanics to arrive, Silver briefs me on MBA's next adventure. The trip to Las Vegas will include a zero-gravity flight, a dogfight simulation in World War II fighter planes, a helicopter ride to a desert butte for a strategy session, and a Q&A with Peter Diamandis, co-founder of the \$10 million X-Prize, given to Scaled Composites in 2004 for being the first private company to send a manned craft to space twice in two weeks.

After a few minutes, a support truck pulls up behind us, and with the speed of a NASCAR pit crew, the team changes our tire and gives us the all-clear. Silver is champing at the bit to hit the road and regain full speed. As soon as we're back in the car, he mashes the pedal to the floor, and within seconds we're careering down a barely visible track in the desert. That's when I realize that a successful entrepreneur is an adrenaline junkie by nature, willing to risk everything to gain everything—in business or on the dirt roads of remote Mexico. I cinch up my seat belt, grip the door even tighter than I have been, and steel myself for the ride. It's likely to be a long one.

Join the Club

For more information about MBA or to become a member, visit the group at maverickbusinessadventures.com.

bulls in Pamplona, driven in exotic car races across the American West, and bungee-jumped in Queenstown, New Zealand. He also already holds ticket No. 144 on one of the first space flights offered on Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic *SpaceShipTwo*.

It may not be space travel, but the adventure in Mexico isn't for the meek. The trip kicked off at a hacienda outside Cabo, where the Mavericks skimmed around the surf on jet skis before heading north to the Sea of Cortez. They crossed the peninsula to a remote surf camp on the Pacific, where there were waves for surfing, miles of dusty trails for ATVing, and downtime for hanging on the beach. From there it was a speedy 100-mile

CAREERING
From left, blazing the Baja 1000 course with the Mavericks; the Cabo coast, one hell of a setting for a business lunch

