



CATHY DESAUNOIS

A Portrait.

by Turner Mojica

American-born **Cathy Desaunois**, is a global business brand strategist, Fortune 500 communications consultant, startup visionary and impassioned philanthropist. She is the daughter of a decorated Air Force officer who was a pioneer of stealth and space technology and an asset to NASA, and a school teacher who opened her mind and eyes to the world.

Ms. Desaunois was exposed to travel and learning at an early age. While most girls were playing with dolls, Cathy rode horses, played with her animals and explored the forest surrounding her home. She would often glean through National Geographic magazines imagining where her family would move next. They traveled throughout the United States and Europe and settled in England.

After her parents' divorce she moved to California where she studied Sport Physical Therapy at California State University. "I was in love with the ocean and was also an athlete, so it was only natural that I became a certified lifeguard and swim instructor. I got that fearless drive from my father and the desire to teach from mom." This experience is something that has stayed with Ms. Desaunois throughout her professional career; saving troubled businesses or watching vigilantly over startups as they swim in shark-infested waters.

Cathy travelled to Holland where she interned for handicap children and the Dutch Olympic team. It was there where she started her first company, The Health and Fitness Network which brought American fitness instructors to Europe during the Fitness craze

of the early Nineties. As a certified aerobics and personal trainer with a penchant for marketing, she caught the eye of Reebok through her successful events. While at Reebok she garnered two additional degrees in Marketing Communications and Public Relations and worked her way up through the ranks from Technical Rep to Category Women's Brand Manager. From Advertising and PR, to Athlete Management and Television Programming, it was Ms. Desaunois' leadership which helped transform the brand into a global powerhouse. She wrote fifty TV fitness shows produced by John de Mol and also wrote the book "The Total Workout". "The experience gave me my first multinational experience and taught me that to launch a company successfully in a new market, you need to understand the culture not only the language."

It was during this time that Ms. Desaunois married and had two children, but being a mother didn't slow her down. Feeling that it was time for a change after eight years with the company and her dozens of accomplishments, Cathy was headhunted by Fitness First Health Clubs. She was hired in 1999 as International Brand and Marketing Manager and worked with an international team to roll out the company in thirteen different countries. Under Ms. Desaunois, Fitness First became the largest health club chain in the world with a presence throughout Europe, Asia and the Middle East. She also was instrumental in the alliance between Technogym and Fitness First. Cathy developed the international brand manual, communications and training, while managing the marketing in five European countries.

While in Italy, she caught the attention of Richard Branson who hired Desaunois for the expansion of Virgin Active throughout Europe as Brand/Marketing Director. She went onto launch, operate and/or consult for Virgin (Active) Spa, Virgin Café, Virgin Radio, Virgin Games, Virgin Money, Virgin Green Fund, Virgin Poker.it and organized fundraising events for the charitable arm of the Virgin Group: Virgin Unite. Branson said that, "Cathy is one of our

best brand directors and Virgin Active in Italy was the best brand launch The Virgin Group has done in Europe."

Ms. Desaunois has always had her eye on the horizon much like her days staring across the ocean, so in 2006 she launched her own strategic brand, communications and partnerships firm: CD Communications. Cathy's clients run a gamma of industries including: sports, fashion, luxury, travel, entertainment and celebrities while remaining a consultant in Europe for the Virgin Group. Her clients and collaborations have included: Formula One, Amber Lounge International, Nike International, Adidas Italy, Clarence Seedorf/AC Milan, La Perla Lingerie, Phillip Plein, Giugiaro Architecture, HRH Princess Charlene of Monaco, Producer/Director Ron Howard, George Lucas, Eco Art International, Fiat Group, Nelsen Mandela Day 46664 Foundation, The Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation, His Highness Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan Foundation, The Special Olympics, The Center for Global Dialogue and Cooperation, Goal For Africa. "My mother always taught me to give back so I use my business and personal experience to further humanitarian causes that I believe in."

But it's Cathy's love for open water which has brought her the most challenges and the most joy. Her clients and collaborations include: Russell Coutts, RC44 Dubai World Cup, The Louis Vuitton Pacific Series, The Rolex Cup, Yacht Club Milano, and The World Yacht Racing Forum. "Sailing to me is the true epitome of teamwork, as a lifeguard is was just me out there but when you're working together against the elements with a common goal there is an overwhelming feeling of beauty and harmony. This is what I strive for also in business."

Ms. Desaunois' greatest accomplishments are her daughter Taylor and her son Ryan. She spends her time between Italy and Monte Carlo but never strays too far from the sea.

CATHY DESAUNOIS, Founder

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