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# Right on target

Colorado's fastest-growing private companies

# Credibility, hard work ingredients for cocoa-maker success

BY DOUG MCPHERSON

SPECIAL TO THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

Not many companies can claim their product has reached to the top of the world — Mt. Everest. But Mont Blanc Gourmet, a chocolate maker and wholesaler in Denver, can. And its revenues are reaching new heights, too.

Mountain climbers leaving on expeditions will sometimes call the company and ask for donations of its cocoa. As fans of both the outdoors and adventure, Mont Blanc employees are happy to oblige.

In 1992, a climber sent a note to the company about his Mt. Everest trip: "Your ... cocoa was a real hit. Small pleasures like that really helped make a difference for us."

Small pleasures can equal big revenues. From 2003 to 2004, the company's revenues reached serious thin air, rising 947.6 percent — from \$2.6 million to \$10.4 million.

Michael Szyliowicz, whose official title with the company is chocolatier, says sales are "snowballing."

"We're really kind of a niche within a niche," he said. "When coffee shops took off a few years ago we took off, too. Coffee shops are a big customer."

Specifically, Szyliowicz credits Peet's Coffee, a specialty coffee roaster based in Emeryville, Calif., for some of Mont Blanc's success.

"I think when we started selling our product with Peet's Coffee five years ago, we started seeing potential customers get more interested in us and our products," he said.

He said Peet's Coffee, as "one of the best" companies in the world, helped establish Mont Blanc's credibility.

"People would tell us they saw our product at Peet's and then they'd buy from us," Szyliowicz said.

Mont Blanc has steadily added many new clients over



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**Michael Szyliowicz and his mother, Irene Szyliowicz, president, of Mont Blanc Gourmet, make the syrups that go into your lattes.**

the last few years. A few of those include the Cheesecake Factory, Dunkin' Donuts, Whole Foods Markets, Wild Oats Markets and Peaberry Coffee. Notably absent in the coffee market is Starbucks. But that's likely to change soon.

"I think by the end of the year, you'll hear that we're doing something with Starbucks," Szyliowicz said.

Mont Blanc, a family-owned business, is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. The Szyliowicz family trained with a world-class chocolatier in France before setting up shop in Colorado in 1985 as a small home-based candy maker. The family used a wing of their Greenwood Village home to make their goods.

By 1990, they opened two retail stores in Cherry Creek.

But by 1992, business was getting so good that, Szyliowicz said, the family had reached the proverbial fork in the road.

"We had to make a choice to either stay with retail or go into wholesale and we chose wholesale," he said. "Doing

both would have stretched us too far."

"I liked retail. It was a lot of fun," he said. "Everybody ought to work retail once in their life. And that experience has helped us better understand our customers today."

So they closed the two retail shops and started selling wholesale only.

"We felt like if we focused just on making the product and wholesaling, we could reach the quality we wanted," he said.

Mont Blanc abandoned candy and started making gourmet cocoas and chocolate syrups. Today, its top seller is chocolate syrup.

Szyliowicz said he sees a renaissance in food in the United States.

"Americans are becoming more sophisticated when it comes to food and drinks," he said. "We're seeing more interest in cooking, and better quality foods are making their way into the country."

He said that renaissance has only strengthened Mont Blanc's commitment to quality. And he said quality has played a major role in more sales.

And as sales have grown, so has its staff. It has eight employees, and it has just added two people to work full time in research and development exclusively.

Szyliowicz said the company boosted research and development because Mont Blanc is making more proprietary products for its customers. "That's become a large part of our business and you need a lot of research to do that right."

The company expects to begin serving ice cream retail shops, too. "They're always looking for new products, so we'll grow in that area, too."

And the company has about 12 new products planned for 2006.

So, even after 20 years, the business hasn't lost its appeal to Szyliowicz.

"Yeah, bummer, we have to make and taste chocolate all day," he said with a laugh. "It's just fun."

DOUG MCPHERSON | wordpub@aol.com

**No. 2**  
Large company

**Mont Blanc Gourmet**

Web site: [www.montblancgourmet.com](http://www.montblancgourmet.com)  
Phone: 303-755-1100  
Employees: 8  
Revenue growth: From \$992,750 to \$10.4 million/947.6%

## Fastest-Growing Large Denver-Area Private Companies

(Companies with more than \$5.46 million 2004 gross revenues, ranked by percentage growth 2002-2004)

Rank / 2005 Largest Rank	Business name, address	Phone / Fax	2002-2004 Percent revenue growth	Revenues 2004 2002	Fiscal year end	Number of employees / locations first line: Denver second line: Total company	Description of business	Executive Owner Headquarters	Year established in Colorado
1.	<b>Axess Communications</b> 10901 W. Teller Drive Littleton, Colo. 80127 www.axesscomm.com	303-531-6002 303-531-6001	1475%	\$12,600,000 \$800,000	Dec. 31	33 1 33 1	value-added reseller of both voice and data products and services	Dave Brown, president, CEO Dave Brown / Littleton	1996
2.	<b>Mont Blanc Gourmet</b> 9745 E. Hampden Ave., Suite 440 Denver, Colo. 80231 www.montblancgourmet.com	303-755-1100 303-283-1100	948%	\$10,400,000 \$992,750	Dec. 31	8 1 8 1	producer of chocolate syrups, beverage mixes for specialty coffee companies and cafes	Michael Szyliowicz, chocolatier Michael Szyliowicz, Irene Szyliowicz / Denver	1985
3.	<b>Paragon Solutions Group Inc.</b> 4700 S. Syracuse Way, Suite 250 Denver, Colo. 80237 www.paragonsg.com	303-841-4418 303-841-4392	500%	\$12,000,000 \$2,000,000	Dec. 31	15 1 15 1	IBM computer re-seller	Haydn Hirstine, president Haydn Hirstine / Denver	1989
4.	<b>Gunther Douglas</b> 1430 Larimer St., Suite 300 Denver, Colo. 80202 www.guntherdouglas.com	303-534-4441 303-534-4451	329%	\$8,624,002 \$1,545,136	Dec. 31	40 1 52 2	IT consultants and placement services	Lisa M. Gunther, principal Lisa M. Gunther, Douglas Payne / Denver	1999
5.	<b>MOA Architectural Partnership</b> 1900 Wazee St., Suite 100 Denver, Colo. 80202 www.moaarch.com	303-380-1190 303-380-1197	311%	\$5,760,166 \$1,400,000	Dec. 31	25 1 25 1	architecture, design, planning	Robert L. Outland, principal Robert L. Outland / Denver	1981
6.	<b>Touchstar</b> 3025 S. Parker Road, Suite 925 Aurora, Colo. 80014 www.touchstarsoftware.com	303-388-0678 303-338-5236	256%	\$9,000,000 \$2,526,000	Dec. 31	43 1 58 5	call-center software, predictive dialing, IVR, ACD, soft phone switch	Steve Bederman, president, CEO wnd / Aurora	1998
7.	<b>Digitaly Unique</b> 1615 California St., Suite 613 Denver, Colo. 80202 www.digitalyunique.com	303-292-4555 720-294-9794	255%	\$7,143,149 \$2,014,193	Dec. 31	11 1 11 1	consumer electronics and computers	Mark Yeaman, president, CEO Mark Yeaman / Denver	2001
8.	<b>Silicon Mountain Memory</b> 4755 Walnut St. Boulder, Colo. 80301 www.smmdirect.com	303-638-1155 303-638-1166	204%	\$13,834,509 \$4,551,914	Dec. 31	60 1 60 1	memory solutions for desktops, laptops, servers, routers, printers and other peripherals	Tre Cates, CEO Tre Cates / Boulder	1997
9.	<b>Resumes On-Line Inc. *</b> 333 W. Hampden Ave. Englewood, Colo. 80110 www.roinc.com	303-781-0055 303-783-0444	177%	\$8,952,614 \$3,226,327	Dec. 31	273 2 289 3	staffing services for the high-tech and insurance industries	Robert Bidwell, president Robert Bidwell / Englewood	1991
10.	<b>Global Technology Resources Inc.</b> 2941 W. 19th Ave. Denver, Colo. 80204 www.gtrn.com	303-455-8800 303-455-8808	156%	\$30,000,000 \$11,700,000	wnd	24 1 24 1	IP telephony, network infrastructure, advanced storage & backup and network security	Lance K. Vierra, CEO Lance K. Vierra / Denver	1999
11.	<b>Statera Inc.</b> 8101 E. Prentice Ave., Suite 700 Greenwood Village, Colo. 80111 www.statera.com	720-346-0070 720-346-0080	154%	\$13,200,000 \$5,200,000	Dec. 31	103 1 105 2	IT consulting, software developers, IT services, infrastructure	Carl Fitch, CEO Carl Fitch, Brad Weydert / Greenwood Village	2001
12.	<b>K.L.G. Corp.</b> 7270 S. Fraser St. Centennial, Colo. 80112 www.klgpt.com	303-841-5950 303-841-5952	147%	\$8,000,000 \$3,600,000	Dec. 31	15 1 15 1	engineering re-design firm	Linda J. Grasson, president, CEO Linda J. Grasson / Centennial	1983
13.	<b>TrenStar</b> 5613 DTC Parkway, Suite 1100 Greenwood Village, Colo. 80111 www.trenstar.com	303-220-1133 303-220-4755	123%	\$51,600,000 \$23,100,000	Dec. 31	27 1 128 4	asset-tracking technology including RFID and logistics services	Greg Cronin, president, CEO Trenco, The Carlyle Group, The Leed Companies / South Africa, Washington, D.C., Denver	2001