

Rubber Made

How one Tufts alum is using his alma mater's mascot to change how we think about—and use—condoms. By SARAH SENNOTT

People assume Davin Wedel is saying "condo" when he describes the kind of company he owns. The polite former violin player who made his greatest business strides as an undergrad at Tufts University hardly seems the typical peddler of prophylactics.

"They think they've mistaken you. You can see it in their faces," says Wedel, who owes his alma mater for much of his success. While at Tufts, Wedel began selling condoms branded with the university's mascot, Jumbo the elephant. Built on the strength of those ego-gratifying Jumbo Condoms, his business leaped to international status; it just signed a deal with CVS to sell its wares in the chain's 4,000 stores.

Back in the '80s, when he started out, "condoms were a dirty gas station-bathroom thing," Wedel, now 35, says about his college years. "No one was using them, but everybody was having sex." As the AIDS epidemic grew, Wedel and a friend began selling Jumbo condoms on campus. "People went bananas," says Wedel. "It gave everyone an excuse to use condoms and to start discussing the issue" of unprotected sex.

Soon Wedel went from violinist to condom king with the startup of his Boston-based company, Global Protection Corporation. As the company grew, so did its product base, which now includes such novelties as glow-in-the-dark condoms and a promotional line that lets companies such as Virgin Records print their logos on packages of condoms.

It all may seem frivolous, but Wedel has given it a serious spin since the beginning, when the company gave 10 percent of its profits to AIDS research. These days, he works with nonprofit and health groups on youth education. Wedel describes the latest generation as "anti-condom," in spite of high rates of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

So is there any room for *money* in Wedel's wallet? Sure. Global Protection was just named to the Inner City 100, a national list of the fastest-growing inner-city companies based on gross revenue. Even so, Wedel says his main concern isn't profit. "We started this," he says, "because it was something we believed in."

BALLOONING PROFITS
Davin Wedel's condom business
is growing by the minute.