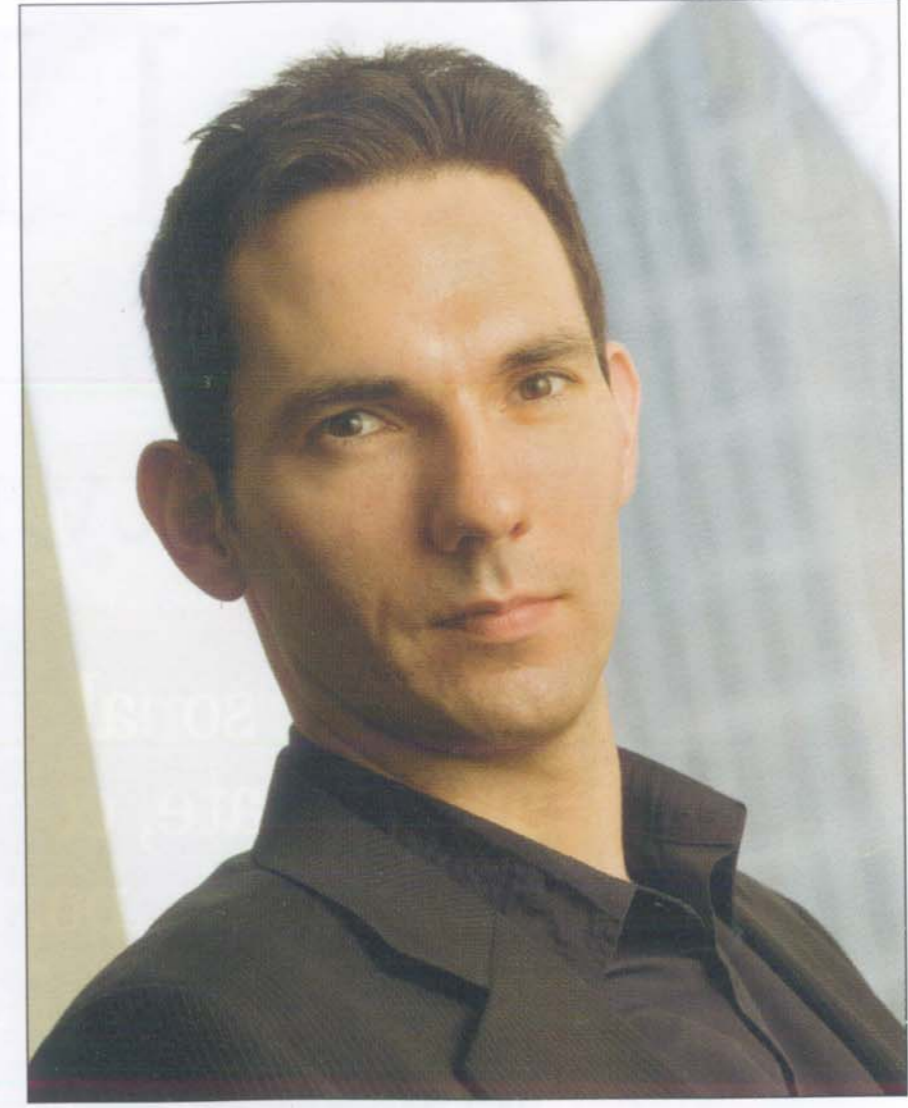


Above: Whether he's climbing the sheer rock face of Victoria's Grampians, or New Zealand's Mt Cook (right), John Kazanas says the challenge is invigorating and clears his mind for the tough decisions in the office.



The secret life of me

The recent spate of feared dead or missing mountaineers has done little to put Members Equity Bank's marketing and communications manager, John Kazanas, off conquering his next mountain. Whether it's rock climbing, ice climbing or mountaineering, he is happy to rise to the challenge.

Who: John Kazanas
From: Members Equity Bank
Secret: Rock climbing, ice climbing and mountaineering

B&T: Why climb mountains?

JK: As a famous mountaineer once said "Because it's there!" Nothing can beat climbing a snow-and-ice-covered mountain on a crisp winter morning, with the sound of steel crampons and ice axes penetrating hard ice or hanging by your fingertips 100 metres above the ground on a beautiful rock face.

B&T: What was your first climb?

JK: Mount Arapiles, Victoria. I got "dragged up" this 60-metre multi-pitch climb by a very experienced climber. Although I was a little scared at first and I avoided looking down, the "rush" was too good to ignore. Within six months I had purchased my own rock-climbing gear and was back there lead climbing.

B&T: So you're an adrenalin-junky?

JK: I can be. Although it sounds rather strange, it's an amazing rush putting yourself in situations where a single mistake can be fatal. I also have a private pilot's licence and fly light aircraft. There must be something about that "high in the air" feeling and being in control in an

environment where things can get out of control.

B&T: Are there any similarities between your climbing expeditions and your job?

JK: It's all about pushing your limits, achieving your potential, managing risks, making good decisions and working with others to achieve a common goal. In the case of climbing and mountaineering, the person you are tied to with a rope also has your life in their hands and vice versa. So complete trust is crucial.

B&T: How does climbing affect or inspire your job in marketing?

JK: It clears my mind, allows me to practice making very good decisions under pressure, set new standards, find solutions to problems and push my mental limits.

B&T: How do colleagues and friends react to your secret life?

JK: Even though it may not be something that they would do themselves, most are really taken with it and tend to admire what I do. I always share my photos and experiences and it's as if they have been there as well, from an armchair perspective.

B&T: When do you find the time to climb?

JK: On the weekends and when I can take leave from work. I climb indoors on weeknights as part of my training.

B&T: Most memorable climb and why?

JK: Climbing a technical 3,000 metre peak

called Mt Dixon in New Zealand's Southern Alps. We started climbing at 4am, climbed for 24 hours non-stop and ended up on this never-ending series of ice arêtes with a 1,000 metre drop on one side and a 300 metre drop on the other. Any small mistake would have seen the end of myself and my climbing partner. We then made it to a tiny rock ledge that had a 1,000 metre drop below us and we slept for two hours before descending to where we started 33 hours earlier. It was a real test physically and mentally. Three days later we climbed New Zealand's highest mountain, Mt Cook, in less than 18 hours. The view from both peaks was amazing, allowing us to see both the Tasman and Pacific Oceans across the New Zealand peninsula.

B&T: Best location you've ever climbed?

JK: I just spent six weeks in Nepal climbing in the shadow of Mt Everest on a 7,000 metre mountain called Mt Pumori. It took us eight days to trek in, using the Everest Base Camp trail, before setting up our Base Camp just down the road from Everest Base Camp. We had Mt Everest and some of the world's highest mountains "in our face" for five weeks and we did a series of acclimatisation runs up and down Pumori. On the highest point of the mountain we were able to view the plains of Tibet on the other side of Nepal, gaze at Mt Everest close up, and really experience the enormity of the Himalayan mountain range.

B&T: Where's good closer to home?

JK: For rock climbing in Victoria the most popular areas are Mt Arapiles near Horsham and the Grampians. In NSW, the Blue Mountains. For ice climbing, both the Victorian and NSW Alps offer good ice and mixed climbing during winter in places like Mt Buller, Mt Bogong and Blue Lake (new Mt Kosciusko).

B&T: Had any really scary experiences?

JK: My scariest experience has been when attempting to cross extremely deep crevasses on the base of Mt Cook, New Zealand. Deep enough to swallow multi storey buildings, these crevasses were covered only by small narrow snow bridges that were ready to collapse at any time. When there were no snow bridges to cross over we simply jumped across the crevasses after taking a run up. Needless to say I avoided looking down inside the deep bottomless abyss below me! The crevasse ladder crossings in Nepal were really scary as well.

B&T: Describe your ultimate climb.

JK: It's every mountaineer's dream to climb Mt Everest. I would attempt it only if all the pain and suffering I was likely to endure was for a worthwhile cause or a charity. The over-commercialisation of Mt Everest, however, is of concern.

B&T: Who would you most like to join on an expedition?

JK: Rob Hall, the famous New Zealand mountaineer who tragically died on Mt Everest in 1996. He was an amazing guy. And Joe Simpson, who wrote the book *Touching the Void*. Both would have some great stories to tell!

B&T: Who would you least like to join you on an expedition?

MM: My mum! She would worry too much!

B&T: Any advice for wannabe climbers?

MM: Try indoor climbing first, and then get someone to take you outdoors. But be careful, once you get the climbing "buzz" it's very hard to shake off!

Got a secret passion outside advertising?

Send your ideas to

heather.jacobs@reedbusiness.com.au to appear in the Secret Life of Me.