



CREATIVE THREADS

T-shirts are gallery walls for graphic artists says Auckland-based creative director Glenn Jones. What better advertisement than 50,000 satisfied customers walking the world in t-shirts bearing your designs?

Jones's cartoon parodies of popular culture have made him the most-printed designer on US online t-shirt shop Threadless.com. His Star Wars-inspired Dark Side of the Garden design alone has sold in excess of 11,000 shirts.

Threadless is the ultimate fashion democracy. Designers submit ideas, viewers rank them and each week the six most popular designs are printed up as tees. They sell for US\$15 plus post and packaging. If you send in a photo of yourself wearing a tee to the site, you earn 'Street Team' credits which count towards purchase. 'Twelve Month' clubbers get sent 12 random shirts per year. It's clearly as addictive for consumers as it is for the designers.

Jones has submitted 75 designs under the Glennz pseudonym since 2004. He has had 12 designs printed and currently has six out of the top 20 designs on the site. His Biblical Disaster is the second highest rated design and Dark Side of the Garden is third. To put that in context, Threadless has posted more than 60,000 t-shirt submissions for scoring to date.

Designers earn US\$2,000 for every concept that is printed. Not bad pocket money for something Jones "does at the weekends" for "a bit of relaxation."

During the week Jones works as Creative Director at Auckland-based Design agency Dashwood Design. His designs for Threadless provide a different kind of creative outlet. "There's no client to answer to on Threadless," he says.

Yes but Jones must answer to the 350,000 registered Threadless members before any designs make the print room. He concedes that he's had to adapt his ideas for the US market. His high scorers are the designs that people recognise instantly from popular culture.

Jones believes Threadless works because it is inclusive. People feel like they have input into what goes on sale. Feedback is immediate and low-scoring designs are removed within 48 hours.

"It's pretty direct feedback," he says. "I can't take too much from the comments. I'd get a bit down otherwise." He could get down, or he could get a big head. Comments like this abound: "Let's just face it, Glenn Jones is the b*****d lovechild of Jesus, Buddha, and Marilyn Monroe," in response to his Thunderbirds-meets-Team America-inspired F.A.B Mr President design.

Jones says Threadless has become much more than a t-shirt site. "The whole blog forum has almost become as important as the t-shirts," he said. "There's such a cross-pollination of ideas, a real international community for designers."

And Jones is the unwitting cream of the designer crop. Fame, even internet t-shirt shop fame, has its price. Such is the divisiveness of Jones's success, a lot of his high-scoring tees are yet to be printed. "Sometimes it's about keeping the community happy," he shrugs.

Then there is the conspiracy theory, the GLENNZ experiment. "Apparently I am an amalgamation of Threadless staff." And finally, painfully for this unassuming creative talent, there were the people who asked to be photographed with him at the 2006 NZ BeST design awards function in Auckland recently, where his Threadless collection was Highly Commended in the Graphic Design – Arts category. "They knew me from Threadless. I was a little bit embarrassed," he recalls.

He was too. He went red just mentioning it.

Get creative, submit a design at www.threadless.com.