

E-shirt designer starts his own label

Online T-shirt design superstar in partnership with US company

By Ulrika Hedquist, Auckland | Tuesday, 1 April, 2008

The most-printed designer on US online T-shirt shop Threadless.com is not the head designer of some large US clothing corporation, but a designer from Auckland.

Glenn Jones, former creative director of Auckland-based Dashwood Design, has now set up his own T-shirt design shop, but he did it the smart way: by partnering with a US company, which takes care of shirt production, warehousing, shipping and customer service for Jones' company, GlennzTees.

Jones has submitted over 100 designs to user and voter community Threadless.com under the Glennz pseudonym since 2004.

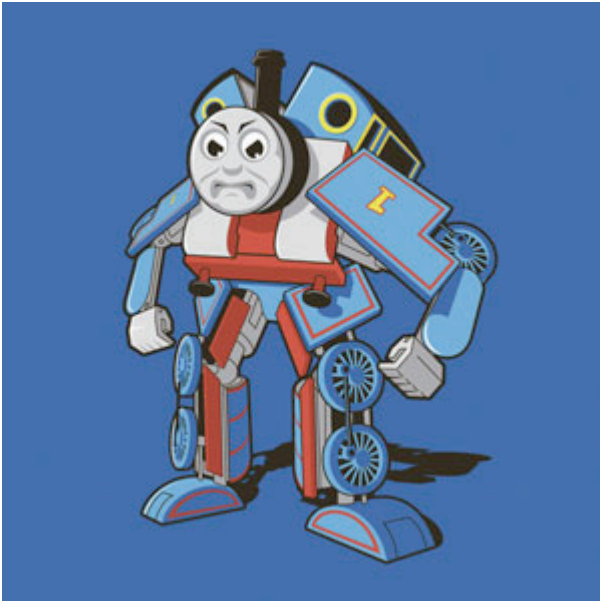
Around 150 new designs are submitted each day to the site, which was founded in 2000. Designs that pass an initial screening are posted on the site for scoring by an online community of close to 400,000 registered members.

Each week, the six most popular designs are printed on T-shirts and sold for US\$15 (NZ\$18.60) plus post and packaging. Designers are paid US\$2,000 for each winning design — US\$1,500 in cash and US\$500 in store credit.

Jones has won 20 times, and with that, holds the world record. Looking at the comments from members, and his consistent high scores, Jones seems to be almost a celebrity to the Threadless community. He gets lots of fan email and is regularly blogged about, he admits.

There has even been speculation among members that there is whole team of designers behind the Glennz designs, simply because he has been so consistently popular. But Jones is the sole Glennz designer. He used to create his T-shirt designs at nights and weekends, just as a break and a bit of relaxation from his day job, he says.

Jones had been contemplating starting his own line of T-shirts for a while, but thought customer service and keeping stock would be difficult and expensive. The perfect solution came along when the twin brothers behind US label Despair approached him last year.



Justin and Jef Sewell had an idea for a T-shirt, but their designer had pulled out at the last minute, so they sent “a random email” to Jones — known to the industry from Threadless — asking if he had time to design something. Jones was having a quiet Friday and said he would get something to the Despair brothers that night.

“By 7pm that same day, they had signed off the design,” says Jones.

Jones did a few more designs for Despair, an online company whose products aim to mock the US multi-billion-dollar motivation industry. Despair has found a lucrative niche market, and the Sewell brothers, who come from an ISP background, have expanded the company to offer warehousing and shipping services to other online companies, says Jones.

The working relationship with Despair worked really well over the internet, says Jones. He had no problems interpreting Despair’s ideas and making them into designs. Around Christmas time, Jones and Despair started talking about printing some of Jones’ designs that hadn’t been printed on Threadless, and the joint venture started. The plan is now to add new designs to the mix, says Jones.

Jones is very happy with what Despair brings to the partnership. In reality, to produce and ship these kinds of products out of New Zealand would not be cost-effective, he says.