

T-shirt entrepreneurs launch business from Web site

A University student capitalizes on the growing trend of Internet sales

By Victor Runyan
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Imagine a T-shirt that expresses exactly what the wearer wants it to say.

ArtApart.com is an example of a growing trend among entrepreneurial University students who start businesses on the Internet.

ArtApart.com is the Web site of Aajost Technologies, co-owned by Aaron Ickes, a student working toward his master's degree in business administration. It offers customers the chance to design T-shirts and other merchandise on the Web site and have it shipped to them. The Web site and its custom-designed software took half a year to develop.

"We did a lot of footwork,"

said Joel Rowles, Ickes' partner.

He said they avoided one of the risks of starting a business on the Internet — opening too early. They are avoiding another risk by having a business plan.

One of the powers of the Internet is it frees business owners from the need to maintain a clean workplace for customers to visit, said Phil Busse, assistant director of the Charles H. Lundquist Center for Entrepreneurship.

"It's Oz, except no one gets to look behind the curtain," Busse said.

But this lack of in-person customer contact creates a temptation to start a business before it is ready. The absence of inventory on the shelves is easier to hide with an Internet-based business.

The Internet made it easier for Ickes and Rowles to create the business by reducing their start-up costs from more than

\$100,000, what he estimates it would cost to start a similar storefront run business, to the few thousand dollars. He said the business draws about three or four customers per day, more than they predicted.

The software for the site required \$70,000 to \$80,000 worth of engineering by Rowles and their former partner, who the pair is buying out, Rowles said. He said the trio was able to create and offer the software he feels makes them more competitive with other businesses offering custom T-shirts because they had the technical skills required to do the work themselves.

The software permits customers to put text and pictures of

their choice on the product. They can upload a picture or choose pictures from the company's files. Rowles said only one other company offers a similar level of customization to the average consumer.

"It's one thing to make a Web page, it's another thing to make it dynamic," Ickes said.

The company grew out of the its creators' interest in art. They wanted to allow people to express their own artistic impulses and decided the best way to do that was to allow customers to design T-shirt art, he said.

Rowles and Ickes are planning to expand into other custom-printing areas, such as business cards. They deliver

their products with the help of a print shop, getting the T-shirt to the customer within a few days.

This year the business college expects to graduate about 90 MBA students. Of these, about 10 percent start their own businesses and another 20 percent plan to start their own business within a few years. Most of the remaining students go to work for existing businesses, said Dan Poston, director of master's programs for the business college.

Poston said the Internet is a vital area for any student to understand.

"It's going to impact all different industries," he said.

Empowerment

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underreported types."

Because of the number of unreported rapes and assaults, Jason Bennett, a resident assistant for Sweetser Hall in the Walton Complex, instigated a ribbon program to show his support for survivors of assault. He, along with other Sweetser residents, passed out more than 2,500 ribbons this week.

"I've received overwhelming support from the community for doing this," Bennett said. "If I can make one person wear the ribbon and become aware of sexual violence then this project has been worth it."

Juleah Huckstep, a family and community services major, will speak at the rally. As a woman with a physical disability, Huckstep plans to discuss her own ideas about the issue of violence.

"So many people in our society view sexual assaults as an act committed against beautiful and loose women," Huckstep said. "They don't realize the perpetrator targets those who are weaker and accessible."

Huckstep said one of her friends was sexually assaulted, but Huckstep felt the charges were not believed because of her friend's disability.

"People wondered why good-looking boys would choose to assault her," Huckstep said. "But what people don't realize is that sexual assaults are about power and control, not about sex."

Nadia Telsey, a University self-defense instructor and a

Take Back the Night

Schedule of Events

■ 7 p.m.—Pre-rally organizing with signmaking and viewing the Clothesline Project, shirts made by survivors of abuse, in the EMU Amphitheater.

■ 8 p.m.—Speeches and self-defense demonstrations are presented as marchers gather. The march begins at the corner of 13th Avenue and University Street and proceeds to Eighth Avenue and Pearl Street.

■ 9 p.m.—Musical and theatrical performances are followed by a speak-out allowing people to express their views and to share stories about sexual assault. Concurrently, the workshop "Men's Role in Ending Sexual Violence Against Women" takes place in the EMU Walnut Room.

Sign-language interpreters offer their services for the event, and child care is provided.

Shuttle services back to the University are available to people who need a ride after the march.

For more information about the rally or to arrange for child-care services, call the ASUO Women's Center at 346-4095.

women's movement advocate, said she hopes the march will gain social awareness of the prevalence of violence.

"Rape and domestic abuse are often swept under the rug," Telsey said. "Thousands of women are walking around wounded. They need to know they are not alone and that they have acceptance and support from the community."



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