



Design to a tee

Global t-shirt phenomenon builds true community and successful business using Adobe® Creative Suite® 4 Design Premium software



Jake Nickell didn't set out to be a successful entrepreneur—but that's exactly what he became when one of his hobbies turned into a global t-shirt phenomenon. Nickell is the founder of Threadless, the popular and playful t-shirt company. The designs on the tees are sourced from an ongoing open call for t-shirt submissions from a worldwide community of amazing artists and designers. Once submitted, the community of more than one million members casts votes that determine which designs become Threadless t-shirts.

Art No War by Noah Krogh



Rainforests by Yeoh Guan Hong



Hundreds of thousands of designers from around the world submit designs to Threadless in hopes of being selected as a monthly "Bestee" winner. Some of the 2009 Bestees are shown here. All of the artists used Adobe software to create their designs and each received a copy of Adobe Creative Suite 4 Design Premium as part of their Bestee prize from Threadless.



Her Hair by Federico Rodriguez Morice



Three Keyboard Cat Moon by Oxen

"Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop CS4 are my life. I use them every day."

Joe Van Wetering, designer, Threadless

More than just a competition, Threadless is also a loyal community of fans who create t-shirts, vote to decide which shirts get manufactured, post to forums, upload photos of themselves wearing the shirts, and even bake "Threadcakes" that look like their favorite t-shirts. From contestants designing t-shirts to the e-commerce website where the shirts are sold, the Threadless community thrives on Adobe Creative Suite 4 Design Premium software.

"Our focus is on fun and on the Threadless artistic community—our successful business model selling t-shirts is more of an afterthought," says Nickell. "We are a forum that inspires and rewards creativity, and we all live and breathe Adobe Creative Suite 4 because of its ability to empower designers. From day one, when we started with \$500 and no investors, to today when a global design community has coalesced around our efforts, Adobe software has been our foundation."

A good idea gone wild

The inspiration for Threadless came when Nickell was a member of illustrator Joshua Davis' former Internet art forum, Dreamless, a gathering place for graphic and web designers and programmers. Nickell loved the intrigue and camaraderie of the site and, as a hobby, decided to set up his own site to bring artists together with a unique twist: designers had to use t-shirts as their artistic canvas.

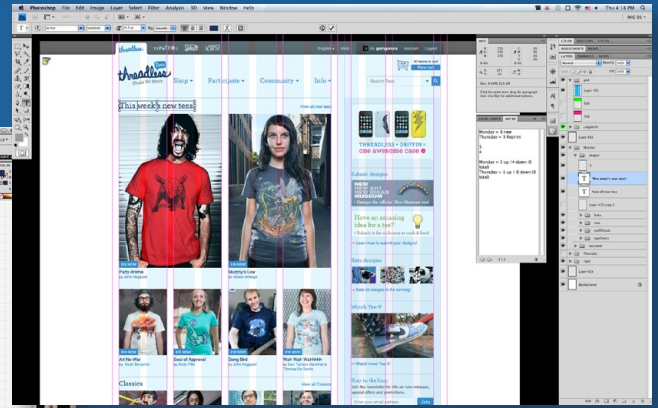
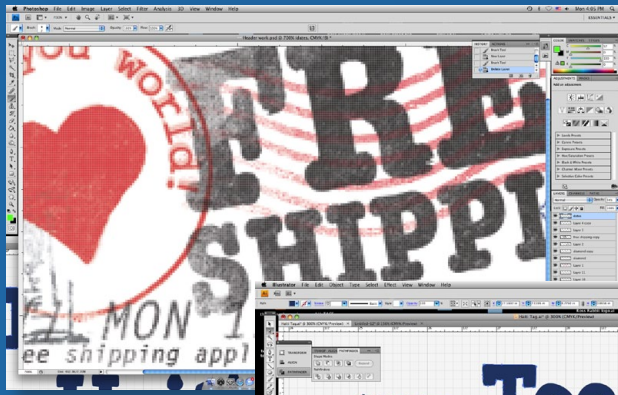
The first year, a few hundred people submitted t-shirt designs to Threadless. Today, hundreds of thousands of designers from around the world submit traditional as well as digital designs, many created with Adobe software, and submit them to Threadless. Winners of the competition, "Bestees," can earn a variety of prizes, from charitable donations to gaming systems, gift certificates, up to \$20,000 in cash for Bestee of the Year, and—the most coveted prize for many monthly winners—a free copy of Adobe Creative Suite 4 Design Premium software.

"I love the fact that I won a copy of Adobe Creative Suite 4 from Threadless," says Noah Krogh, Bestee Award winner for September 2009. "Adobe Creative Suite 4 is an all-in-one, integrated design studio. I can pretty much stay in the Adobe environment from concept to creation whether the end product is for the web, print, or a combination."

A burgeoning community

Surrounding the competition is a flourishing community that interacts on the Threadless website as well as on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. The company nails the playful part of the process by posting songs and other fun items on the pages of its websites and not taking itself too seriously. Threadless has even created a dedicated online video channel, Threadless Tee-V, broadcasting interviews with hot bands, fans baking cakes that look like their favorite shirts, and other lighthearted events on venues like Vimeo.

Although business success may have been a secondary goal, it has been achieved in spades. Threadless sold \$6.2 million worth of merchandise in 2005 and has experienced very healthy double digit growth rates every year since then. The parent company, skinnyCorp, has been diversifying from its main Threadless line too. The Threadless Select Series is a line of t-shirts featuring the work of the world's most talented artists, curated by Threadless. TypeTees is a new



The Threadless creative team relies on Adobe Creative Suite 4 Design Premium software for everything from producing their t-shirts themselves to designing the Threadless website using Adobe Illustrator CS4 and Photoshop CS4 Extended. Throughout all of its materials, the Threadless focus is on fun and on the Threadless artistic community—a community that also gives back to those in need.

take on the traditional slogan tee. There are Threadless Kids tees. Naked & Angry, a site that features products with breakthrough pattern designs, is branching out into ties, wallpaper, dish sets, and more.

The Threadless creative hub

For everything it does, the Threadless creative team relies heavily on Adobe Creative Suite 4 Design Premium as well as Adobe After Effects® software. Threadless produces the t-shirts themselves by preparing four-color artwork for screen-printing using Adobe Illustrator® CS4 and Photoshop® CS4 Extended software. The company's websites also are designed using Illustrator and Photoshop. Adobe software, including Adobe InDesign® CS4, is also used to create print flyers, business cards, and the packaging used to ship t-shirts to customers as well as to design and produce assets like logos and banners for e-mails sent to Threadless fans.

"Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop CS4 are my life. I use them every day," says Joe Van Wetering, designer for Threadless. "The integration between Illustrator and Photoshop with Smart Objects is great. I can scale objects in Photoshop as I please without losing quality. Then, with a simple double click, I can edit everything in Illustrator at a later date, so I can design freely, knowing that I can always go back and make changes whenever I'd like."

Effects and animations for the company's videos on Threadless Tee-V are created using Adobe After Effects. "From logo builds to quirky special effects, After Effects helps us add that extra bit of pizzazz for Threadless Tee-V," says Mig Reyes, interactive designer for Threadless. "After Effects plays a big role in helping us project a playful, fun image."

A global creative movement

Threadless contest participants, who range from students to working designers, also depend on Adobe software not only for their t-shirt designs but also in their professional lives. In his Shanghai-based design company, Super Nature Design, June 2009 Bestee Award winner Yeoh Guan Hong uses Adobe software for interactive, print, and web designs for clients such as Nike and Coca-Cola.

"Adobe tools are so powerful and well integrated," says Hong. "The Creative Suite 4 user interface is very smooth and well thought out, making it easier for me to realize my ideas from sketches through to final design work. Adobe software helps me continually improve the quality of my work."

Threadless skinnyCorp

Chicago, Illinois
www.threadless.com
www.skinnyCorp.com

Challenge

- Create global design community
- Empower designers to realize their creative visions
- Reward designers around the world
- Build successful business

Solution

- Use Adobe Creative Suite 4 Design Premium to create everything from t-shirts to websites and flyers
- Provide Adobe Creative Suite 4 to Bestee Award winners
- Add pizzazz to video pieces using Adobe After Effects

Benefits

- Built loyal and enduring following
- Equipped designers with tools that pave new creative paths
- Provided Creative Suite 4 software as part of Bestee Awards
- Sold \$6.2 million worth of merchandise in 2005 and has grown every year since

Toolkit

- Adobe Creative Suite 4 Design Premium. Components used include:
 - Adobe Illustrator CS4
 - Adobe Photoshop CS4 Extended
 - Adobe InDesign CS4
 - Adobe After Effects



Adobe software is not just used for t-shirts and websites at Threadless. Adobe InDesign CS4 is also used by Threadless to create flyers, business cards, and packaging, as well as to design and produce assets like logos and banners for e-mails sent to Threadless fans. The company has also branched out into ties, wallpaper, dish sets, and more—all created with Adobe Creative Suite 4 Design Premium software.



“What we enjoy most is the smooth integration among all the Creative Suite 4 applications.”

Ross Zietz, art director, Threadless

“The continuity and compatibility among Adobe programs is key to working with multimedia, which is what we enjoy most,” says Harris. “With Adobe Creative Suite 4, Emilee and I can trade off parts of each piece, back and forth between us and in and out of different Adobe software applications seamlessly, until everything is polished to perfection.”

January 2009 Bestee Award winner Federico Rodriguez Morice is an art student at the Universidad de Costa Rica as well as a design freelancer. He appreciates the ability to extend Adobe’s creative tools using scripting and batch processing. “Adobe software is very open and flexible,” says Rodriguez Morice. “Designing and creating high quality art involves a large time element, and it’s the main cost in any design business. Optimizing processes is vital and tends to be overlooked, but it’s easy using Adobe Creative Suite 4.”

Up to any task

For Threadless, skinnyCorp, and the entire Threadless community, Adobe software is the backbone of their creative efforts and the tool that makes t-shirt designs shine. “What we enjoy most is the smooth integration among all the Creative Suite 4 applications,” says Ross Zietz, art director for Threadless. “It really helps us focus more on creating great work, and less on managing the software—regardless of the design challenge we’re about to undertake.”

July 2009 Bestee Award winners Shawn Harris and Emilee Seymour of OXEN garnered the highest score and the most votes ever on Threadless during voting week. They use Adobe products daily to create album covers, t-shirt designs, posters, websites, and music videos for bands and musicians.



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