

Industry Focus: An October shopping spree—same-store sales rose 4.5% **Page B4.**

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MARKETPLACE

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THE FRONT LINES

BY THOMAS PETZINGER JR.

For a Designer Known as Chank Letters Are Art

MINNEAPOLIS

A YEAR AGO, a starving artist named Chank made his home in the dreary basement of a Minneapolis punk-rock magazine. He had no phone, no money and no prospects. But he had a lot of fonts.

Fonts are hot. Everywhere you turn these days, fonts are in your face: typography of every shape and description on computer screens, packaging, even clothing. But you can't copyright fonts. Over-the-counter designs sell for next to nothing, if the user pays at all. Which, as Chank discovered, makes life hard for a full-time font designer.

Hard but not hopeless. Today, Chank distributes thousands of fonts each week. The popular RiotGrrl Web magazine calls him "the Johnny Rotten of fonts," high praise indeed for a 28-year-old male wearing the latest shade of urban-distress nail polish. And some of Chank's customers actually remit money for his designs. This newspaper paid list price—a whopping \$30—for the font in the headline above.

As for his name, he grew up as Charles Anderson in Tampa, where the neighbors called him Charles Spanky, or Chanky. Demanding his dignity, he insisted on Chank.

Those impressionable years were full of over-the-top typography: video games, comic books, MTV. Where other people looked at newspapers and saw words, Chank saw type—and saw it often, sometimes getting up at 3 a.m. to help his divorced mom fold the Tampa Tribune for home delivery. He also witnessed fontfide, as 1980s hotel chains plowed-over classic Florida motel lettering.

He came here to attend the tony Macalester College, but couldn't make it through in six years. Instead, he absorbed himself in the campus newspaper and in running up credit-card debt. Later, he helped establish an edgy punk-music magazine called Cake, featuring wild new typefaces: a distressed bodoni (Badoni), a drunken serif (Mister Frisky), the chubby Chauncy Faty (seen above), and a few with names too ribald to repeat here.

CHANK REGISTERED his fonts with the leading typography brokers and was soon seeing his work everywhere, from the Cartoon Network to a dollar-off coupon for Nestle Toll House Morsels. Mister Frisky wound up on a Taco Bell wrapper and a Welch's Grape Soda can. For his share of these sales, however, Chank was lucky to get ten bucks. It didn't help that he lacked a permanent address. "We'd send him a royalty check and it would come back undeliverable," recalls Carlos Segura, whose T-26 Digital Type Foundry in Chicago represents hundreds of font designers.

Then Chank turned to the World Wide Web. Teaching himself to program, he put his work on display and made it available for sale via download or disk. He filled the site with zany, indecorous accounts of his punkadelic lifestyle, stories that could not fail to amuse (and occasionally educate) geeky young Web de-

signers. When amateurs began asking him for free fonts, he obliged. The revenue wasn't growing, but the traffic was. Chank the font designer was becoming Chank the brand.

Commercial viability drew closer following a spectacular coincidence. Minneapolis is the home of a long-established designer also named Charles Anderson, with whom Chank is occasionally confused (one reason



he remains strictly Chank). One day, the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York selected the work of one Charles Anderson for a typography exhibit. When the museum phoned the office of the older Mr. Anderson, the call was taken by a former Cake interh. "You want Chank!" the museum was told.

When he was notified that it was his work they wanted to honor, the penniless Chank dispatched an e-mail to everyone he knew pleading for \$10 toward gas money to New York. In his gratitude he drew a unique alphabet for each contributor. It then occurred to him to ask for \$10 from anyone downloading "free" fonts from his Web site. Some actually paid! Next he offered to send a disk with three mystery fonts and a catalogue to anyone who mailed him \$10 in advance. More paid.

BEST OF ALL, the \$10 come-on spurred sales of his full-price fonts. For many corporate designers, he found, paying \$30 by credit card is easier than sending \$10 by mail.

These days, www.chank.com registers more than 1,000 daily visitors, each viewing an average of seven pages. Reliably, about five people every day send money, anywhere from \$10 to \$299 each (the latter for Chank's Dental Pack of 50 fonts, with proceeds going toward his urgent dental work.) He's also collecting ad revenue from the site.

And as his Internet popularity grows, Chank receives more contracts to design exclusive fonts for companies and ad agencies. Ocean Spray, for one, paid him \$6,000 for an exclusive font to convey the "zing" in its beverages. Says Peter Griffith, the outside art director who hired him for the job: "If this guy's not on the cutting edge, then I don't know what I'm looking for."

Chank recently moved into an office suite decorated with striped walls and a reproduction of Gainsborough's "The Blue Boy." "We pay rent, taxes and two part-time employees and sustain Chank full-time," says Heidi Olmack, his business manager and housemate.

What a world. Major corporations spend huge sums on slick Web sites, advertise them to death and generate zero revenue. Chank spends almost nothing and builds a business, however modest, on sheer design talent and personality. "It's just keeping people entertained," he says. "A little creativity goes every bit as far as a lot of money."

Asia's Currency Turmoil = U

By LISA MILLER

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

A man flies from California to Taiwan and back. The round-trip fare is \$3,500. Without a discount from the airline, the man pays \$1,300 less than that. How?

No riddle here. The man, an executive named Andy Helman, took advan-

TRAVEL

tage of Asia's currency turmoil by cashing in on some remarkably favorable exchange rates. Rather than booking a round trip in the U.S. and paying in dollars, he paid for only the trip out in dollars and paid for the return in Taiwanese currency.

Mr. Helman is part of a savvy subculture of U.S. travelers, travel agents and companies taking advantage of the current clobbering of Asian currencies. By using these currencies, whenever possible, to pay for travel and lodging, Americans are enjoying savings that are "glaring, incredible," says John Melchior, managing director of international operations for Woodside Travel Trust, a consortium of travel agencies based in Bethesda, Md.

Most U.S. airlines haven't been raising trans-Pacific fares in Asian currencies. One reason: They risk losing business to foreign competitors who don't. What's more, higher fares could price local residents out of the market.

Meantime, travel agencies, from Sundance Travel International Inc. in Irvine, Calif., to giants like American Ex-

Fluctuating Fare

The currency debacle in Asia has created all sorts of bargains. It's often cheaper now to buy two one-way tickets, instead of one round-trip ticket, by purchasing the return portion at the Asian rate.

ROUTE	REGULAR PRICE	YSP
Newark-Kuala Lumpur-JFK	\$9,113	\$6,113
Chicago-Penang-Chicago	6,167	4,167
JFK-New Delhi-JFK	6,315	4,315
Cincinnati-Bangkok-Knoxville	8,980	6,980
JFK-Bangkok-JFK	7,939	5,939

Note: Examples are for actual, first-class itineraries, most of which involve multiple stops. The "YSP" price is based on the most favorable currency exchange.
Source: American Express Travel Related Services

press Co. are helping travelers take advantage of the situation.

For American Express, it's nothing new: The company has long tracked foreign exchange rates and split tickets to adjust to favorable exchange rates. "It's generally an invisible process," says a spokeswoman for American Express Travel.

It's more visible now. Since June, the price of a one-way, first-class ticket to Los An-

SPORTS

Why It Takes a Rocket Scientist

By BILL RICHARDS

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

HUMBOLDT, Tenn.—If you think golf is a long way from rocket science, you should meet Robert Thurman, a rocket scientist who designs golf-ball dimples for a living.

Mr. Thurman, a 29-year-old aeronautical engineer, once helped build fuel tanks for the space shuttle. Now he works for Wilson Sporting Goods Co., a unit of the Finnish company Amer Group Ltd. He is one of a growing cadre of specialists designing dimples that can make golf balls travel faster or slower, higher or lower, longer or shorter.

It is no fly-by-night avocation. With the global golf boom, golfers now spend some \$800 million a year on balls and tend to flock to the latest wrinkle—or dimple—in ball design. Wilson has spent nearly \$1 million on Mr. Thurman's dimple lab here since 1995, including installing a 340-yard driving range complete with sand traps and a water hazard.

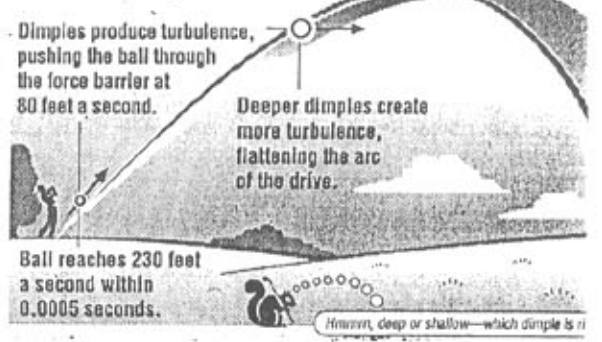
Steven Aoyama, who designs dimples for Fortune Brands Inc.'s Titleist & Foot-Joy Worldwide unit in Fairhaven, Mass., has his own computerized wind tunnel and a three-hole course with a full-time superintendent. Spalding Sports Worldwide, the world's biggest golf-ball maker, estimates it spends about \$2 million a year on two dimple-designing facilities in Massachusetts and Florida. Spalding employs an aeronautical engineer and a physicist to help with the designs.

"Dimples," says Frank Thomas, technical director of the U.S. Golf Association in Far Hills, N.J., "are very important and very, very complex." A dimple-less golf ball in the hands of even a good golfer would travel an anemic 130 yards or so off the tee, he estimates. The same ball, properly dimpled, could fly twice that far.

But dimpled how?

"Ah," says Mr. Thurman, as he tees up one of his dimpled creations on an Iron Byron. It's a contraption de-

What Dimples Do



signed to mimic the swing of Byron Nelson, an endary golf pro whose swing in the 1930s and reputed to be close to perfect. The device whacks Mr. Thurman's ball about 270 yards down the fairway toward the pin.

The key, Mr. Thurman explains, is to create enough depth to produce air turbulence around a ball as it rotates in flight. That helps the ball what engineers call "the force barrier"—the that builds up as the ball moves through the air. Much turbulence increases the drag on the ball it to drop too fast.

Most dimpled balls crack the force barrier at a speed of about 80 feet a second. Once through, air resistance drops by half, and the farther. (Mr. Thurman estimates the same ball, would have to travel more than 200 feet before breaking the force barrier.)

Dimple depth isn't the only factor in a ball's flight. There is dimple shape—circular or elliptical—and the angle of the dimple as it breaks the ball. There is the question of how many dimples a ball have—the consensus seems to run somewhere

RETAILING

Word of Mouth Makes Kansas Store

By KEVIN HELLIKER

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

ATCHISON, Kan.—About once a month, Melanie Krumbholz drives her Jeep here from a Kansas City suburb 60 miles away. The trip through wooded bluffs is scenic, and this old railroad town is quaint. But the real treat is a home-furnishings store called Nell Hill's.

The store, which offers a sophisticated mix of high-end and

longer. Its wide streets and huge mansions date back to the late 19th century, when the town was a shipping point for the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad. Since then, its population has declined so much that the whole town thrived on the high point of his career. The store is a restaurant.

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