

Metro students get on-line distribution

STUDENT STORE | Metro State College students see how their furniture and houseware designs sell using a Web-based outlet in a project that teaches them the nuts and bolts of a real-life business.

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Jared Arp's modular shelving was a finalist for Brand Spankin New production. Creative BSN student designs can be found at www.brandspankinnew.org.

"Our goal is to make this... the largest student-operated retailer in the world."

Mick Jackowski has big ideas for Brand Spankin New, the "functional art" online store run by Metropolitan State College of Denver marketing and industrial design students.

The retail business gives aspiring home-furnishing designers a platform to sell their original, limited-edition wares. Students rise to the occasion by learning to negotiate the home and design industry. Consumers benefit by having access to their affordable, highbrow furniture.

Aspiring designers often mount student exhibits, but the Brand Spankin New store - at brandspankinnew.org - is touted by Metro as one of the few undergraduate- run Internet retailers in the world, if not the only one.



"Instead of training students for the job, we bring the job to the training," says Jackowski, an assistant marketing professor at Metro State and a Brand Spankin New adviser.

One browse through the online boutique and it's clear this is more than a routine class project. The site's savvy look includes artful product shots and slide shows, and designer bios and head shots akin to those employed throughout the design industry.

Securing a signed, limited-edition piece takes just a few clicks. Since August, those clicks have added up to roughly \$6,000 in revenue from products ranging in price from \$57 to \$387.

Jackowski has students in two upper- level classes working on marketing and branding for the site. Meanwhile, assistant professor Ken Phillips and his Industrial Safety and Production class forge Brand Spankin New's housewares.

"We're a very strong hands-on program," Phillips says. "We ask (students) to perform quickly in the design phase."

Then, a panel of interior design professionals chooses the concept that appears to have potential to be a top seller. That design is manufactured in a limited run of 107. Students came up with that number after determining that the competitive asking price for the very first Brand Spankin New product was \$107.

Last spring, third-year student Kate Head's magazine holder, "Maggie," was selected for production. The simple box made of Baltic Birch and frosted acrylic has clean, unadorned lines. Its light wood frame lends a warmth that keeps "Maggie" from being sterile.



"'Maggie,' like most of my designs, was ... driven by function," Head says. "The aesthetic development was inspired by modern architecture - the glass expanses of the Colorado Convention Center." Through Brand Spankin New, Head gleaned the skills to find a manufacturer for her product and prepare it for market. "Maggie" began shipping last week.

Metro State graduate Hannah Henry's 2005 coat rack, "Serenade," was the first Brand Spankin New design chosen for production.

"There were a lot of little things to figure out," Henry says. "I spent several days making hundreds of phone calls."

"Serenade" is now the company's top seller, according to Jackowski.

Profits from these sales are put back into product development, with the exception of a \$300 stipend for the designers.

"As with any new business, our biggest issue is cash flow," Jackow-

ski says. That means some of the more popular designs end up in the "Can't Have It" section of the store. These close-second finishers can still be produced - with enough customer donations.

Heather Mourer co-owns One Home in Cherry Creek North. She helps select each semester's top product and stocks them in her modern furniture store.

Mourer says student designer Ynes Kropf's loopy "Lupe" magazine rack gets a lot of attention.

"We may use a couple of pieces in our (interior) projects," she adds. "Some of the (Brand Spankin New) pieces are next to a Knowles or a Claire Bataille chair."

The opportunity rarely arises for students to place their designs in professionally finished rooms. That is something else that sets the Brand Spankin New business apart.

"We have students get jobs because of their technical skill," Phillips says of the program's benefits. "We've got people scattered all over the country (and) getting fairly successful."