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Threadless.com

Despite its laid-back design and social-networking functions, the primary goal of Threadless.com is to sell T-shirts and hooded sweatshirts designed and marketed by its users. In the process, Threadless emerged as a thriving retail site and online community where users post pictures, submit designs and critique the work of aspiring artists. From the moment a design is pitched, Threadless participants are invited to publish personal blogs, vote for designs and submit pictures of themselves wearing the company's products. Each week, user-generated designs are rated on a scale of 0 to 5 and the most popular are selected for printing; almost guaranteeing high T-shirt sales. In 2007, the site generated over \$16 million worth of T-shirts sales, which are priced at an average of \$15 each, but only cost the company \$4 to make. Threadless is perhaps one of the first retail websites to capitalize on the popularity of online communities.

Threadless' business model, however gimmicky as it may seem, demonstrates successful marketing towards young consumers, which tend to respond more favorably to word-of-mouth and other viral techniques. Consumption has evolved into a process in which people render products as a part of themselves. Whether a visitor to Threadless.com is a designer, model, voter/critic or "StreetTeam" member, he/she becomes personally invested into generating popularity and sales for a particular design. Fashion has always been a form of expression, therefore it is inevitable that customers gravitate towards T-shirts to show off their individuality. Essentially, Threadless capitalizes on this concept by treating its clothing as the medium for art to be displayed. Rather than being relegated to wearing a logo or brand name over their chests, the company markets its products and website as an arena where customers can flaunt their creativity and wittiness through T-shirts that contain clever slogans such as, "To Err is Human, to Arr is Pirate."

Threadless.com's homepage is cluttered, yet visually appealing because of the many colorful images of its clothing. Although, the site is primarily organized by three main categories: "Shop," "Participate," and "Info," navigation can be rather confusing even for the most savvy of Web 2.0 users and older visitors may be put off by terms like "blogs" and "RSS Feed." One unique aspect of the site remains the pictures of people—many of which are actual customers—modeling various T-shirts. The participation/community aspect of Threadless.com doubles as the major attraction for customers and the company's promotional tool. Unlike other online clothing retailers, Threadless seems to treat its customers as representatives by allowing them to become members of their "StreetTeam" and earn points towards future purchases by linking to the website and referring friends. This strategy results in repeat business and helps Threadless achieve the viral-marketing sales that Myspace and Facebook continuously strive for.