

THE FAST

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50 WAYS TO MOVE BUSINESS FORWARD

Our Second Annual Global Readers' Challenge

Powerful ideas and personal commitment are what propel industries, companies, and individuals into the future. Every November, FAST COMPANY shines a spotlight on the idea elite of business—the CEOs who make our annual Who's Fast issue. This month, for the second year in a row, the Fast 50 emphasizes in-the-trenches achievement. There are CEOs, but also engineers, marketers, and frontline teams whose passion means the difference between winning and losing. ■ This year's challenge attracted more than 1,400 entries and 20,000 online comments from people in 30 countries and 45 states. The winners demonstrate the power of persistence, the thrill of invention, the value of values, the rewards of solving problems, and the business of culture. ■ It's been a brutal few years for business. These champions of innovation show what it takes to build a brighter future. MANAGED AND EDITED BY PAUL CABANA WEB PLATFORM BY DAVID SEARSON

THERE'S MORE ONLINE

www.fastcompany.com/fast50

- View full profiles of this year's winners.
- See which entries received honorable mentions.
- Search more than 1,000 entries by category, location, and industry.
- Read more than 800 parting tips from this year's entrants.
- Register for information on next year's challenge.

AVOID CULTURE SHOCK

Gary Hirshberg
President and CEO
Stonyfield Farm Inc.
Londonderry, New Hampshire
How do you maintain your privately held company's well-known social mission and find an exit strategy for 300 shareholders (mostly friends and family) without going public? You find a big corporate partner (Groupe Danone) that is willing to pay top dollar for a big stake, leave you in charge, and keep your company's mission and strategy intact.

MANAGE THROUGH TURBULENCE

Colleen Barrett
President and COO
Southwest Airlines Co.
Dallas, Texas
Colleen Barrett was a secretary at the law firm that helped Southwest Airlines take off in 1971. Thirty years later, she took the helm as president, just three months before the September 11 attacks. Barrett directed the effort to get the airline flying again, reassuring customers and employees and securing the company's financial stability. Southwest quickly resumed its trajectory as the most celebrated airline in America.

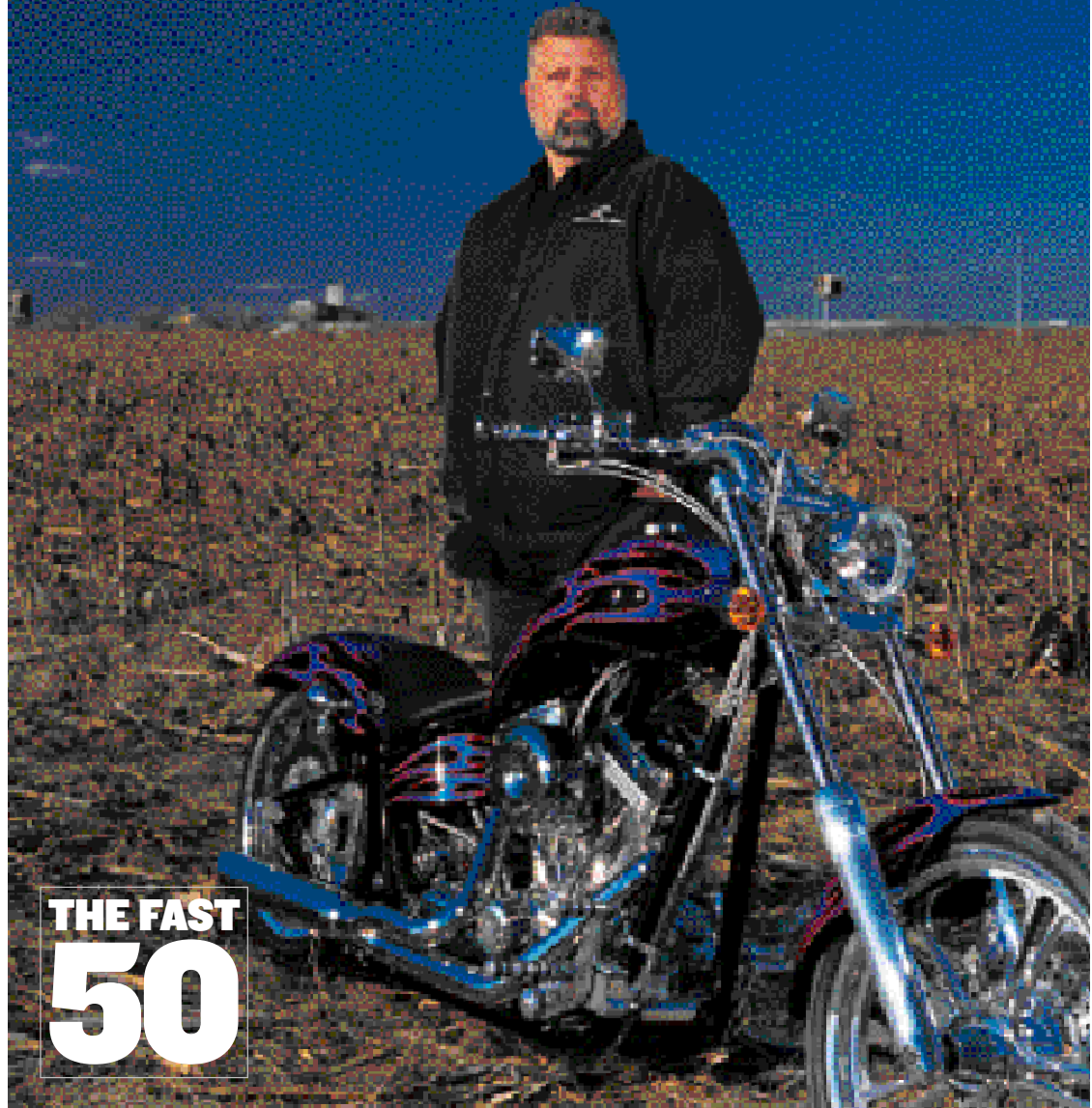
MAKE A FAST-GROWING IDEA GROW FASTER

George Bell
CEO
Upromise Inc.
Needham, Massachusetts
The promise behind Upromise is compelling: Parents rack up the equivalent of frequent-flier miles to help fund college tuition when they purchase goods and services from companies such as AT&T, Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Staples, and Toys 'R Us. In late 2001, eight months after Upromise's launch, the company was closing in on its 1-million-member mark. That's when CEO George Bell decided to make a fast-growing idea grow even faster, by partnering with supermarkets and pharmacies. Today, Upromise's membership is approaching 3 million.

TAKE THE HIGH ROAD

Bill Rucker, CEO and cofounder, American IronHorse Motorcycle Co., Fort Worth, Texas

Bill Rucker, with cofounder Tim Edmondson, started American IronHorse to turn the art of custom motorcycles into a roaring business. Last year, it did \$40 million in sales from models such as the Slammer, the Outlaw, and the Texas Chopper. Its customers include celebrities, moguls, and people who are passionate about bikes. "Each American IronHorse bike is as distinct as the person riding it," says Rucker.



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THE POWER OF PERSISTENCE

THESE FOUNDERS, CEOs, AND PRESIDENTS ARE BUILDING THEIR COMPANIES FOR THE LONG HAUL.

GIVE CUSTOMERS MORE OPTIONS

David Krell
CEO

International Securities
Exchange Inc.
New York, New York

The stock market has been down for three years in a row, but David Krell and his colleagues are giving investors something to cheer about. They cracked the long-standing club that controlled the \$650-billion-a-year market in U.S. stock options. Thanks to ISE, trading equity options is now easier and cheaper. And ISE itself is a growth story: Barely two years after the company's launch, ISE traded its 200-millionth options contract.

THROW AWAY CONVENTION

Brian Scudamore
Founder and CEO

I-800-GOT-JUNK?

Vancouver, British Columbia
Back in 1989, Brian Scudamore was just out of high school when he started a company to remove all sorts of trash that the garbage collector wouldn't take. Since

then, he's developed a network of franchisees and embraced the Web (with an e-commerce system called JunkNet) to keep his fast-growing operation free of clutter. The result: a booming business, 80,000 truckloads of junk, and more proof that one man's garbage is another man's gold.

CHANGE THE RULES OF THE ROAD

Michael Welch
Managing director
Black Circles Ltd.
Peebles, United Kingdom

Michael Welch has proven to be a tireless innovator in the British tire business. A veteran of Kwik-Fit, one of Europe's leading tire retailers (it was once owned by Ford Motor Co.), Welch built his company around a collection of savvy e-commerce applications and marketing relationships with leading companies, including Sainsbury's, McDonald's, and Marks & Spencer. When employees from these companies need tires, Welch's company supplies them—fast, cheap, and easy. Black Circles claims that it's already in the black.

BE SURE TO SPREAD THE WORK AROUND

Robert Camastro
President and COO
Virtual-Agent Services
Schaumburg, Illinois

Toll-free call centers are a ubiquitous part of the "virtual" economy. But call centers themselves are almost always centralized operations, which creates lots of problems. Robert Camastro, former director of planning for worldwide reservations at United Airlines, has built a call-center company with a distributed workforce. Its six centers, all based in New Brunswick, Canada, shift calls among various locations—allowing each operation to be smaller and more personal. In just three years, Virtual-

Agent Services has grown to 500 employees and 20 high-profile clients.

THE BEST COMPANY IS AN OPEN COMPANY

Ron Gruner
President
Shareholder.com
Maynard, Massachusetts
Individual investors may never enjoy a level playing field with Wall Street insiders, but Ron Gruner's company does what it can to help. Shareholder.com uses a range of digital technologies to provide investors with access to earnings estimates, analyst calls, and other key sources of financial information.

ENGAGE WITH A NEW SET OF CUSTOMERS

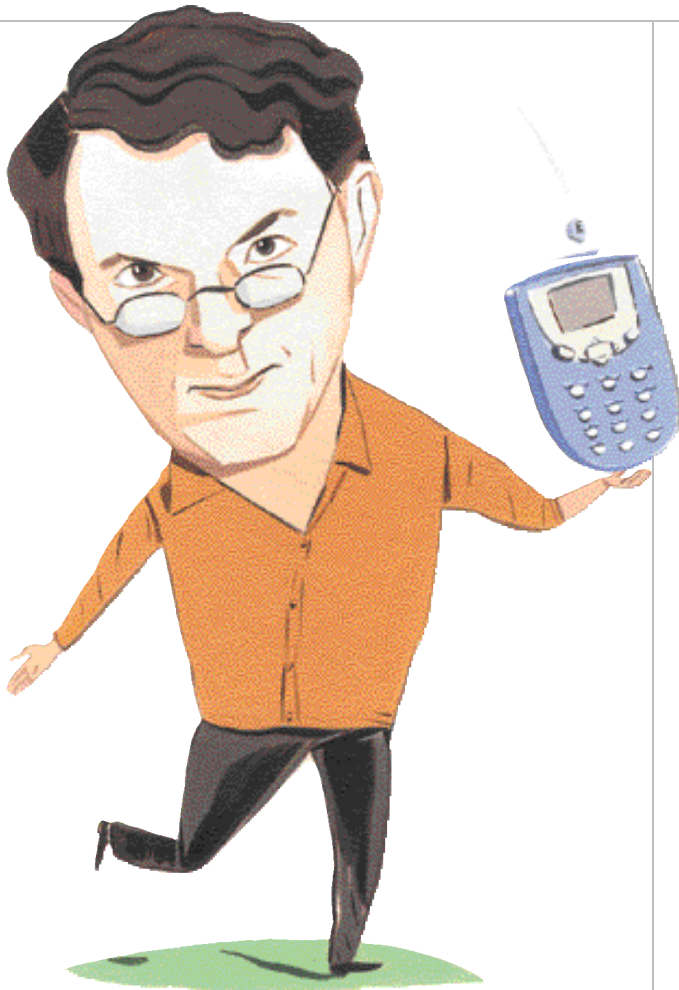
Mark Vadon, founder and CEO, Blue Nile Inc., Seattle, Washington

Jewelry has emerged as a bright spot of Internet retailing. The secret behind Blue Nile is its appeal to men. According to CEO Mark Vadon, the challenge was to "create a retail environment that would reassure men making one of the most confusing, stressful, emotionally wrought, and expensive purchases of their lives: the engagement ring." Blue Nile has certainly met the challenge. The company has annual sales of \$80 million, a 40% annual growth rate, and a solidly profitable business.



THE THRILL OF INVENTION

THE BREAKTHROUGHS OF THESE LEADERS AND TECHNOLOGISTS SET NEW STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE.



DEFY GRAVITY

Gary Lemke
President and CEO
ASV Inc.
Grand Rapids, Minnesota
Construction equipment can be destructive to its surroundings. That's why Gary Lemke and his colleagues introduced antigravity machines that, despite weighing up to 9,000 pounds, put less pressure on the ground than a child's sneakers. One model, the Posi-Track, has been used to lay sod in historic Lambeau Field and dispose of live bombs in Panama. Industry heavyweights dig what Lemke has done: ASV has attracted a major investment from Caterpillar.

UNCOVER YOUR HIDDEN ASSETS

Doug Fieldhouse
President and CEO
Vesta Corp.
Portland, Oregon
More than five years ago, Doug Fieldhouse took over a struggling provider of prepaid long-distance telephone service and discovered that the company was sitting on a killer app: a unique way to identify and virtually eliminate fraud in

"card not present" transactions over the phone and the Internet. Vesta Corp. is now a leading provider of stored-value sales, service, and infrastructure in the United States.

GET THE MESSAGE—INSTANTLY

Francis deSouza
CEO
IMlogic Inc.
Boston, Massachusetts
Instant messaging is not just for gossip-crazed teenagers; it's also an important application for business users. Microsoft veteran Francis deSouza has developed the technology that made IM systems more secure, more manageable—more businesslike. Early customers include Bear Stearns, Merrill Lynch, and Reuters.

TURN ORANGE INTO GREEN

Max and Elaine Appel
Cofounders
Orange Glo International
Greenwood Village, Colorado
This husband-and-wife team is cleaning up by helping customers clean their homes more naturally, with products based on orange oil. Orange Glo International generates annual sales of \$330 million.

PUSH THE RIGHT BUTTONS

David Levy, founder, chairman, and CTO, Digit Wireless LLC, Cambridge, Massachusetts

David Levy, an influential designer who shaped the ergonomics of the Apple PowerBook, understood sooner than most that the design of phones, laptops, and PDAs had to change radically. The problem: As these devices become smaller and smarter, they become almost impossible to use. It took eight years and 16 patents for Levy to develop the Fastap: a keypad that is as intuitive as a desktop interface, yet small enough to fit into one-third of the area of a credit card. Who says mobile technology has to be all thumbs?

PERFECT THE VISION THING

Mark Spitzer
CEO
The MicroOptical Corp.
Westwood, Massachusetts
Tom Cruise wore them in *Mission Impossible*: a pair of glasses that displayed top-secret information in the lenses. Initially developed for the military, the vision behind Mark Spitzer's advanced eyewear is to allow users of DVD players, PDAs, and other electronic devices to see the displays through their glasses.

MASTER THE NAME GAME

Jack Hermansen
CEO
Language Analysis Systems Inc.
Herndon, Virginia
Jack Hermansen and his colleagues at Language Analysis

GET TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Janet Burki, president and CEO, GE Imatron, San Francisco, California

What happens when you combine the technozeal of Silicon Valley with the Six Sigma discipline of a giant company? A medical breakthrough. Janet Burki and her 280-person operation, acquired by General Electric in December 2001, developed the world's fastest CT scanner. Launched six months ahead of schedule, the eSpeed system works 10 times faster than other systems and produces clear 3-D images of the beating heart. The best news? The procedure takes less than 15 minutes. Sometimes faster really is better.



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Systems have developed super-smart name-recognition software that sifts through massive amounts of data to find specific people—and that generates highly accurate matches. The company collected, classified, analyzed, and extracted statistical patterns from almost 1 billion names from every country in the world before launching its product in February 2001. Seven months later, after

the attack on the World Trade Center, Hermansen's software was the right technology at the right time.

HELP SMART PEOPLE LEARN

Matthew Pittinsky and Michael Chasen
Cofounders
Blackboard Inc.
Washington, DC
E-learning software is to the

world of software what Brazil is to the world economy: It's the technology of the future, and always will be. Blackboard aims to change all that. What began as a collaboration tool for students and faculty at Cornell University has grown into a popular and widely distributed platform for e-learning, with a user base of more than 5.4 million people worldwide.

DEVELOP AN ANTI-KILLER APP

Brian Lantz
Vice president and adviser
MapInfo Corp.
Troy, New York
Location-based intelligence (LBI) has become a key tool in fighting terrorism. Lantz, a veteran of the U.S. Secret Service, works with FEMA and the NYPD, among other clients.

THE VALUE OF VALUES

THESE LEADERS MADE THE RIGHT MOVES BY DOING THE RIGHT THING.

KEEP YOUR PROMISES

Susan Clampitt, executive director and general manager, WAMU 88.5 FM, Washington, DC

In 2001, WAMU eliminated its popular bluegrass programming in favor of more news and talk. But “we promised our bluegrass listeners that we would not abandon them,” says Susan Clampitt. So WAMU launched BluegrassCountry.org, a 24-7 Web-streaming service. The site is the fourth most popular Internet-only broadcasting site in the world.



GIVE POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Charles Costello
Director, The Democracy Program
The Carter Center
Atlanta, Georgia

Jimmy Carter won the Nobel Peace Prize in large part for the unglamorous but crucial work of the Carter Center. Charles Costello has run the center's democracy-building operation since 1998.

CUT FROM A DIFFERENT CLOTH

Heidi McCloskey
Global director of sustainability
Nike Apparel
Beaverton, Oregon

Nike loves to win, but its growth doesn't always win over legions of socially conscious fans. Heidi McCloskey wants to make Nike's success more sustainable by persuading apparel suppliers to use organic cotton. Nike's organic-cotton usage is projected to reach 3 million pounds in 2003, up from 1 million pounds in 2001.

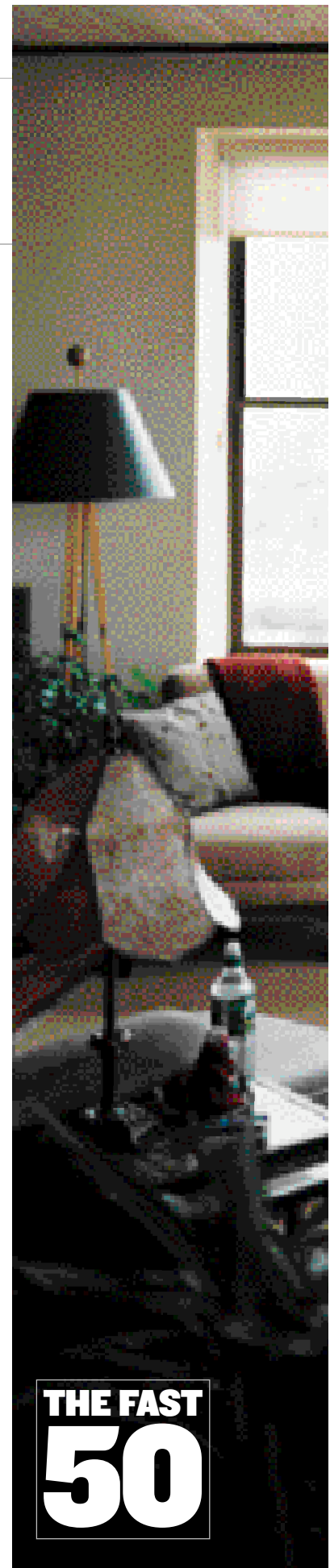
CHARGE WHAT PEOPLE CAN BEAR

David Green
Executive director
Project Impact Inc.
Onstead, Michigan

How do you deliver medical supplies and devices to people in desperate need but so desperately poor that they can't afford them? David Green set up Aurolab, a factory in India that makes low-cost sutures, eyeglasses, and lenses. Soon to follow: solar-powered hearing aids.

MAKE THE NET WORK

The Tomoye team
Tomoye Corp.
Ottawa, Canada
John Mertl's software is helping "communities of practice" share ideas within the Smithsonian Institute, the World Bank—even the U.S. Department of Defense. In 2002, his company was asked by the United Nations to help rebuild Afghanistan and promote AIDS awareness in Africa.



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MAKE A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Kathleen Dore, president, IFC Companies, Jericho, New York

At Bravo, Kathleen Dore wrote one of TV's great turnaround stories. Now comes the sequel. She's established IFC Companies (parent of the Independent Film Channel) as the leading indie brand. Among its hits: *Boys Don't Cry* and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. Says Dore: "What Nike is to athletic shoes, I want IFC to be to independent films."

GIVE GIRLS A HEAD START

Rachel Muir
Founder and executive director
Girlstart
Austin, Texas

Picture a camp full of kids building Web pages and programming robots. You probably see a bunch of boys. That's why Rachel Muir started the first technology center for girls in Texas.

GIVE CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

John Hatch
Founder and director of research
FINCA International Inc.
Washington, DC

John Hatch has devoted his life to waging a war on poverty. His most potent weapon? Village banks that are managed by and for local communities. FINCA (Foundation for International Community Assistance) oversees a network of 24 country programs and 16,000 village banks that have worked with more than 600,000 families. Last year, FINCA granted loans worth \$100 million.

MAKE LEARNING MEMORABLE

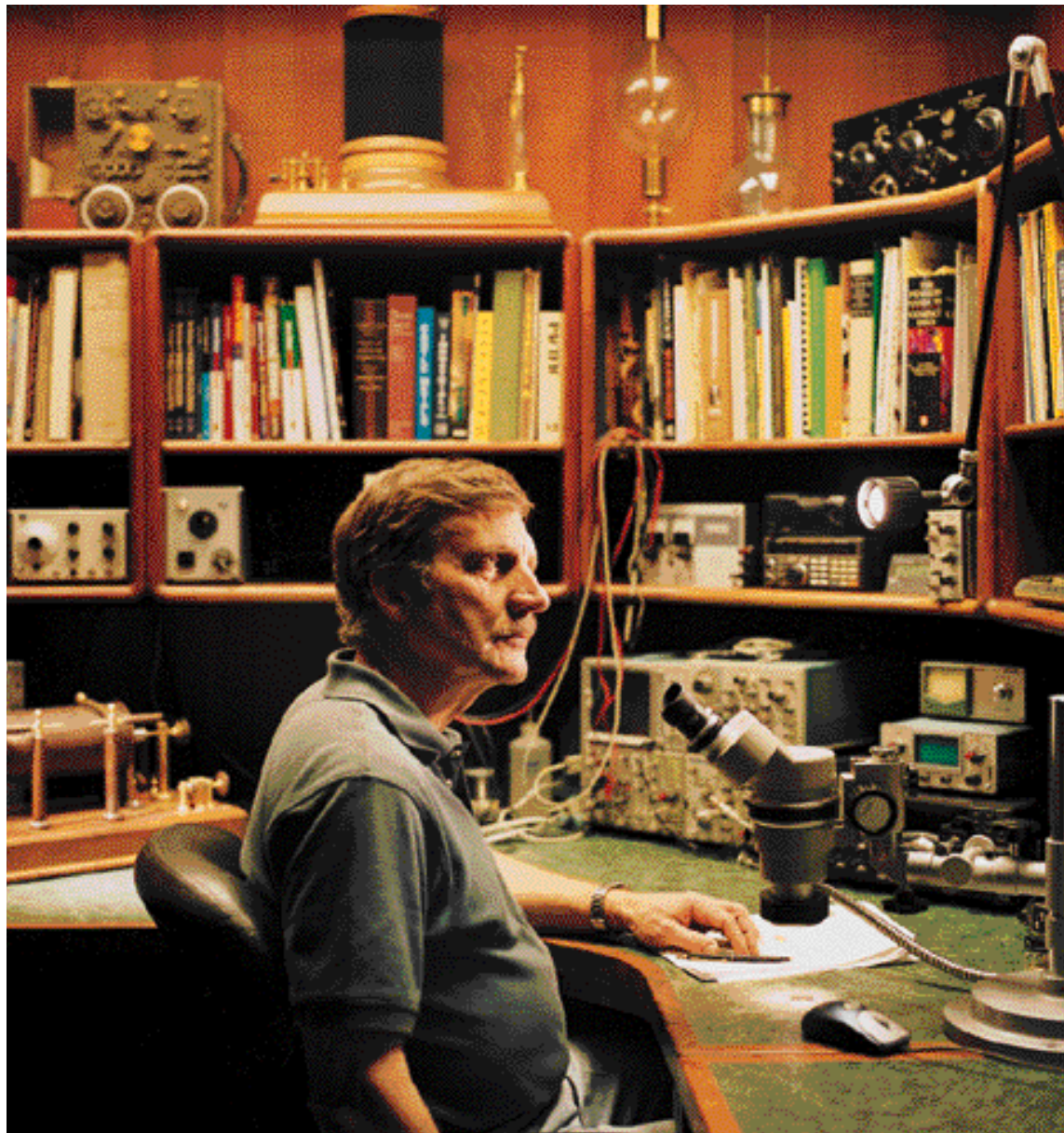
Bill Nelson
CEO
Little Planet Learning
Nashville, Tennessee

After 25 years of making movies in Hollywood, Bill Nelson moved to Nashville to create an edutainment-based company to teach kids how to read. Seven years later, students in more than 10,000 schools have used Little Planet programs—and business is catching on as well: It's using the company's technology to improve training. Next up: a deal with the U.S. Department of Education to teach English to 300 million teenagers in China.

LIGHT THE WAY

Anne Pasternak
Executive director
Creative Time Inc.
New York, New York

Anne Pasternak's group commissions provocative public-arts projects to challenge and uplift the community. Few projects were as uplifting as the group's "Tribute in Light," a breathtaking display of two beams of light that rose near ground zero to commemorate the six-month anniversary of the attacks.



THE REV

WHERE MOST COMPANIES SAW P

KEEP ON TICKING

Alan Bauer
 Direct group president
 Progressive Casualty Insurance Co.
 Mayfield Village, Ohio
 Insurance companies are famous for fostering confusion among customers. Progressive Casualty Insurance has always been an exception. Alan Bauer's innovation is a case in point. The problem: how to help customers compare prices on auto insurance. The answer: a Web-based "rate ticker" similar to the scrolling stock prices on CNBC. In real time, the ticker scrolls Progressive's rate compared with those of its rivals, even when Progressive's is most expensive. Bauer's company doesn't always win the business, but it wins points for honesty.

PHONE HOME

Bennett Liss
 Founder
 PACE
 Los Angeles, California
 Bennett Liss arrived at parent-teacher night only to find that he should have been there two nights earlier. So he started PACE. Its technology lets principals record, schedule, broadcast, and track a personalized voice message to thousands of parents in an instant. More than 175,000 parents are part of the system.

THINK FAST—ACT FASTER

The Inova health-care team
 Inova Health System
 Springfield, Virginia
 Inova Fairfax Hospital was ground zero for the anthrax crisis. When two postal workers entered the emergency room, physicians suspected anthrax. The challenge was to save them both and to develop an effective new protocol for the little-seen disease. The Inova team made groundbreaking contributions to the treatment protocol by adding clarity to screening guidelines, demonstrating the effectiveness of certain antibiotics, identifying potential complications—and, most important, successfully treating both patients.

BUILD A BETTER MOUSE

Gary Gordon, Agilent Labs fellow, Agilent Technologies, Campbell, California

Gary Gordon hated his mouse. It got dirty. It got stuck. So he built a better one—creating the sensor behind the first optical mouse. Now all optical mice use Agilent's innovation, making the mechanical mouse seem more like an endangered species. This past December, Agilent announced that it had shipped its 100 millionth optical-mouse sensor since the release of its first one in 1999.

What's Gordon working on now? A "flying mouse" that can sense where a gestural controller is pointing.

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WARDS OF SOLVING PROBLEMS

EMS, THESE INNOVATORS SAW OPPORTUNITIES—AND CREATED SOLUTIONS.

CREATE A RESOUNDING DIFFERENCE

Robert Rabiner
Cofounder, president, and CEO
OmniSonics Medical
Technologies Inc.
Wilmington, Massachusetts
Scientists were skeptical that low-power acoustic energy could break up blood clots—until Robert Rabiner and the team at OmniSonics showed otherwise. They created a device that used low-power acoustic energy to turn blood clots into harmless particles, restoring blood flow and saving lives. The World Economic Forum recognized Rabiner as a “Tech Pioneer” of 2003 for his radical and transformational technology.

DON'T FIGHT CITY HALL, INFORM IT

Michael Meotti
President
Connecticut Policy and Economic Council
Hartford, Connecticut
Michael Meotti developed the City Scan project, which puts handheld computers, GPS systems, and digital cameras in the hands of citizens to document street-level conditions that need to be fixed by local government. Citizens help inventory everything from potholes to graffiti and then draft a “Contract for Results” with city officials.

CHANGE THE SOCIAL FABRIC

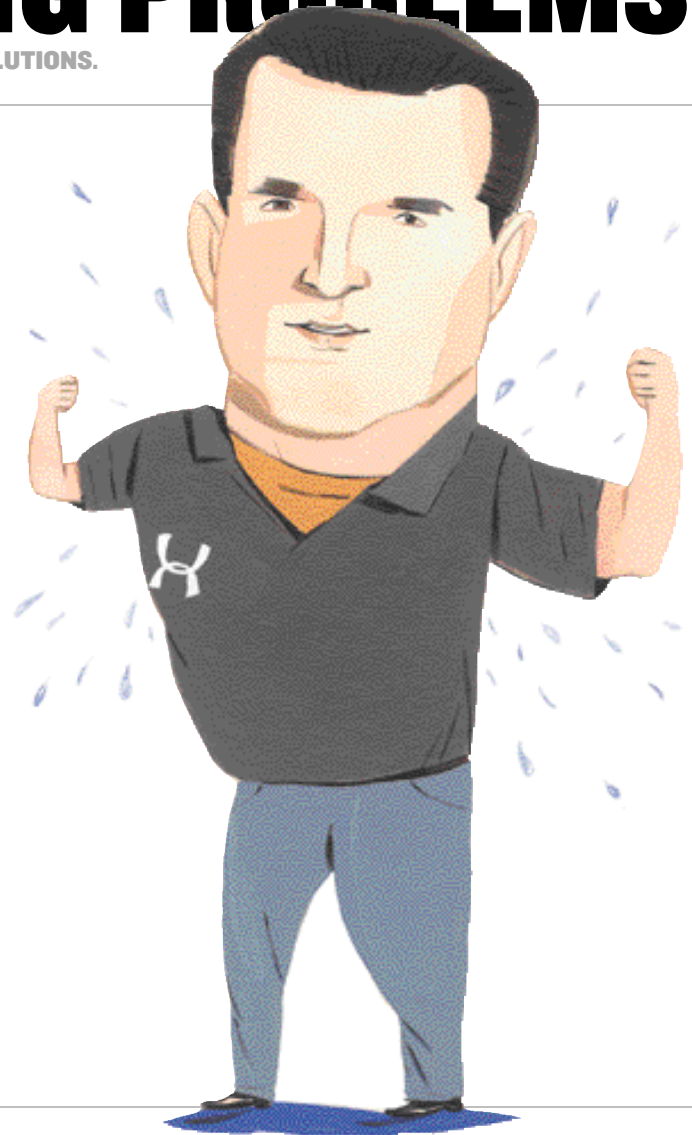
Craig Ruben
CEO
Hi-Tex Inc.
West Bloomfield, Michigan
Inspired by a display of disposable diapers at a local drugstore, Craig Ruben spent years developing Crypton Super Fabric, a stain-resistant, waterproof, and decorative upholstery fabric that could withstand the rigors of heavy public use. Today, Crypton is one of the most sought-after fabric brands in health care and hospitality. Some 20 million yards have been installed in less than 10 years—from Buckingham Palace to McDonald's.

BE A SECURITY BLANKET

George Kurtz
CEO
Foundstone Inc.
Mission Viejo, California
It is a mission-critical problem: anticipating IT security attacks before they happen. Foundstone's experts train officials at the National Security Agency, Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, U.S. Secret Service, FBI, Air Force Office of Special Investigations, and all four branches of the U.S. military.

GIVE PEACE A CHANCE

Stef Wertheimer
Chairman, board of directors
ISCAR Ltd.
Tefen, Israel
Is there a tougher problem than the Arab-Israeli conflict? Stef Wertheimer is a 74-year-old entrepreneur who created a set of industrial parks in Israel, all with an integrated Israeli and Palestinian workforce, to promote export businesses, create jobs, and reduce gaps in living standards. According to Wertheimer, firms located in the parks now generate business worth \$2 billion a year—10% of Israel's industrial exports.



DON'T SWEAT THE COMPETITION

Kevin Plank, founder and president, Under Armour Performance Apparel, Baltimore, Maryland

As a captain of the 1995 Maryland Terrapins football team, Kevin Plank was constantly swapping his sweat-soaked T-shirt for a dry one. That was the problem that inspired Under Armour: sports apparel that doesn't retain moisture. For 2003, Plank sees sales of \$100 million. Under Armour is an official supplier to Major League Baseball, the National Hockey League, 30 NFL teams, and all but 9 of the 117 Division IA college-football programs. His secret? “As an athlete who had developed a product for athletes, I had an in.”

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UNLEASH YOUR COMMITMENT

Stephanie Volo, president, Planet Dog, Portland, Maine

Man's best friend has a new best friend. This fast-growing nonprofit produces a catalog and an online store for dog lovers. Planet Dog features hundreds of natural and ecofriendly products, such as collars and leashes made of hemp and water bowls made of recycled plastic. Rabid sales have attracted lucrative partnership offers from big-time retailers (and, no doubt, some jealousy from the once-famous Pets.com sock puppet). A portion of the company's profits fund Planet Dog Philanthropy.

BLEND STYLE WITH SUBSTANCE

Brett Lovelady
President

Astro Studios Inc.
San Francisco, California

Brett Lovelady and his colleagues design gorgeous products, but their toughest job is to design a process of collaboration between brands and business partners. Designing the Nike Triax sports watch meant working with Seiko. Designing the iPAQ PDA for Compaq meant working with Microsoft. The Triax generated \$200 million in sales for Nike, and Compaq sold more than 2 million iPAQs.

LET THE ADVERGAMES BEGIN

Peter Mack
President and founder
Templar Studios LLC
New York, New York

When the old-style Lego brand needed a way to showcase its new-wave Bionicle action figures, it turned to Peter Mack and his colleagues. Their strategy? An online game that would both capture the imagination of players and introduce the product. *Mata Nui* did just that, attracting more than 500,000 visitors a month, spurring a crop of fan sites, and catapulting Bionicle to a leadership position in the toy market.

SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS

Dan Hammond
Chairman, president, and CEO
Publishing Group of America
Franklin, Tennessee

The American media is notoriously bicoastal and famously obsessed with bad news, all of which gave Dan Hammond an idea: Why not create a weekly supplement for newspapers that would focus on the good news of life in America's small towns? He launched *American Profile* in April 2000. Today, it is distributed in more than 812 newspapers with a circulation of 4.2 million.

LIVE AMONG THE NATIVES

Robbie Blinkoff
Principal anthropologist officer
and managing partner
Context-Based Research Group
Baltimore, Maryland

On a break from the annual convention of the Society for Applied Anthropology, a few attendees lamented the lack of job opportu-

nities for anthropologists. Then came the epiphany: Launch a network of cultural insiders to create a research product that could be sold to business. Today, the Anthrojob network taps into more than 3,500 anthropologists worldwide who apply the tools of cultural ethnography to a growing list of blue-chip clients such as Fisher-Price, Kodak, Microsoft, and Procter & Gamble.

BE A BAD GIRL

Cameron Tuttle
Bad Girl #1
Bad Girl Swirl Inc.
San Francisco, California
What exactly is a bad girl? It's a girl at her uncensored best, says Cameron Tuttle: "the smart, sexy, confident chick she secretly wants to be." A bad girl is also the basis of a booming business. Tuttle's first book was *The Bad Girl's Guide to the Open Road*. *The Bad Girl's Guide to the Party Life* and *The Bad Girl's Guide to Getting What You Want* soon followed, along with an online community, BadGirlSwirl.com. This naughty little brand has grossed more than \$8 million in revenue, showing just how good it is to be bad.

BUILD A BRAND FOR THE BRAIN

Richard Tait
Grand pooh-bah
Cranium
Seattle, Washington
When Richard Tait and his partner started Cranium in 1998, the two Microsoft alums had a simple goal: to lighten and enlighten people's lives by building a "brand for the brain." Their flagship product is the Cranium board game—and their loyal fans are called Craniacs. More than 1 million sets have been sold, and Cranium won the prestigious Toy Industry Association award for "Game of the Year" in 2001. In 2002, Cranium became a worldwide phenomenon with local versions for Australia, France, Germany, and the UK.

MAKE THE MOVIE THE STAR

Bruce Bildsten, creative director, Fallon Worldwide, Minneapolis, Minnesota

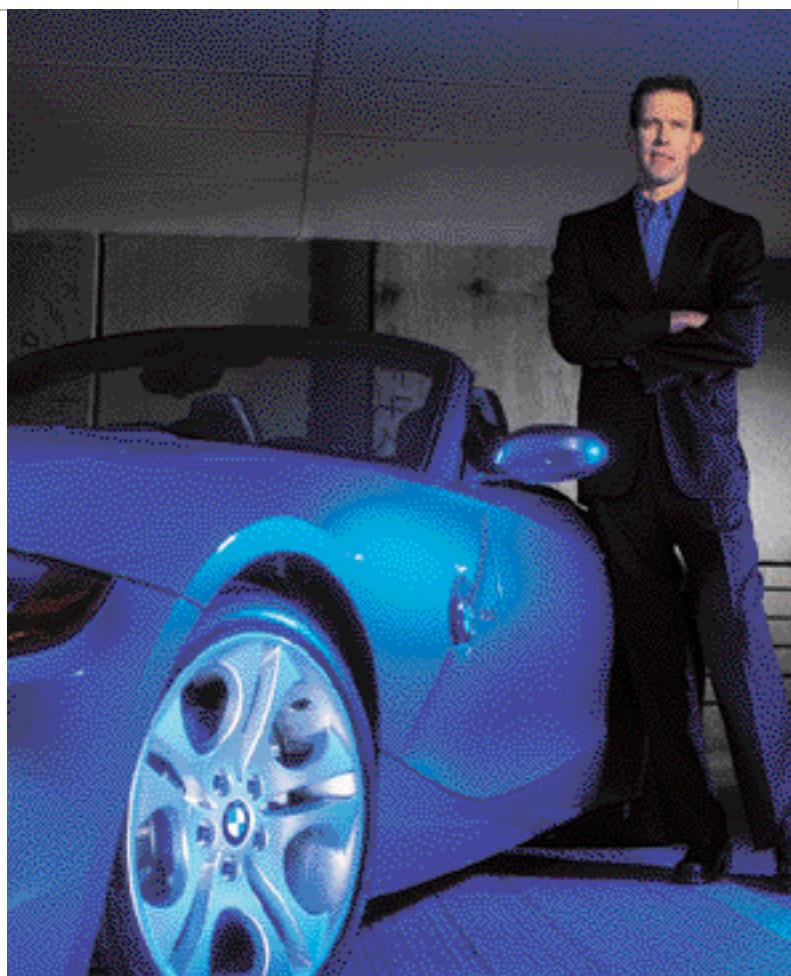
The best advertising is as entertaining as a Hollywood movie. That's why Bruce Bildsten and his colleagues went Hollywood again. In October 2002, Fallon launched the second installment of *The Hire*, an Internet film series for BMW of North America. The three eight-minute films were directed by big-name Hollywood talent and distributed online. More than 20 million people have viewed the films, generating saturation media coverage and widespread critical acclaim.

TAKE SPORTS TO THE EXTREME

Bill Carter
President
Fuse Integrated Sports Marketing
Burlington, Vermont
America has become a wide world of sports, and Bill Carter's firm leverages the popular fascination with athletics—especially, these days, with extreme sports—to give products the thrill of victory. Clients include Gillette Right Guard Xtreme, Mountain Dew, even Ford and Motorola.

GET A GOOD RAP

Devin Lazerine
Editor in chief
Rap-Up
Calabasas, California
Music is a young person's game—and apparently so, too, is media about music that young people like. Lazerine is the 19-year-old founder of a nationwide hip-hop and R&B magazine that started in July 2001 and is distributed by Time Warner. Companion projects include a television show, a Web site, and a nonprofit group that is devoted to getting teens involved in the media.



THE BUSINESS OF CULTURE

THE MOST EXCITING IDEAS AND COMPANIES ARE ABOUT STYLE AND SUBSTANCE, FASHION AND FUNCTIONALITY.