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## 20-Year-Old Combines Sales, Giving

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Mike Mutz is a college kid who makes T-shirts - not exactly the profile that springs to mind when you think of entrepreneurs in high-tech fields.

At 20 years old, Mutz is the youngest face at Blue Sky West and probably has the least business experience, though it was his life experience as a devout Christian doing mission work that ultimately led him here.



*ERNST PETERS / THE LEDGER*

At 20 years old, Mike Mutz is the youngest face at Blue Sky West.

Mutz's fledgling company, Design the Difference, models itself after online apparel firms that have found success selling hip T-shirts to college students and young adults. But Design aims to set itself apart with philanthropy, contributing 10 percent of each sale to help orphans and build orphanages in impoverished parts of the globe.

"I've done a lot of mission work. I've been to Africa four times, and I went down to Haiti two months after the earthquake. From my travels, I became very aware of the poverty in the rest of the world," said Mutz, a senior at Southeastern double-majoring in interdisciplinary studies and business management.

He originally went to college intent on working for a nonprofit or starting his own. A brainstorming session with friends, however, yielded the idea for Design the Difference.

"The campus pastor at Southeastern just kind of spurred me on and inspired me to not think that I had to wait until I was 30 or 40 to do something in the world, that I could step out and do something and make a difference right now and enjoy work in helping people, which is what I wanted to do while still making a living for myself,"

Mutz said.

Design the Difference is very much a new business, having just launched its website ([www.designthedifference.com](http://www.designthedifference.com)) in June, with roughly 100 shirts sold thus far. Artists submit designs that are voted on by website visitors, who decide which ones are made into shirts. Designs are printed on high-quality T-shirts and sell for \$18 apiece, comparable to those offered by popular online retailers, such as Threadless.

Mutz said he also was inspired by firms such as Orlando-based Loveless Apparel and California-based TOMS Shoes, both of which make charity a prominent part of their business. To that end, Design has already partnered with missionary groups doing work in Haiti and Zambia.

But as a business, Design needs serious help from the incubator, especially with creating an effective marketing plan and growing its customer base beyond friends and Facebook fans. It will be a heady task for a business made up of just two people (Mutz is assisted by Gracey Hulbert, a public relations and journalism major at Southeastern) who are trying to finish college.

But Mutz, who grew up in Lakeland the son of Lakeland Automall owner Bill Mutz, has plenty of motivation to make Design succeed, including the fact he self-funded the venture with more than \$15,000 in savings.

"It's a little unnerving," he says. "It definitely can be a profitable business if you do it right and market ... While we're here, I'd say we want to develop a strong business that is scalable."

But ultimately, Design the Difference will have to stand on its own, Mutz says.

"Hopefully in a year, we're doing well enough we won't have to be here anymore."

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