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—Justin Cisewski (right) of ColorWare



STYLE **GADGETS** BODY WHEELS CULTURE

Color Coders

A small Minnesota company is changing the face of the hi-tech world—one paint job at a time

You might think that Justin Cisewski wouldn't have much to teach you about style. The 28-year-old still lives in his small hometown of Winona, Minnesota (two hours southeast of Minneapolis); he speaks with the down-home accent that made the movie *Fargo* an instant classic; and, if you were to ask, he wouldn't be able to tell you the label of the shirt on his back. But as CEO of ColorWare Inc., Cisewski has launched a polychromatic assault on the black, white, and beige world of consumer electronics by painting laptops, gaming consoles, and iPods for people who want their gear to stand out in the crowd. 

HENRY BLACKHAME, STYLING; JAMIE MOYER, GROOMING; LUCY DEVLIN, HAIR; FOR CLOUTIERAGENCY.COM; PROP STYLING: CHARLOTTE MALLOP

"Computers used to be about utility. Now they're fashion statements," Cisewski says. "We're giving people a choice."

Cisewski was inspired to start ColorWare in 1999, when he saw his brother Jason attempt to spice up his cell phone. Jason, who operated a custom paint shop at the time, was spray-painting his handset midnight blue. "I told him, 'You can just buy a cover for that,'" says Cisewski, who was working in the information technology department at an industrial supply company. "But then it hit me: If he can spray-paint his phone, why can't we paint other electronics too?"

So the brothers got to work. They used paint mixing and application techniques developed in automotive and plastics manufacturing to concoct a polymer-based coating that would be glossy, scratch-resistant, and seamless. The results are flawless: The new products the company paints for resale look like they shipped from the factory that way, in one of the ColorWare standard shades (there are 22) or custom colors (which cost an extra \$99). (All products ColorWare sells are covered under warranty.)

Currently ColorWare peddles two iPods (iPod Mini and iPod Photo), four Mac computers (two laptops and two desktops), and GameCube, PlayStation 2, and Xbox consoles. (The company will also paint any of these products that you already own.) In addition, the company sells ColorWare-branded PC laptops (pictured on page 65), and by 2006 it'll be selling its own headphones and plasma-screen TVs.

"ColorWare seems to have hit the market at just the right time," says Josh Rubin, creator and editor of the design Web site Cool Hunting (coolhunting.com).

"I've seen some ColorWare colors in fall fashion shows, and they're going to stay hot."

—Leatrice Eiseman of Pantone Color Institute

.com). Now that everyone has a cell phone, laptop, and iPod, Rubin says, more people are demanding that their gear express their individuality.

The price of style? You'll pay \$265 for a 4 GB iPod Mini (\$66 above the suggested retail cost) and \$2,094 for

BEFORE AFTER



a 12-inch 60 GB PowerBook (\$595 more). Special jobs—such as the two PowerBooks ordered by Monster Cable CEO Noel Lee, one each to match the color and finish of his yellow Lamborghini and red Ferrari—go for as much as \$1,000 more than retail.

The brothers' color choices aren't based on science: Once a year, "we just look at books of all that 'orange is the new pink' crap and decide what we think is cool," Cisewski says. And according to Leatrice Eiseman, director of the Pantone Color Institute—which tracks trends to help fashion and industrial designers stay ahead of the curve—the ColorWare catalog is on target. "I saw a number of the colors in the fall fashion shows," she says, pointing to the company's dark blue and orange hues, "and they're going to stay hot for a while." Customers seem to like the selection, too: The company's sales have jumped almost 2,500 percent in the past two years.

The Cisewskis are elated by the response, but can't quite explain how a painter and an IT guy ended up on the vanguard of hi-tech fashion. However, when Justin steps outside his office and gazes past the bulldozers working to quadruple the size of the ColorWare physical plant, he's certain what color he wants to see in coming seasons: "lots of green." —MICHAEL JOSEPH GROSS

Products available at colorwarepc.com.

Hues for You

For those who find choosing tints terrifying, we asked Leatrice Eiseman of Pantone Color Institute to pick her top six (three hip and three classic) Pantone shades. And what do you know? ColorWare offers many near-matches for them. See the ColorWare Web site to compare for yourself.

TRENDSETTER

AMERICAN BEAUTY

PANTONE® 19-1759
C = 0 M = 100
Y = 100 K = 25

GLAZED GINGER

PANTONE® 18-1154
C = 0 M = 50
Y = 100 K = 27

MOROCCAN BLUE

PANTONE® 15-4241
C = 100 M = 50
Y = 20 K = 40

SAFE BET

KHAKI GREEN

PANTONE® 5845 C
C = 0 M = 1
Y = 47 K = 30

NAVY

PANTONE® S 217-1
C = 100 M = 40
Y = 0 K = 40

SILVER

PANTONE® 8400 C