

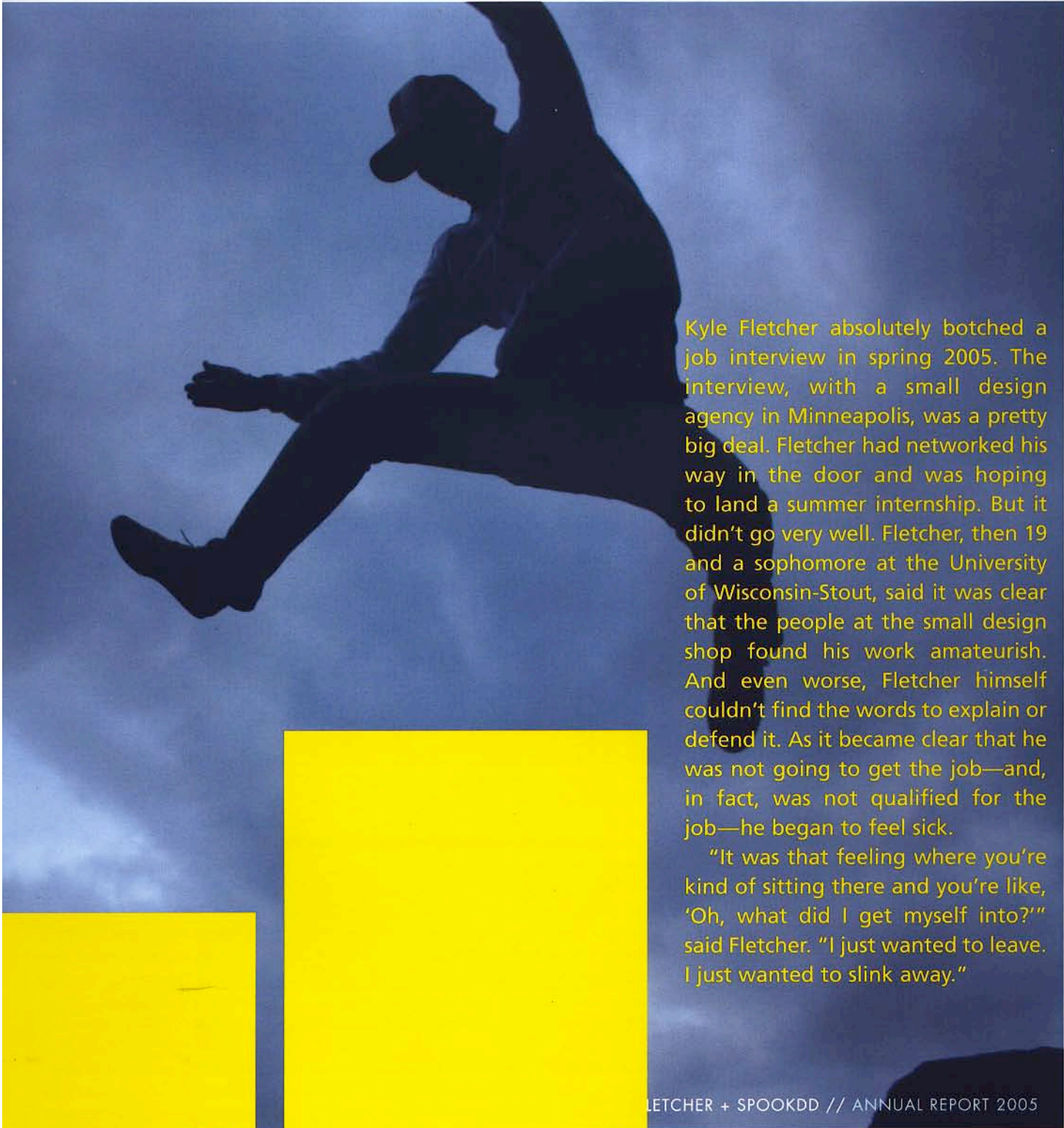
# design student as business + man

(KYLE FLETCHER DOES NOT DO IT FOR THE GRADE)

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2005



Kyle Fletcher absolutely botched a job interview in spring 2005. The interview, with a small design agency in Minneapolis, was a pretty big deal. Fletcher had networked his way in the door and was hoping to land a summer internship. But it didn't go very well. Fletcher, then 19 and a sophomore at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, said it was clear that the people at the small design shop found his work amateurish. And even worse, Fletcher himself couldn't find the words to explain or defend it. As it became clear that he was not going to get the job—and, in fact, was not qualified for the job—he began to feel sick.

"It was that feeling where you're kind of sitting there and you're like, 'Oh, what did I get myself into?'" said Fletcher. "I just wanted to leave. I just wanted to slink away."

FLETCHER + SPOOKDD // ANNUAL REPORT 2005

2006

2007

By Keith O'Brien



## Determined not to feel that way again,

Fletcher, a graphic design major and business minor, returned to school in fall 2005, determined to work harder. "Sure, it was possible," he said, "to glide through and graduate." But if he wanted to succeed in the design world, he realized he was going to have to focus. He was going to have to churn out quality work—not for the grade but for the work itself. And he was going to have to learn how to promote himself. He was going to have to be more of a businessman.

And so, about a year after his botched job interview, Fletcher sat down on a rickety, sub-par office chair and penned a short letter to his shareholders (he doesn't have any) to update them about the status of his design career (he barely has one).

It was the first-ever Kyle Fletcher Annual Report. "Dear shareholders," it began. Fletcher wanted people to know that the previous year had been a big one for him. "I MADE MONEY for the first time in existence," he wrote. They were small profits, he conceded. But profits nonetheless. He was freelancing, and he was optimistic about the future. Among his many hopes, he wrote, he sought to fulfill one in particular: He hoped to be sitting in a better office chair one day soon—maybe even an Aeron chair by Herman Miller, the chair of all chairs, as far as he's concerned. Then, signing off, he drew a heart and scrawled his name.

Fletcher, now 21 and a senior scheduled to graduate in December, certainly is not the first design student to write an annual report about himself. Design students forced to write annual reports in class often look for ways to be different or quirky, and that sometimes includes making up entire companies that do not exist. But Fletcher's annual report, which he created in an informational-design course, is significant for at least one reason: It marks a turning point for the man born in Champlin, Minn., a pivotal moment somewhere between the failures of the past and the success that Fletcher's professors believe he'll find after graduation. They say Fletcher—who designs, writes his own copy, and studies business preparing for the day when he'll have a company of his own—is going places.

"You can tell that some students get into graphic design because they can get a better job than fine arts graduates," said Nagesh Shinde, an assistant professor of graphic design at UW-Stout and the professor who taught Fletcher's informational-design class. "He's not one of those. He really enjoys what he's doing."

The annual report was certainly evidence of that enjoyment, but it didn't exactly start out that way. When Shinde first assigned the class the task of producing an annual report, Fletcher wasn't too thrilled. The project, for starters, was huge. They had to create a report with at least five graphs and charts, using their own photography and copywriting. They were expected to display the information well and bring a new perspective to the report. And yet, it was an annual report, so certain standard elements—a client page, a financial section—were required. "It was just kind of cut and dried," Fletcher said. He briefly considered doing his report on a Ping-Pong paddle company or on Nike, and then he hit on a better company to profile: himself.

"Kyle was excited," Shinde said. "He said, 'I don't want to do this. I want to do an annual report for myself.' His idea was, 'I'm going to use this for a self-promotion piece. I'm going to show this to companies: Invest in me; Kyle is a company.'" Early on, the idea didn't exactly take off. Initial drafts lacked a cohesive narrative. Fletcher said the report was beginning to look too much like one big collage of his work or some sort of biography. Shinde stressed the importance of the report having a narrative and a cohesive message. Fletcher, doodling one night shortly thereafter, drew a picture of a desk chair, and the narrative for the report was born.

"Designers spend a lot of time in chairs," he wrote on page two of the annual report. He then proceeded to sketch the chairs he has sat in over the years, giving each a ridiculous, yet fitting, name. And a timeline of Fletcher's oh-so-brief career emerged. There was Plastic Fawn (1996–2000), where Fletcher drew "some disproportionate crazy ass shit" in middle school, and Cantilever Sapling (2000–03), "a noble workhorse." There was Disagreeable Sacrifice (2005–06), "an awkward excuse for back support," and Flavorless Juxtaposition (2003–06), a chair so bad that he'd rather stand. And then there was his current office chair, Artificial Mitigation Excalibur (2002–06), "a pseudo leather masterpiece."

The chairs, hand-drawn and sprinkled into a piece built with Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop, became a symbol of both where Fletcher was coming from and where he was going. He used them throughout the annual report. They became virtual logos—icons that tied everything together both visually and philosophically—and Fletcher kept his designs as colloquial as his copy. He created a production assistant for himself, SpookDD (pronounced "Spook Double-D"), an illustrated skeletal character formed by folding two Ds together. He included photos of bar graphs, showing income and expenses, painted on his bare chest. He even interviewed friends and family in order to create a page about the executive. The project got an A. Even better, real-world executives liked it. The attempt at self-promotion had paid off.

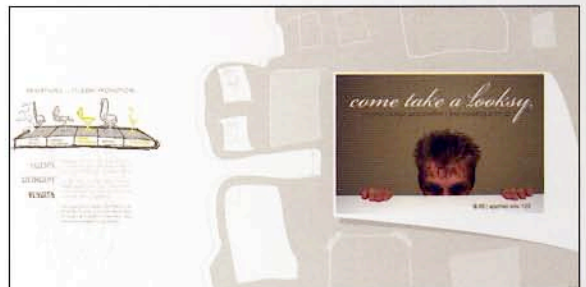
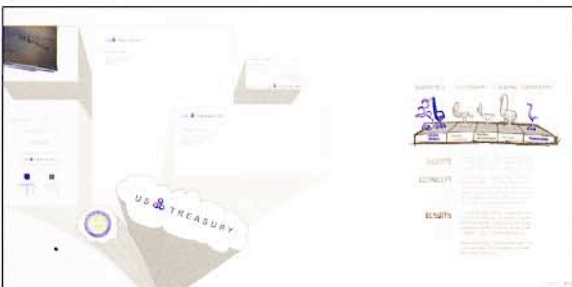
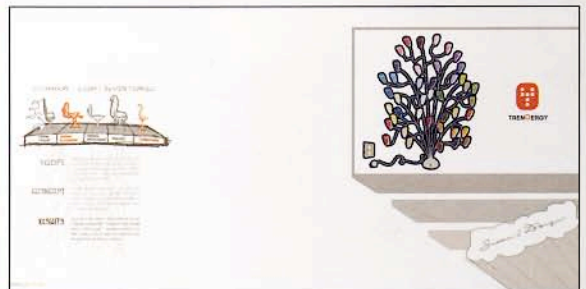
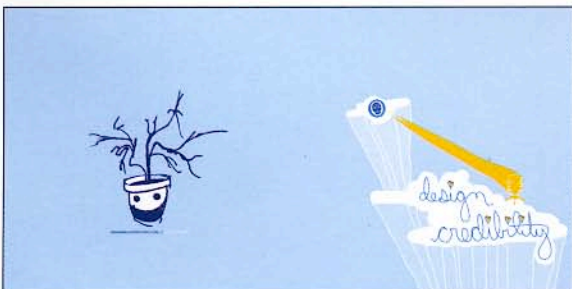
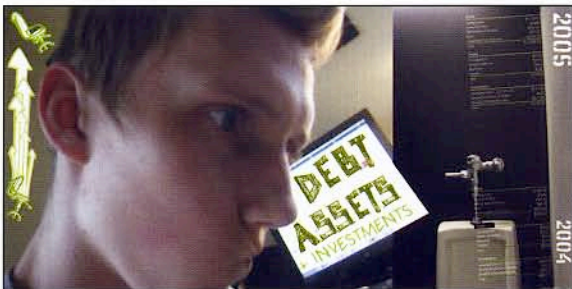
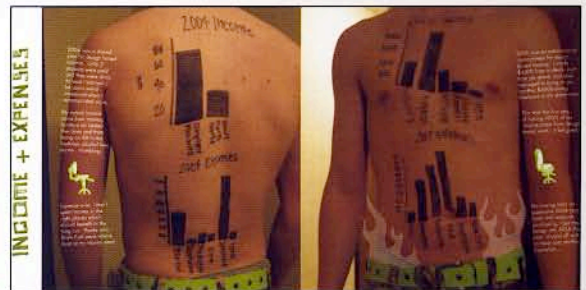
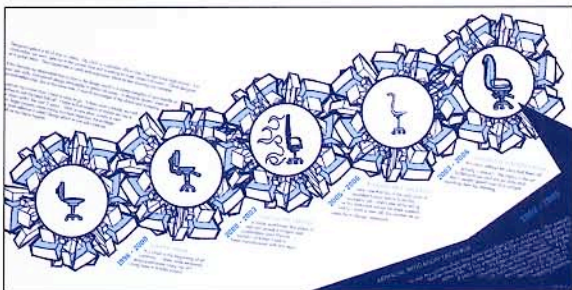


"I've seen that before," Luis Fitch, principal and co-founder of UNO Hispanic Branding, said about the idea of doing an annual report on oneself. "It's a concept that's not new for me. It was just that [Fletcher's] was nicely and experimentally done, and it reflected the kind of attitude I was looking for in a designer at the time."

In part because of what he saw in the report, Fitch hired Fletcher to work for him last fall. Fletcher, who'll be looking for full-time employment after graduation later this year, hopes other executives will like what they see as well. Whether he likes it or not, Fletcher is still sitting on Artificial Mitigation Excalibur, that rickety, pseudo leather chair. "I think it's on its last legs now," he said. "It's starting to make some creaks that I'm not trusting." But for now, he's stuck with the chair, creaks and all—at least until he can afford to buy one of those fine Herman Miller models. "I like them a lot," he said. "But damn, they're expensive." ■ CMYK

**Annual Report:**

Select spreads from Kyle Fletcher's annual report. Photos, design, text: Kyle Fletcher



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