

# FAST COMPANY

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2011

## THE UNITED STATES OF DESIGN

WHY AMERICAN BUSINESSES LIKE **APPLE AND NIKE** ARE THRIVING  
BY LINDA TISCHLER

**30** DESIGN-DRIVEN COMPANIES

**50** MOST INFLUENTIAL DESIGNERS



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# SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

Experts imagine future prospects for two once-prosperous brands

**Our panel:**



**REBOOT CEO:** Mark Thomann, CEO of River West Brands



**BRAND CONSULTANT:** Josh Feldmeth, CEO of Interbrand New York



**AD MAN:** Huw Griffith, CEO of M&C Saatchi North America

★ PANELIST'S SUCCESS PREDICTION



## STUDEBAKER

Founded in 1852, it began making gasoline cars in 1904 and ceased production in 1966.

THOMANN

"It has a memorable name but wasn't a memorable car, so you're free to go in a totally new direction—like making an **electric car**. The iconic name could give an early-stage car company a much-needed marketing boost. People think Studebaker is a piece of history and might not clamor for its return. But they'd certainly be intrigued to see it again."

★★★★☆

FELDMETH

"It doesn't have to be a car company. Studebaker is about classic style, and where do I need more classic style? Maybe with my **luggage and travel accessories**. The closer you get to transportation, the more relevant the brand is. Just remember: Studebaker may be classic, but it was also a failure. It's one click away from the Edsel. So you'd have to work hard to convince people it can be strong again."

★★★★☆

GRIFFITH

"People buy cars that project the image they want, but millions of people are driving the same car. So offer one premium product that harks back to the golden era of driving: a **handmade, made-to-order 1953 Studebaker Commander Starliner**, with all-new engineering. It's luxury and style. We look to romanticize the '50s, the American diner, James Dean, mobility, and freedom on the road."

★★★★☆



## GEOCITIES

In 1994, it was one of the first free sites to build and host a website. Discontinued by Yahoo in 2009.

"There are some brands that are **better off dead**, and this is one of them. Sure, it may not have many negatives, but it doesn't have many positives either. And the name isn't strong enough to build on. It's time to let this one go."

☆☆☆☆☆

"There are brands that people love and brands that just help people do things. Geocities was the latter, and its original function is outdated. So much of what we're doing now is about checking in—the intersection of place and community. But there's opportunity: Facebook and Foursquare are broad, not focused, and Geocities originally organized websites by interests. So it could be a niche site, like one that **catalogs craft beers across the country**."

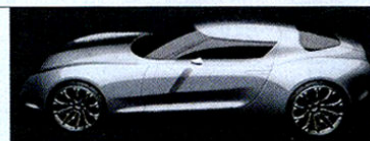
★★★★☆

"The original Geocities 'cities' weren't geographic. But now, they could take on Yelp and Craigslist and become a **comprehensive guide to every city in America**. Businesses would have listings, but there would also be event guides, concert reviews, a real insider's view. Then again, Geocities was relevant when far fewer people used the web. Would most of today's Internet users even know the name?"

★★★★☆

### HEY, NEW OWNER OF STUDEBAKER, WHAT WILL THE BRAND BECOME? //

"I envision it as a custom, limited-edition, high-end sports coupe, while staying true to a little of the original design. The car totally **speaks to American pride and entrepreneurial spirit**," says Chicago entrepreneur Nathan Benditson (whose family once owned the rights to the Studebaker Avanti). His intent-to-use trademark application for Studebaker was accepted this spring, and he's hoping to start production within two years. Meanwhile, he has a design draft (right).



## How Much Will It Cost to Revive This Beer?



**BEER:** National Premium, a 139-year-old Baltimore beer that died in 1996

**NEW OWNER:** Tim Miller, local real-estate agent

\$200,000

### // Miller's estimated relaunch cost

That includes \$100,000 for marketing, and \$75,000 for the beer's first run. Rather than brew it himself, he'll **save money by hiring a brewery** to work off National's old recipe. He expects immediate interest. "It has big-time name recognition," he says.

\$1,000,000

### // The beer's marketing value

That's what the owner of a similar regional beer—Mark Hellendrung of Narragansett Beer—estimated his brand's recognition was worth in advertising dollars when he relaunched it in 2005. He **spent \$10,000 on a billboard**, and it was an instant hit.

\$???

### // Cost of overcoming the past

"You can get caught up in the romance, but you have to keep in mind that there are a lot of **people who lived through the demise** and remember people being laid off," says Hellendrung. Winning over old-timers requires time, money, and lots of samples.