

# FAST COMPANY

March 2005

## THE FAST 50

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#### 38 From Lab to Fab GREG SCHMERGEL, 36 Cofounder and CEO Nantero Inc.

Webster, Massachusetts  
It's rare to find people who can talk about nanotechnology in the present tense. But Greg Schmergel happily (and patiently) explains how his company, Nantero, managed to introduce its carbon nanotubes into a semiconductor-chip fabrication plant in 2004. Eventually, they'll replace silicon, producing smaller and more powerful processors and "instant-on" computers. But experts didn't think anyone would get the material into production for at least 10 years because sophisticated semiconductor "fabs" have to remain ultraclean, and carbon nanotubes generally are not (think soot). "Every day we ran analyses on our filtration process, counting down the removal of banned particles," Schmergel says. Now that Nantero has successfully moved its technology from "lab to fab," 2005 will be the year when it actually gets a production-ready sample into customers' hands.

#### 39 Tilting at Windmills THOMAS WAGNER, 43 General manager of wind technology GE Energy Greenville, South Carolina

The windmill dates back to at least the seventh century BC, but not even Don Quixote could've imagined what Thomas Wagner and his team completed last April: a wind turbine field five miles off the coast of Ireland. The seven seagull-white 3.6-megawatt turbines, the largest ever used offshore, are also the first designed specifically for this demanding environment. "They should be able to withstand a category-three hurricane," Wagner says. GE expects its wind-power revenue to double this year to \$2 billion and to reach \$11.5 billion by 2008. For now, the field is a demo. When it eventually quadruples to become a 100-megawatt power plant, it will generate enough electricity to support at least 64,000 homes. Convinced that offshore fields will be preferable, not to mention easier to place, Wagner is already working on the next turbine: a bigger, more efficient model to inherit the wind.

to do. That's less than a year ago. Dwight maintained local manufacturing for the flagship product, but in his expansion drive, some of the 30 new items, such as yoga bags and duffels, are made overseas. That compromise has named Timbuk2 around, with one of the best-selling computer bags at Apple's retail stores. It hit \$10 million in sales and turned a profit in 2004.

#### 42 A More Popular Banco ROBERTO HERENCIA, 46 President Banco Popular North America Rosemont, Illinois

What's in a name? Sometimes not enough. And with just 50% of its customers Hispanic, Banco Popular's name doesn't express all it is. Roberto Herencia undertook the challenge of expanding the 11-year-old bank's mandate to more broadly serve its communities regardless of ethnicity. Herencia and his team started with bank employees, creating a "Got Passion?" campaign. They also initiated community-outreach programs. And of course, "we needed to talk to the people," Herencia says. Town-hall meetings provided opportunities to interact with customers and learn from them. The payoff: After a six-week new-account drive this past fall, Herencia was delighted to sign up 15,000 new customers. Now 2005 brings even more ambitious goals of increasing revenue from \$60 million to \$100 million and upping Small Business Administration loans from \$200 million to \$300 million.

#### 43 Changing the Debate RAY LAUK, 45 Superintendent Lyons Elementary School District 103 Lyons, Illinois

With a budget crunch last year, superintendent Ray Lauk faced a daunting prospect: cutting programs or selling a big tax hike. His constituents weren't eager to raise their own taxes. But Lauk gave them a reason. He convened 50 community members and faculty to reassess priorities for the district of 2,200 students over the next 10 years. They came back with two proposals: A "reality plan" that left taxes alone but meant closing two schools and increasing class sizes, and a "possibility plan" that would restore art, music, and athletics and focus on math and reading.

Lauk won a referendum last March—with a 50% property tax increase. "We weren't asking them to raise taxes," he says. "We were asking them, 'Which vision of schooling do you want for your kids?' Seeing the choices made the difference."

#### 44 From Pawn to King STEVE MACK, 46 Chairman ZtradingIndustries Las Vegas, Nevada

Transforming a business is never easy, so imagine making the leap from Las Vegas pawnshop to software company. Steve Mack took over his family's fourth-generation business in 1981 and built it into a 41-store chain using software to price the goods instead of the old-school way of eyeballing each item. In late 2002, he modified his software so that he could sell items on eBay and within months rocketed into the top tier of eBay's Titanium PowerSellers. "We hit eBay's radar right away," he says. "They took one look and told us, 'You guys have cracked the code.'" Last fall, Mack sold his pawnshops to Cash America for \$125 million, kept the software, and put his energies into ZtradingIndustries to sell and market it to eBay sellers. "I want to be the Kelley Blue Book of preowned merchandise," he says.

#### 45 More Than a Symbolic Change WILLIAM NUTI, 41 President and CEO Symbol Technologies Inc. Holtzville, New York

When William Nuti became CEO of Symbol Technologies at the start of 2004, he took the reins of a company facing shareholder and government lawsuits and mounting financial losses. Dream job, eh? Working with his handpicked management team, the former number two at Cisco engineered a plan to set Symbol straight and made sure that everyone knew the vision and how his strategy would realize it. Sweeping out the toxic culture helped produce immediate results at the mobile-computing company. By September, revenue had jumped nearly 13% from the year before, to \$1.3 billion; the lawsuits were settled; and operating expenses dropped \$15.5 million from the previous year. "The company was doing everything largely

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### REINVENTIONS

Charting a new course for their businesses and industries through innovation

#### 40 Documenting Magic BRUCE CHIZEN, 49 CEO and president Adobe Systems Inc. San Jose, California

"I was way out of my comfort zone," says Bruce Chizen. "I didn't know if I was making the right decisions. I didn't know what I didn't know. I doubted myself every night." That was then. In 1998, when Chizen took a greater leadership role in what was a highly troubled company from its legendary cofounders, Chizen, who officially became CEO in 2000, obviously made the right move, from a major reorganization to a greater focus on customers. He engineered the turnaround without destroying Adobe's unique people-friendly culture, no less. In 2004, Chizen successfully reinvented the company that made desktop publishing possible by moving into the enterprise server business to help customers send more-reliable documents through email. The result: In fiscal 2004, Adobe's net income

jumped 69% to \$450 million on revenue that grew 29% to \$1.7 billion, a record for the company. Chizen is now in his comfort zone.

#### 41 In the Bag MARK DWIGHT, 45 CEO Timbuk2 San Francisco, California

When Mark Dwight purchased Timbuk2 in late 2002, its main asset was its cult brand. People loved both the merchandise and the company's story (it was founded by a bike messenger in 1989 and used local San Francisco labor to fashion its sole product—a messenger bag). Despite about \$4 million in sales, however, Timbuk2 was broke. Dwight brought some of the management principles he had learned at Cisco, and he jettisoned the crippling consensus-driven decision making. "I came here and said, 'You guys have to trust me to make certain executive decisions about what we're going

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They run startups and huge divisions, and they sell everything from chocolate to nanotubes. Every one of the winners of our fourth annual competition dreams big—and delivers.