Euripides type tester in action at www.itcfonts.com

From boutiques to department stores, where to shop for type on the Internet.
By Nick Shinn

Being digital, fonts are an ideal Internet product, and this fact has not been lost on the marketplace—there is a huge variety of places you can buy them from.

The field breaks down into a number of areas, and to understand the distinctions, it helps to know something of how the retail type business works. Here is a step-by-step summary.

1. THE FOUNDRY

In the digital era, the type foundry is the type designer's studio, and it's here that fonts are both designed and manufactured. The type designer creates not only the typeface (the shapes and details of the characters), but also the font (the software utility that is used by applications to produce typesetting in that typeface). This is because design and manufacture are combined in the commercially available font authoring tools, Fontographer and Font-lab, and in the proprietary systems used by a few companies like Adobe.

Once the font is made, it takes two steps to market it to the end user—publishing and retailing. So there is some parallel between type design and writing books.

2. THE PUBLISHER

The Publisher is the company which puts a typeface on the market, controls its brand and generally owns its trademark. This is sometimes apparent in the actual name of the typeface, for instance, *Adobe Caslon*, *FF Meta*, or *ITC Garamond.*

3. THE RETAILER

The retailer sells the fonts to the end user; however, as fonts are software, the correct term is licensing.

I have no data as to what the average split is, but typically the retailer takes around 50% of the license fee paid by the end user, the publisher takes 30%, and the designer gets a 20% "royalty".

The Internet makes it possible for a very small business—a solo designer, even—to design, make, publish and retail its own fonts. Those that take this direct route to market most likely also sell their fonts through retailers, and often sell the fonts of independent designers not interested in starting a font business.

After they've been in business a few years, publishers amass a pile of fonts. As the saying goes, "He who dies with the most fonts wins."

Nothing is ever deleted from the catalog. And the product never ages. (The oldest font on my hard drive is *Helvetica Condensed* from 1987—and it works like the day I first used it.) The Internet contains a timeless, living museum of digital type, and every new typeface added to this pool of data is instant history.

Here are some of the creator-curator-merchandisers:
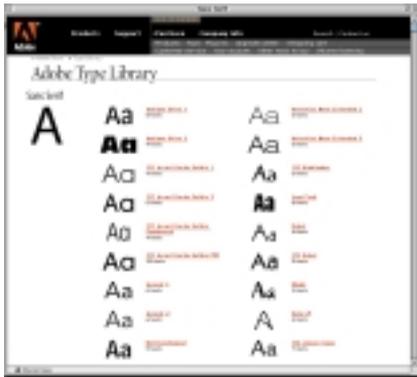
adobe.com/type
Foundry, Publisher, Retailer, Distributor.

Amongst Adobe's many software products you may be able to find the Adobe Type Library, which contains not only Adobe "Originals" but also fonts from other publishers such as ITC. Adobe type designers are some of the most prolific, and successful, in the digital era: Sumner Stone (*Stone Serif*, *Stone Sans*), Robert Slimbach (*Giovanni*, *Minion*, *Myriad*, *Utopia*, *Adobe Garamond*) and Carol Twombly (*Lithos*, *Adobe Caslon*, *Trajan*, *Myriad*).

apostrophiclab.com
Foundry, Publisher, Retailer, Distributor.

Fred Nader's site presents his own fonts, and those of a collection of designers from around the world, as freeware.

chank.com
Foundry, Publisher, Retailer.

Mr Chank Diesel blazed a trail for online font retailing with a mix of wacky type-faces, freeware promotions, and gosh-darn hucksterismo. Like others who rode the grunge wave, he's matured his product line (a bit). Latest offering of Chank.com is the Psychedelic-Maori font stylings of NZ legend Joseph Churchward.

emigre.com
Foundry, Publisher, Retailer.

Zuzana Licko is the typographic genius of the age. Her faces (*Base*, *Oblong*, *Matrix*, *Mrs Eaves*, *Filosofia*, *etc.*) span a vast range of functionality while artfully exploring the issues of culture and technology. With partner Rudy Vanderlans, art director of *Emigre* magazine, Licko has led by example. The site design is an ultra-minimal all-html understatement that screams "it's the content, stupid." As well as Licko's work, Emigre publishes fonts by offbeat designers such as sign painter John Downer, counterculturalist Jon Barnbrook, and iconoclast Edward Fella.

eyewire.com
Publisher, Retailer, Distributor

After a stint with Adobe, Calgary's Image Club resurfaced as Eyewire, an online graphics supermarket with a select showing of foundries such as Brian Sooy's.

fontbureau.com
Foundry, Publisher, Retailer.

Founded in 1989 by David Berlow and periodical über-redesigner Roger Black, Font Bureau is the place to look for fonts that exploit the traditional subtleties of printed typography, and it's also one of the nicest, most functional font sites on the Web.

But really, if you want a typographic fetish to drool over, then you should acquire a hardback copy of the 3rd edition of the Font Bureau *Type Specimens*.

Berlow's *Bureau Grotesque* and Tobias Frere-Jones' *Interstate* have dominated US publication design for a decade.

fonts.com
Publisher, Retailer, Distributor.

The type site of Agfa-Monotype is a bland hodge-podge of mixed material, fronted by a retail-style home page that is tacky, but not enough so. For that, there's the broad parody of a guy like Chank, or the slick schtick of House Industries (see below.) One would expect Monotype, with its legacy of classic typefaces, to have a classier web site than this.

The FontShop Canada site features unique Canadian content that pops up in new windows: shown, a type sample page from the Montreal foundry 2Rebels.

The font-display and delivery engine is the same (with language adjustments) for all FontShop franchises.

fontshop.ca
Publisher, Retailer, Distributor.

Another pioneer of digital fonts, the German company FontShop International, has a chain of retail franchises around the world (including Canada), and publishes its own exclusive "house brand", the Font-Font library—that includes such major faces as Erik Spiekermann's *Meta*, Martin Majoor's *Scala*, Jan-Albert Pool's *DIN*, and popular Candian-designed faces such as Val Fullard's *Mambo* and my own *Fontesque*.

In addition to FontFonts, FontShops sell the products of other publishers. These are carefully selected and tested, for, as Canadian franchise owner David Michaelides puts it, "we test, guarantee and support what we sell online, otherwise it's just a price game."

With this marketing philosophy, FontShop is also able to avoid the redundancy found at some large retailers, which end up selling many versions, by different foundries, of the same classic typeface.

"The hope is that FontShop bridges the gap between the major publishers which have all the fonts, and the individual foundries," says Michaelides.

houseindustries.com
Foundry, Publisher, Retailer.

Masters of retro Americana popcult lettering, House boasts the sweetest assemblage of "brushed" curves anywhere ever, not to mention the totally ill *Crackhouse*, which is the typeface that put this Delaware crew on the map back in the day. House has recently taken a more traditional typographic direction with the precisely-engineered *House Gothic*, the hoax-modern *Chalet* and the cleverly evolved OpenType family *Simian*, without missing a beat.

itcfonts.com
Publisher, Retailer, Distributor.

ITC's line of tall x-height faces was the look of the '70s. Recently, their approach has varied, from the fascinating size-specific *ITC Bodoni* to Mark van Bronkhorst's distressed technoface *Conduit* (used in *R.O.B.* magazine). Two strong features of this site are the *U&lc* online magazine, and Euripides, arguably the best "test drive" utility on the Web (see headline).

microsoft.com/typography
Foundry, Retailer (of free Web fonts).

A vast resource for matters pertaining to digital fonts. Also the place to download Microsoft Core Web TrueType Fonts (e.g. Matthew Carter's *Verdana*, *Georgia*), which everyone should have—resistance is futile. Microsoft's *Links*, *News and Contacts* page is also worthy of regular visits.

myfonts.com
Retailer, Distributor.

Bitstream's Myfonts offers a service for the small foundry, and presents the shopper with an interface that works like an interactive technical manual, with ingenious specimen-generating software, including a full-font character map (detail above, showing Euro symbol). And a list of the site's top 50 sellers. Brilliant.

p22.com
Foundry, Publisher, Retailer.

A unique strategy for a font business: types inspired by art, history and science, marketed in museums and foundations. Online are fonts derived from such classics as Théo van Doesberg's 1917 *De Stijl* lettering, and Edward Johnston's influential *London Underground* alphabet.


philsfonts.com
precisiontype.com
psyops.com
Retailer, Distributor.

These three US retailers (whose names

coincidentally begin with the same letter, it's not as if there are scores more like this) offer fonts from a variety of foundries, mostly independents. Phil's also distributes the Adobe and FontFont brands. They are a good place to check out a variety of contemporary type designs.
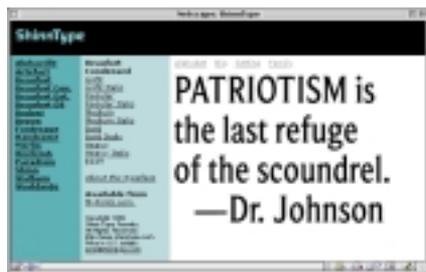
shinntype.com
Foundry, Publisher.

My site doesn't sell direct, but it has links to Myfonts.com and FontShop, which retail the Shinn fonts. Whereas some sites are like stores, and others like magazines, this is more of a catlog. There's no type tester (you can test drive the fonts at the retailers), but there are plenty of specimens which show the type nicely set. This way, visitors get to see a block of text, and the kerning that's in the font. Kerning support is not a feature of any online test drivers, which generally require Flash.

stormtype.com
Frantisek Storm (Czech Republic)

typofonderie.com
Jean-François Porchez (France)

www.typography.net
Jeremy Tankard (UK)
Foundry, Publisher, Retailer.

Hot European sites. All have English text, although Storm's is pretty dismal. Each is a class act with lots of brilliant, unique typefaces. If you're jaded, visit somewhere exotic and see what the locals are up to.

t26.com
Foundry, Publisher, Retailer, Distributor.

Carlos Segura's foundry built a reputation for grunge fonts in the early days of digital, and has kept its edge with a techno lineup such as the Identikal faces. Above is a new type from prolific UK graphiste Rian Hughes. The hip selection of foundries sets T-26 apart from other distributors.

thirstype.com
Foundry, Publisher, Retailer.

Like T-26, Rick Valicenti's Chicago outfit is supercool. Fonts by Chester (a Montrealer), Toronto's Paul Sych, New Yorker Barry Deck, and Italian Claudio Piccinini.

typequarry.com
Foundry, Publisher, Retailer, Distributor.

Brian Willson's site has an unusual collection of handwriting fonts—his speciality.

typodermic.com
Foundry, Publisher, Retailer.

Ray Larabie's new type site. Also check out larabiefonts.com for his large collection of free fonts, such as *Neuropol.*

typography.com
The Hoefler Type Foundry
Foundry, Publisher, Retailer.

Jonathan Hoefler must have a time machine—he travels to the past and brings back the classic ethos (no mere revivals, mind you), sharp as a newly minted sovereign. Like Font Bureau, specializes in size-specific ranges, from text to ultra-fine display (e.g. *HTF Didot*). Recently joined by Tobias Frere-Jones, late of the Bureau.

weworkforthem.com
Foundry

For many type designers, it's not the major part of their work (by intent or of necessity), and so they produce strange, brilliant faces which don't get a lot of exposure. Mike Cina is one of these, as is Margo Chase (chasedesigngroup.com).

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