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## Joel Bass

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*--Joel Bass*

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**Rhyming Planet asks ...**

**We can't wait to ask this first question - where did your wonderful, whimsical company name come from?**

**JB:** It's my nickname for something that happens in a computer game I used to play: if you're lucky, you're suddenly transformed into a whirling, multi-colored fuzzy thing, and no harm can come to you. The phrase "invincible fuzzy thing" stuck in my head.

Since then, it's taken on more interesting meanings. For instance, small businesses are like the fuzzy mammals that adapted and survived when the climate got too tough for the large, lumbering dinosaurs. Then there's the Internet itself, constantly in flux and distributed across the world; another invincible fuzzy thing.

Hopefully the name will stick in people's heads, just as it stuck in mine. And I'm sure it weeds out any potential clients without a sense of humor!

**Your portfolio is wide ranging, from technology services to architecture to jewelry and back again. What are the common characteristics across this diverse client base?**

**JB:** Most of our clients are small business owners who know the power of image and identity. Nothing attracts like confidence, and, on the web, nothing projects confidence like clean, clear design and well-written copy. In general, my clients have come to me at a time when they were ready for a change. Some clients had existing websites they were unhappy with. Others, who had no sites, wanted to reach a larger, or different, customer base.

**What specific services do you provide for your customers?**

**JB:** Though I prefer to focus on web design, I have nearly a decade of experience in graphic design, and I spent a good part of that period doing print work. I still enjoy contributing to identity development and marketing materials. For example, I am currently working on a set of posters for the Gates Innovation Competition, and

once, in a moment of particular genius, I created the logo and identity for Rhyming Planet.

**What makes invinciblefuzzything different from the numerous other web design and development shops targeting small and medium size businesses?**

**JB:** One of our greatest strengths is to the ability to listen to clients. It brings me great pleasure to create something that fully serves the needs of the client and expresses their uniqueness in the process. If you look through my portfolio, you'll notice that there's a lot of variety not only in my clientele but also in the websites I've built for them. That keeps my job interesting; I can't imagine turning out endless cookie-cutter websites.

I also come from a design background, whereas a lot of web designers come from a technical background. I have the greatest respect for those who specialize in the technical side of things -- obviously, a website must function smoothly. But I think a great website needs to do more than that; it should feel friendly, warm, clear and attractive to its users. For instance, it's vital that a restaurant has a clean and well-stocked kitchen, but that alone won't bring in repeat customers and rave reviews in the newspaper. In any business, the front end is as important as the back end. That's what design is all about.

**What types of web design projects are you currently working on?**

JB: I recently finished a website for Ann Cuthbertson Architects. It was a pleasure to play with all that stunning photography. Right now I'm working with Droy Advertising on a Rehabilitation Treatment Center website, and with Lisa Everitt on a redesign for the Little Thompson Water District website. Variety is the spice of life!

**Your website designs are colorful, unique and memorable. Take us through the creative process with a new client and describe how it works.**

**JB:** The very first step is to learn as much as possible about the client's needs for the site. Why do you want a website? What are your goals for the site? Who is the audience? From this we move to the scope of the site itself: What is the main focus of the site? What kind of flow is needed? Can those looking for basic, quick information find it, and can we satisfy those who want to dig deeper as well?

With these considerations covered, we move on to look and feel. What differentiates the site from those of your competitors? What feeling do we want to instill in people as they enter the site and move from page to page? These are very subjective issues, and we use a variety of methods to come to a workable vision. For instance, one client (we'll call her "Susan"), showed me a favorite painting, and I designed her new logo with a similar color scheme.

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**What is your favorite website design project to date? Why? (We promise our feelings won't be hurt too much if you select a site other than Rhyming Planet...)**

**JB:** I would have to say Rhyming Planet, of course! Each project has its triumphs. The first site I ever did was for a toy company called ZomeSystem (formerly Zometool), and the purpose of the site was to build community around people who loved this toy. Great fun! I've learned so much since those days. Castle Jewelry.com was also very enjoyable. I've always been a fan of art deco, and Linda Castellani thought it would be the perfect setting for her jewelry creations. So the site looks like it's from 1939, with all the functionality of the 21st century. But though these experiences each had its delights, the one that really stands out is Rhyming Planet, no question.

**Who writes the reviews that accompany the website entries in your professional portfolio? They read like a description of a fine wine -- we love it!**

**JB:** Thank you. Great design without equally great copy is like a well-dressed person confidently spouting gibberish. No good. So for my website, I wanted the very best. I brought on Kathryn T. S. Bass, an outstanding copywriter (to whom I am fortunate enough to be married), and she transformed my clumsy descriptions into perfect gems. You can find more examples of her work at <http://www.kadroodle.com>.

**What are the top three challenges facing Joel and invinciblefuzzything in 2003?**

IFT was started in 2001, and has been building steadily since then. In 2003, I'd like to take the company to a new level. First, I want IFT to reach a larger audience. We definitely are in a niche, and it's a good one, but there are a lot of people within that niche who have not yet heard of us. Secondly, as always, I want to continue expanding my abilities as a web designer, learning new technologies and techniques. I've never believed in loading websites up with a lot of gratuitous bells and whistles, but there are some good, useful tools I'd like to spend more time with this year. And lastly, we're adding a few services to IFT's repertoire, including search engine optimization and promotional press releases.

**What made you decide to step out on your own and start your own company?**

**JB:** I learned a great deal from the time I spent as part of a design studio, but working for myself has always appealed to me. I like the luxury of working with clients on a one-to-one basis. I like the opportunity to collaborate with clients. And I like the freedom and flexibility of owning my own business. I feel that I can now live the life I want. My happiness feeds my creativity and directly benefits my clients. It also helps that I can relate to clients who own small businesses more than ever. I know the stresses. And I know the amount of dedication and passion it takes to strike out on your own.

**How can people contact you?**

**JB:** My portfolio is online at <http://www.invinciblefuzzything.com>. Reach me by email at [joel@invinciblefuzzything.com](mailto:joel@invinciblefuzzything.com), or by phone at 303-762-1445.