



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**December 2007**

**Sweat Equity Enterprises (SEE) designs groundbreaking collaborations between youth and industry – an innovation lab for companies, and an unbelievable learning opportunity for teens.**

**What makes SEE unique is that underserved youth *and* industry each gain in numerous beneficial ways.** Youth engage in projects with corporate partners where they analyze, demystify, and redesign the products and media that most captivate them (proceeds and contributions go towards students' college scholarships and program support). This learning method is proven to increase their personal, academic and professional skills, and these impressive outcomes are stimulating the national debate over school reform. At the same time, companies gain fresh creative ideas and market research, enhance their brand through sustainability, and cultivate a talented and diverse workforce of the future.

Past and current projects include Apparel and Accessories for **Marc Ecko**, Cars for **Nissan**, Electronics for **RadioShack**, Watches for **Callanen/Timex**, Shoes for **Skechers**, Graphics for **Saks Fifth Avenue**, Caps for **New Era**, Skateboards for **Zoo York**, Package Design for **Dr. Miracles**, Graphic Design for **New York Cares** and others.

SEE's **vision** is to revolutionize education and philanthropy.

### **Nationwide Expansion**

Educators claim that SEE offers schools something they can't find anywhere else – an engaging way to motivate at-risk students and help them discover a love of learning. In response to high demand from schools all over the United States, SEE is growing nationwide. In 2008, thanks to support from the Nathan Cummings Foundation, SEE will establish programs in three new states outside of New York, and aims to be in over 10 states by 2012.

### **How does it work?**

SEE is a project-based learning program that takes place in a real professional studio where teenagers can participate during the school day or after-school up to all four years of high school. Participants gain intensive design, technology and entrepreneurship training as they develop original graphic, product, or apparel designs from concept to prototype in partnership with a company client. Students are selected through a competitive application process based on the following criteria: passion and critical thinking about design, the ability to make the major time commitment and a willingness to overcome challenges with maturity. The program is led by educators, college students, and professional design volunteers with a student-adult ratio of 3:1.



## Youth Outcomes

The aim of SEE is not to make all participants into designers – but to build on the proven capacity of design education to give them valuable transferable skills that can be used in every area of their lives. SEE’s independent evaluation shows that participants gain the following skills:

**Professional:** design, public speaking, project management, time management, technology, information management, and market research.

**Socio-emotional:** problem-solving, demystifying brands & consumer products, constructive self and peer criticism, conflict resolution, collaboration, financial literacy, and resiliency.

**Academic:** critical thinking, research, literacy, math, science, social studies.

## Why SEE?

SEE’s youth-professional collaborations solve some of the most frustrating questions facing our society today:

- If high school youth explain the cause of high drop-out rates and the growing achievement gap by saying that school is not relevant to their lives or their future, but they are fascinated with are products, fashion and media - **why not use those objects as entry points for learning?**
- Only about **1% of the U.S. designers are non-white**, and our objects and spaces are being designed by a homogenous group that does not truly reflect us.
- Every CEO, marketing executive and ‘cool hunter’ knows that urban youth possess the creative sophistication and market insight that forecast future market trends. Business leaders claim that creativity is their most valuable asset in industry today, and economists show that the creative sector is growing faster than Wall Street. **Why do these young people, who have the most desired commodity, remain outside of our educational system and at the bottom of our economy?**

## Origins & Support

In 2004, SEE was born of a belief that design can be an incredible source of power for diverse underserved urban youth, but often they do not have access to learning opportunities and environments that can help them to discover their creative voice. After conducting extensive research, SEE’s founders (Nell Daniel, Damon Butler and Marc Ecko) were further motivated by what they observed as the low standards and culture of mediocrity in education; the lack of design education for underserved youth; the rarity of pre-professional programs for low-income youth; and a rapidly growing digital divide. They were determined to develop a model that would connect youth and industry more effectively to invest in the potential of underserved youth, and build stronger cross-sector partnerships that would stimulate education reform and have a greater philanthropic impact.



**Marc Ecko** has played several crucial roles in the establishment and development of SEE. He provided seed funding and vision to start the organization, and has acted as one of SEE's corporate partners. He currently serves as Chair of the Board of Trustees, and continues to fund SEE's overhead, so that **100% of dollars raised go to direct services for youth**. Additional funders include Callanen, RadioShack, Nissan, Deutsche Bank Foundation, Nathan Cummings Foundation, and other Board Members and individuals.

#### **SEE: The Facts**

- SEE is a project-based learning program that takes place in a real professional studio where teenagers can participate during the school day or after-school up to all four years of high school.
- SEE currently serves about 100 kids from 4 NYC schools and one school in Providence, RI, and will expand nationwide in 2008.
- Past and current projects include:
  - Cars for **Nissan**
  - Electronics for **RadioShack**
  - Watches for **Callanen/Timex**
  - Shoes for **Skechers**
  - Bags and Outerwear for **Marc Ecko Enterprises**
  - Skateboards for **Zoo York**
  - Graphics for **Saks Fifth Avenue**
  - Caps for **New Era**
  - Graphic Design for **New York Cares**
  - Package Design for **Dr. Miracles**
- SEE has recently partnered with **Big Picture Schools, the Gates Foundation's preferred high school reform model**, because of their extremely impressive outcomes when it comes to student achievement when working with the most underserved youth.