

Innovation Economy

Inside tech, life sciences, start-ups & venture capital in New England

Name this e-commerce company...

Posted by Scott Kirsner December 16, 2009 07:15 AM

Here's a holiday e-commerce challenge sure to stump you...

Name this company:

- Based in the Back Bay.
- Founded in 2002 by two guys who first met as undergrads at Cornell.
- Will earn well over \$200 million in revenues this year.
- Employs 525 people, more than 100 of whom were hired in 2009.
- Featured on Internet Retailer's list of the "Hot 100 Retail Web Sites" this year.
- Counts a bean bag chair, a doll house, the \$700 Herman Miller Aeron chair, and a countertop convection oven as some of its top-selling items this month.
- Add the letter Y to its name and you've got the name of a folk rock super-group.

The company is one of Boston's biggest e-commerce companies, if not *the* biggest: [CSN Stores](#), which sells a somewhat haphazard blend of housewares, furniture, pet supplies, luggage, fitness equipment, binoculars, medical supplies, and shoes.

What unites all of the items sold by CSN? The company focuses on products that are difficult to ship and require lots of product information to make the sale. CSN also likes to focus on niches where it can build a comprehensive selection -- offering even more items than Amazon. "We strive to have the biggest selection in any category we're in," says CEO Niraj Shah, who started the company with chairman Steve Conine.

Shah and Conine sold their first post-collegiate start-up, a Web design consultancy called Spinners, in 1998. They haven't relied on venture capital to start or grow CSN Stores.

Not raising outside capital "makes you a lot more diligent about making money from every sale," says Conine. "It keeps you really efficient."

Shah says the company is constantly looking for new product categories to expand into, and will be very much focused on recruiting in 2010. "We think the next ten years of e-commerce are going to be even more exciting than the last ten," he says.

(Here's a [WCVB Chronicle segment](#) from September that featured CSN Stores...)