

[CNNMoney.com: What works: 3D Printing for the Rest of Us](#)

I like the quote from Brian Klock - a motorcycle customizer in South Dakota, who as an early adopter shelled out \$60K last year for a Stratasys Prodigy 3D printer: "3D doesn't have to be for stealth bombers. It can be for something as simple as motorcycles."

Well, making motorcycles is still fairly difficult for lots of people, but the idea is: 3D can be simple and used by more of us (rather than large manufacturers). For a small business owner, he really must have had a lot of faith in rapid prototyping to have an impact on his business. Good on him for seeing the value and opportunity in taking that "risk" of investing in the technology. Apparently his investment has already paid for itself in the past year with his business growing over 150%.

Another guy dumped his telecommunications day job and started up an architectural model firm with his personal \$50K investment in a Z Spectrum 510 printer. His belief in the future of 3D printers are so strong that he'll ride it from selling architectural models to becoming a 3D "Kinkos".

It's exciting to see the growth of 3D printers in smaller businesses. Prices are getting more affordable - you can tell with the \$60K Klock paid last year to those selling now for around 20K - 30K. 3D Systems' V Compact Flash which when released this year is supposed to retail for about 10K. With the progress being made by the DIY fabbers like [Fab@home](#) and [Reprap](#), who knows how many more of "the masses" (small businesses, groups and personal users) out there will be using 3D printers. And for a wider range of products and purposes.

Of course this opens up some pretty scary situations for traditional manufacturers within the next 20 years. I believe there is going to be a complete turn around from the mass manufacturing model we have now, utilizing cheap labor resources, to a return to where nearly all products are manufactured locally, where technology replaces the labor, and mass customization replaces mass production. There are several major factors that are going to drive this change: consumer awareness of the environmental impact of product creation, wealthy consumer demand for "individualization", and the massive growth of the middle class in countries like India and China.

How this will play out ultimately is very hard to know but the room for creativity is one of the factors that makes it so interesting in the near term. Where does Ponoko fit into all this? We've already discovered some pretty neat things just from the research and testing we've been doing over the last year. Most importantly, it's a massive mind shift to go from buying to making; and from buying mass produced to moving to individualization. 3D Printers are just one factor in that move. But to paraphrase [Malcolm Gladwell](#) in "[The Tipping Point](#)", in the early stages the progress looks very slow, but when it hits that [Tipping Point](#) it suddenly seems like it's everywhere. The community involved with Ponoko is going to be a real part of this so if you've already signed up, I'm looking forward to seeing what you do, and if you haven't, then [don't miss out](#).