



## Selling tumbleweeds online

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The Sons of the Pioneers sang about tumbling tumbleweeds, but Malta native and ISU graduate Mike Rigby is delivering them to customers far and wide.

What began as a gag to complete course requirements for an Idaho State University class in Internet marketing, has turned into a business for Rigby. It was good enough to earn him an 'A' four years ago and it helped create a market that earns him a living today. 'It was a joke,' Rigby said. 'The assignment was to create a website that would sell something.'

Rigby thought about something ridiculous he could offer for sale. The son of a southern Idaho farmer, he remembered those pesky tumbleweeds that collect along fence lines every spring. Like Archimedes stepping into that ancient Greek bathtub, Rigby had discovered his eureka.

Actually, Jay Leno helped. On his late night show, the comedian had made light of someone selling a tumbleweed on e-Bay. That silly notion gave rise to Rigby's class project and opened the world to the wonders of tumbleweeds.

'It provided a good laugh for my teachers and classmates,' Rigby said about his decision to market dead weeds.

His website, [curiouscountrycreations.com](http://curiouscountrycreations.com) went online and Rigby collected a stellar grade from his professor, Dr. Kevin Parker. To earn his grade, Rigby's site had to contain all the elements necessary for a customer to choose his item and order it. Once the grades were posted, Rigby forgot about the website which was still hosted on a server.

'About three weeks later I got an email from PayPal telling me I had received money,' Rigby said. 'I thought it was probably some kind of spam.'

It wasn't. A customer had ordered one of Rigby's tumbleweeds.

'My wife (Angela) and I had to figure out how to ship it,' Rigby chuckled. With that simple transaction, a business was born.

Now a Salt Lake City resident, Rigby's Curious Country Creations website offers a host of products besides tumbleweeds. Included are bundles of wheat, skipping stones and cattails.

'We even sold a snowball kit for a while,' Rigby said with a laugh. It was a jar of water with instructions on how to freeze it, put the frozen contents in a blender and shape it into a snowball.

Though wheat stalks and cattails are growing in sales, it's still the lowly tumbleweed that generates the most business, according to Rigby.

'We now sell thousands of them,' he said.

The largest customer has been Ralph Lauren that buys them for product displays. Other customers have included The Gap, the manufacturer of Schick Razors and the National Museum of Natural History. His tumbleweeds have gone to buyers in Sweden, Germany, Switzerland and even Dubai.

'Things really took off when I learned to connect my website to the traffic,' Rigby said.

It took research on his part to optimize the use of free and paid sites that redirect Internet users and how to analyze search efforts by potential customers. These are all skills he was first exposed to at that ISU class.

Rigby said the strangest thing is that his father told him to stay away from farming after he graduated from Raft River High.

'Now I go out and harvest tumbleweeds and cattails,' he said. 'I've even got my dad growing some of the wheat I sell.'

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