

Marketing the Unabomber

First screenshot captured on 3 Feb 1999.

"This is a marketing guy's dream."
— Montana marketer Ron Darlington

The New York Times once described suspected Unabomber Theodore Kaczynski as being like water: "... he appears to have been virtually transparent to those who encountered him, and to have evaporated without leaving much trace."

For the former Berkeley professor turned recluse, all that changed in just a matter of minutes.

Rush to print: A day after FBI agents captured Kaczynski at his primitive Montana cabin, publisher Gina Centrello of Simon & Schuster's Pocket Books contacted former FBI agent John Douglas and novelist Mark Olshaker in hopes of producing the first "instant" book on the case. According to The Wall Street Journal, the authors worked 21 hours a day to finish "Unabomber: On the Trail of America's Most-Wanted Serial Killer."

Marketing madness: Within hours of Kaczynski's arrest, Darlington's Montana Marketing Inc. began cranking out shirts emblazoned with slogans linking the state to the Unabom case and standoff of the anti-government Freemen: "Montana — Where You're Wanted," "Naturally Indicting," "At Least Our Cows Are Sane."

"We're thinking about Unabomber sunglasses, with the little logo up in one corner of the lens, and maybe Unabomber pens and pencils shaped like little pipe bombs," the company's owner, Ron Darlington, told The Associated Press.

T-shirt trophies: FBI agents reportedly bought 70 Unabomber T-shirts at \$20 a piece for a celebration party after Kaczynski's arrest.

A race against Time: A staff of 12 reporters and editors from Time magazine put together "Mad Genius: The Odyssey, Pursuit and Capture of the Unabomber Suspect" in just 11 days.

Designs: T-shirt and hat designs included a Unabomber drawing on a postage stamp that bore a cancellation mark from Lincoln, Mont., an old typewriter's rendition of the word "Unabomber" and the simple phrase "Home of the Unabomber."

Tasty tribute: Mom's Cafe on Highway 200 in Lincoln added the "Unaburger" to its menu.

Souvenirs: Wayne Cashman, owner of the Seven-Up Ranch Supper Club, in Lincoln, sold T-shirts with the Unabomber sketch and a legend declaring the restaurant "FBI HQ (headquarters) for Unabomber bust." The restaurant gift shop also sold commemorative hooded sweatshirts for \$50 each.

Giving credit: In June 1996, Berkeley book publisher Kristan Lawson announced he was ready to send Kaczynski a \$1,207.40 royalty check for the Unabomber manifesto, "Industrial Society and Its Future." The check amounted to about a dime for each of the 12,000 copies of the manifesto's paperback version sold by Lawson's Jolly Roger Press, the San Jose Mercury News reported.

Also in 1996, People magazine named Kaczynski one of the year's 25 Most Intriguing People.

Survivor's story: On Sept. 1, 1997, computer scientist David Gelernter, who survived a blast in his Yale University office in 1993, became the first Unabomber victim to publish a book on the subject with the release of "Drawing Life: Surviving the Unabomber."

The Ted K Archive

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