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Wayne E. Smith / The Detroit News

**Justin Berger, 26, checks out shirts at Fanatic U. If the Pistons retain their title, the store's revenues could jump 50 percent this year.**

**Local spotlight**

## **Outfitter gears up to cash in on Pistons**

Greg Every runs four Fanatic U sites in Metro Detroit, a top sport market in the U.S.

By Neal Haldane / Special to The Detroit News

**GARDEN CITY** -- Greg Every started his sports career selling "Bless You Boys" merchandise outside Tiger Stadium during the 1984 championship season.

Sales of Steve Yzerman jerseys during the Red Wings' Stanley Cup Championship runs helped Every buy his house in Plymouth.

And if the Pistons successfully defend their NBA title, Every's Fanatic U revenues could jump as much as 50 percent this year.

"If the team's winning, people are out buying," he said. "The hard part is dealing with the losses. People stop buying."

For example, Every ordered 2,000 Eastern Conference Champion

### **Fanatic U**

- Founded: 1996
  - Employees: 13
  - Products: T-shirts, hats, jewelry, pins, flags and other sports-related items
  - Locations: Garden City, Royal Oak, Livonia, Detroit
  - Information:  
[www.fanaticu.com](http://www.fanaticu.com)
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T-shirts and has sold less than half because the Pistons went down in the first two games of the NBA finals.

But even if the Pistons don't repeat, Every still sees several opportunities to sell T-shirts, caps, bobbleheads and other items adorned with team colors and logos at his four Metro Detroit Fanatic U outlets.

"The Pistons, obviously, are hot right now, and the Tigers and the All-Star stuff is hot, too," Every said referring to Major League Baseball's All-Star game coming to Comerica Park in July.

"Detroit is one of the best sports markets in the country with a passionate, mature fan base," said Mike Dietz of Dietz Trott Sports and Entertainment of Bingham Farms. "The Detroit Red Wings have lead the NHL in merchandise sales for many years and the PGA and Oakland Hills had record sales for the Ryder Cup last fall. The Pistons have been a hot merchandise brand for the past few years and with the All-Star Game and Super Bowl coming, the Tigers and Lions can anticipate strong merchandise sales."

Professional and college teams prefer to sell merchandise from their own outlets, but still benefit through licensing agreements from sales at stores like Fanatic U, said Dietz, who used to work for the Wings and Tigers.

But the NHL lockout and the cancellation of the Wings season cut sales at Fanatic U, Every said.

"It really hurt," he said. "That's 35 to 40 percent of our revenues."

The loss of the NHL season cut into sales nationally as well, according to the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association.

The SGMA reported sales of sports licensed products in the United States hit \$12.6 billion last year, down from \$12.7 billion in 2003.

"Had it not been for the NHL lockout and reduced sales of retro jerseys for street fashion, the sales in 2004 would have been higher," an SGMA report on sports licensed products said.

*Neal Haldane is a Metro Detroit freelance writer.*