

# insomnia



# cookies

Current with Newsweek  
Summer, 2006

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Making Dough: Berkowitz's company brings cookies fresh out of the oven right to your dorm room

## Making Dough: How to Turn Cookies into Cash

How one student made cookies into a monster business

By Rachel Johnson  
Current Magazine

Summer 2006 issue - For college students searching for a fresh new way to combat old-school cravings, Seth Berkowitz has the answer. Founder and president of Insomnia Cookies, a late-night treat delivery service, Berkowitz has spent the past four years at work sweetening up the night.

Insomnia Cookies offers campuses an original alternative to familiar nocturnal dilemmas—where to eat in the wee hours of the night, and how to eat anything not deep-fried or heaped with toppings. Between 8 p.m. and 2:30 a.m., and even later on the weekends, customers at eight schools, including Cornell University and University of Illinois, can call or log onto [www.insomniacookies.com](http://www.insomniacookies.com). Starving students order from among 12 varieties (like mint chocolate chip and Reese's) of freshly-baked cookies and brownies—and yes, milk—for delivery. Orders arrive within half an hour.

Berkowitz first entered the kitchen as a junior at the University of Pennsylvania. "And I tend to get obsessed with things I start," he says. In a short time he was baking and delivering to UPenn students entirely on his own for hours a week. Using dormitory kitchens as bakeries, Berkowitz began perfecting the ratio of ingredients that would become his trademark Insomnia recipe. By the spring of his senior year, with an established business partner (and several fewer classes), that night-time identity was looking like a long-term opportunity. After graduating in 2004, while still in command of the company—unusual among college-age entrepreneurs—he rolled up his sleeves and began the next challenge: developing a commercial chain.

For each Insomnia customer who conquered a 2 a.m. hankering for carbs and went to bed, "there were lots of nights of not eating, not making money, and waiting for results," Berkowitz recalls. Most of his stores now operate their bakeries out of existing local franchises, like the popular Tasti D-Lite shops, (a few of which Berkowitz owns) and he contracts vans for delivery. But the approach to opening each new store varies in difficulty, depending on the infrastructure for delivery already in place and the number of students willing to work—Insomnia now has 95 on payroll. Insomnia will add another eight campuses to its expanding map by this spring. Berkowitz imagines someday owning 100.

The Seth Berkowitz of 2006 says he has learned that confidence in one's own resourcefulness means working through problems, and that the creation of a visual brand is crucial to national growth. But, though they're now flavored by large-scale production and not his own private labors, Berkowitz's favorite of all the cookie flavors is still double chocolate chip. For now, at least, it seems safe to say that if you give a college student a cookie, he's bound to ask for more.