

ADVERTISING STAR



Riester's Creative Director Tom Ortega

[By Robin Salisian]

Tom Ortega's first advertising stint was working for a "German ad guy" in 1982, just one year shy of graduating college. He worked as a junior art director, graduated Texas Tech University with his B.A. in Advertising, and then switched careers.

"I started my career laying out ads for Furr's Grocery Stores and illustrated products. I then moved to Dallas without a job and switched over to copywriting because it was the first job I was ever offered," says Ortega.

Next, he worked with top advertising companies such as McCann and Erickson before deciding to freelance with friend Tim Riester and his company (Riester). Something must have clicked, for Ortega has spent the past 16 years with Riester, joining the agency full time in 2000.

"We turn consumers into lifelong believers for brands with a purpose beyond commercialism," writes Riester's website. "We are Brand Activists™."

Located in Phoenix, AZ; Salt Lake City, UT; Los Angeles, CA; and Washington, DC, this ad agency believes in two things: their clients' purpose and their brands' success. Because of this mentality, "Riester [has become] one of the largest independent advertising and public relations firms in the Western United States."

Today, Ortega works as the executive creative director.

"I oversee our entire creative department and am directly involved with the development and production of Riester's

strategic advertising efforts," says Ortega. "I also work with the Context Planning Department to ensure that all creative is strategically on target."

Over the years, Ortega has acquired a vast clientele list that ranges from the California

Department of Conservation, Veterinary Pet Insurance, and Doubletree Hotels, to Safeway, PetSmart, Del Webb, and McDonald's. However, his most prized campaigns revolve around a passion of his — health and environmental issues.

"It's an example of how advertising can have a positive influence and demonstrates that advertising doesn't necessarily have to be a negative force," he adds. Which is why he enjoyed his work for the Arizona Tobacco Education and Prevention Program, "where he helped to develop nationally recognized and award winning anti-tobacco ads."

"My favorite spot was the 'Smoking Drill.' The ad focused on the negative chain reaction smoking has on the body and how the 'tumor causing, teeth staining, smelly, puking habit' had adverse affects on one's system."

Created from the same campaign, the "Billy Strayhorn" ad was another of Ortega's favorites.

"The ad shared the story of a legendary jazz artist who lived his hay days writing popular songs such as 'The Lush Life'; however, his glory days ended when smoking took a toll on his health, eventually leading to his suffering and death. His life was artfully captured and shown as an example of the effects of tobacco."

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. I love to paint and hang out with my kids. I have a 9-year-old son and 4-year-old daughter.

Q. Throughout your lifetime, what movie have you watched the most?

A. *Lilies of the Field* and *Guess Who is Coming to Dinner*.

Q. What was the last book you read?

A. *Mayflower*

Q. What music is on your iPod/in your CD player right now?

A. I actually don't own an iPod. I love to listen to albums and CDs. I love a variety of music, and if you ask me what CD is in my car right now, it would be Jimi Hendrix. In my office I have everything from good ol' fashioned country blues such as North Mississippi All Stars to the classic cellist Yo-Yo Ma.

Q. If you had an extra hour in the day, what would you spend it doing?

A. That's easy — painting!

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"[And] I love the tactics [Mini Cooper](#) is using," Ortega continues, when asked about ad tactics he admires. "They have reinvented media and make advertisers rethink their tactics. It's amazing to see them use their budget. I also love what Riester did to launch the Aliens Show at the Arizona Science Center. Our PR Department staged an alien crash on top of a building in downtown Phoenix; then we had people call in to the media saying they saw a crash. It got tons of press, and the campaign was a huge hit."

Ortega's expertise comes as no surprise, especially after viewing his lengthy awards and honors resume. Not only has his creative work won several national and local ADDY awards and appeared in the *Communication Arts Advertising and Design Annuals*, Ortega's work has also been awarded Copywriter of the Year by the Phoenix Advertising Club and named a Mercury Radio Awards finalist.

But Ortega's creative talents extend beyond advertising. Blending his degree in advertising with his passion for painting and drawing, Ortega dons the hat of "an

acclaimed contemporary artist." Worldwide galleries ranging from Arizona, Texas, and Colorado to France and Guadalajara have displayed his work. His work was also featured in the 2005 issue of *Phoenix Home & Garden's* Masters of the Southwest issue.

Who would have thought then, as an advertiser and a contemporary artist, that Ortega would have embraced the ubiquitous television program saving device, TiVo?

"We are going in a place we don't know yet; in order to keep up with it we must be willing to change rapidly, and we need to go along with it even if it sometimes means throwing out traditional models of advertising," he says. "We must accept how society embraces mass communications in today's world."

"[Plus,] TiVo is yet another example of the malleability in today's media," Ortega continues. "There is an exciting movement where people are able to create whatever they want. I'm amused by the way I find myself surrounded by young people who can constantly teach me new tricks of the trade."

And just as Ortega remains open to youthful exuberance and insight, he encourages other eager advertisers to do the same.

"In order to thrive in this business you need to be a consumer of culture. You must also be open to other people's suggestions and be willing to change. One of the biggest mistakes you can make is to feel like you have all the answers all the time."

"Have fun," he adds. "We are lucky to be able to do this for a living."

ON THE NET

Riester
www.riester.com

Mini Cooper
www.miniusa.com

California Department of Conservation
www.conservation.ca.gov/Index/Pages/Index.aspx

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