



ADVERTISING STAR



## Anything but Typical: Robert Gourley

[By Robin Salisian]

A typical day for creative director Robert Gourley is filled with client meetings, consumer research, presentations, art directing — you name it. Here, typical almost sounds overwhelming, hectic. But not to this online advertising savant. No, to Gourley typical means a challenge. Typical means excitement. Typical means life at Gourley’s own ad agency, Mojave Interactive.

However, Gourley didn’t fall into advertising in any typical way. He began school studying psychology. Not until time and curiosity beguiled him away did Gourley discover his passion for advertising.

“I had taken a night job at school doing a variety of small office tasks and quickly found my skill in producing marketing materials,” he says of his first job.

But office work wasn’t his niche, and soon Gourley began dabbling in marketing communications.

“I ended up growing a whole department in the company and decided to leave psychology to work in graphic design full-time.”

Designing was now in his blood. He moved to San Francisco, snagged a job as a designer at a marketing service bureau, and “from there...started doing traditional art direction for print.” But then something else in the advertising world sparked his attention — the arrival of the Internet in 1996. He was captured by it. So much so that he quit his current job as a traditional advertiser and focused entirely on online advertising.

Next, Gourley jumped from agency to agency until finally, more than 10 years later, and after a stint at Young & Rubicam as its interactive creative director, he pioneered

out on his own and in 2007 opened online advertising agency Mojave Interactive.

“I saw a shift in the industry towards more

**Q. What do you do for fun?**

**A.** I enjoy cycling, boxing, running, surfing, and playing with my dog. I also have a coral reef aquarium and koi pond that I spend time with.

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

**A.** As a kid, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. I wanted to be an archaeologist until I realized they spend most of their day sweeping a one-inch square section of dirt, not running through temples with a golden idol like in the movie.

**Q. What was the last book you read?**

**A.** *The World Without Us* by Alan Weisman.

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

**A.** I’ve been listening to *Ear Drum* by Talib Kweli as well as *The Complete Blue Note Recordings* from Thelonious Monk. I also listen to the webcast of *Morning Becomes Eclectic* with Nic Harcourt on KCRW almost daily.

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

**A.** Probably working. But I’d rather be snowboarding.

engaging advertising and wanted to start a small, nimble company to capture the momentum and help clients in this new space,” admits Gourley. And that he did, with Mojave Interactive.

“At Mojave, we believe ‘interactive’ means much more than just online,” says the company’s website. “We’re passionate about turning strangers into customers. About turning the uninspired into the engrossed. About making passive, jaded, uninterested people totally engaged with the experience.” Typical? I think not.

Today, Gourley resides as Mojave’s creative director, in which capacity he “oversee[s] all strategic communications, brand development, and art direction for [their] clients.”

And clients are who Gourley is passionate about. He relishes not only relating to clients but also helping them solve their problems.

“I love the feeling of cracking a tough marketing challenge,” he says. “It’s a win-win situation when both the client is happy and the customer responds favorably to your work as well.”

“As far as challenges, it’s the flip side of the same coin,” Gourley continues. “I have to work until I feel like I’ve cracked the idea.

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I won't settle for mediocre concepts, and that can mean late nights brainstorming or throwing out ideas that don't make the grade."

And like all creatives, Gourley knows creativity can't be forced.

"It...takes work to stay out of meetings all day so that I can schedule brainstorming and creative time to take on the creative challenges."

But it's in that time away, secluded from the rest of the world, that imagination and creativity flow best. His lengthy list of well-known clients, after all, proves that his methods work.

Take a look:

"I've had a variety of clients from Microsoft to HBO to Dr Pepper. One of my highlights was being brought into Apple right after Steve Jobs rejoined the company. I was hired to create the [Apple.com](http://Apple.com) site, which has been redesigned several times but still contains many elements of my original design," says Gourley. "Right now we are working on a project for Whole Foods Market leading up to Earth Day. We are producing a series of online 'green' podcasts and some other

surprises I can't quite talk about yet."

"I'm proud of the work I've done for Dr Pepper and Sunkist," he continues, "just because we are able to push the visual design and fun factor with those brands. Some of my work that I'm most proud of is not necessarily from the largest clients. I'm proud of the campaign I created for Cadence. I created an interactive campaign that invited the user to give feedback, and it became one of the most successful marketing efforts in the company's history. I'm also proud of the ongoing video podcasts we are creating."

And interactive campaigns are what Gourley thrives on.

"Obviously, I'm a big fan of concepts that bring the customer into the mix," he admits. "I like campaigns that allow the user to share, remix, or talk about the message."

One company in particular that mastered this was Fanta with its campaign that invited viewers to create their own "Bollywood"-style movies.

"It was brilliant and a lot of fun to do," Gourley says. "I'm sure they had a ton of customers sending the videos to their friends."

TiVo, therefore, was easy for Gourley to embrace. In fact, the motive behind starting Mojave Interactive was "to respond to the shift in the industry."

"We've seen a steep decline in the response of 'interruption' advertising, and we focus on creating campaigns that engage or inspire the user to interact with the brand. This might be a branded, informative podcast, a video quiz show in a banner, or a viral community or online game. We are seeing that these tactics give a better return for your marketing dollar, and the customers are much more likely to pay attention to your message."

Anything but typical, Gourley offers this advice to young advertising professionals:

"Advertising can be a hard business to break into, with long hours and little respect at the beginning. Don't be afraid to share your ideas with your creative director or supervisor. I believe that good ideas can come from anywhere. Respect those around you as you move ahead in your career. Be honest to yourself and your clients. Never try to sell an idea because it's easy. Always try to push the work to make it better. Trust your instincts."

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