

ADVERTISING STAR



## In It for the Commercials: Roger Hurni

[By Robin Salisian]

For 23 years Roger Hurni has immersed himself in the advertising world. He thrives on creating groundbreaking ads, aiding clients in altering their businesses, understanding what interests an audience. So what does Hurni do for fun? “[Watch] TV on my TiVo, where I often skip the commercials.”

But don't worry. Hurni understands that the ubiquitous DVR device plays a purpose: to up the ante on the “quality of a great idea. Without that,” he says, “it's just noise.”

Luckily, Hurni knows how to *avoid* the noise. Time, creativity, and an ounce of “dumb luck” have taught Hurni exactly how — and it all began when he was 13.

“My stepfather's son was an art director with Exxon, and when I was 13 he saw some of my art and explained to me what things are like, should I want to pursue a career in graphic design.”

And Hurni did. He received his associate's degree in fine arts from Glendale Community College in 1985. But before graduating Hurni (the only student in the art program also working in the field) was asked by professors to lecture at neighboring community colleges.

“In the audience at one of them was an art director from Phillips-Ramsey. A few days later I got a call asking me to come in so they can see my portfolio. Two weeks later they offered me a job,” says Hurni.

But because the agency hired him at such a young age, Hurni never received his four-

year degree. There was no need. Seven and a half years later, he left Phillips-Ramsey when called away to work on a \$45 million Safeway account with McCann-Erickson, San Francisco, an event which Hurni credits

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

**A.** Many things. As I said above, I like to experience life, so what I do for fun is constantly changing. There was a time that marathons were what I did for fun. It's changed from tennis to skiing to traveling to some foreign land to reading or spending time in art museums. Fun can even mean sitting down and watching TV on my TiVo, where I often skip the commercials.

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

**A.** *Citizen Kane*. Orson Welles changed in one movie how we forever look at movies.

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

**A.** *Anthem* by Ayn Rand.

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

**A.** Bruce Springsteen's new album, *Magic*.

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

**A.** Spending it with my wife, Joanne.

to “dumb luck.” (Though talent might have played a part in there somewhere.)

Luck or not, Hurni set his mind on success and continues to achieve it. One success along the way was his acceptance into Chiat/Day's Carson-Roberts Creative Course.

“At the time,” he says, “they had a couple of hundred submissions for this 10-week concept development course and only took 15 art directors and 15 writers. That really changed me on how I thought about advertising and business communications.”

Another success came in 1998 when he and business partner David Anderson decided to leave their current agency after realizing their philosophies clashed with the agency's. And without any clients, Hurni and Anderson ventured out together to create Off Madison Ave (OMA).

“We [*did*] start out with VC. No, not venture capital. Visa cards — two to be exact,” explains Hurni. “But we soon found ourselves with several small clients and a staff of five after only one year of business. Personally, I think the cost savings that first year really helped us out. For instance, we worked out of my house, had folding tables and chairs as office furniture, and our wives wouldn't let us eat lunch out unless we had a coupon.”

## ADVERTISING STAR

And if it was coupons and folding office furniture that helped build Off Madison Ave, then thank *goodness* for that. After all, OMA grew from two guys in a living room to a team of 60 in a real Arizona office. However, some things remain unchanged. And those are the company's goals.

"Off Madison Ave is an integrated strategic communications agency...that provides services in advertising, public relations, media graphic design, strategy, and Internet marketing," says its [website](#). "When we had the idea of Off Madison Ave, many of our contemporaries told us that Phoenix did not need another agency. And we agreed. We set out to build an agency that solved the problems of its clients and not the kind of agency that sold ads to them. Eight years later, this is still the philosophy we stand behind."

Hurni proves this when asked to explain ad campaigns:

"With any client these days, it comes down to understanding each segment of their audience so well that you can develop the right communications channel specific to each. That means campaigns that appeal to everyone simply don't work as effectively

as tailoring each message and engaging the audience with a conversation and inviting them to participate in the brand's development and management."

At OMA Hurni acts as partner and creative director, "although," he states, "I just really describe myself as the guy who's in charge of pictures and words."

A day at the agency involves much more than pictures and words, however.

"I help strategic direction on certain accounts, creative direct others, and offer business consulting to a few more. I also like to check in with as many people as I can each day to see how things are going, field any issues that may have come up, and generally take a pulse on the workload."

And this ad star knows all about a full workload. Recently, Hurni was appointed to Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication Endowment Board of Trustees. And Hurni, along with the OMA team, participates in the community with organizations such as Libraries for Literacy, Boys & Girls Clubs, and the 100 Club of Arizona.

Along with the community, OMA serves a myriad of clients. From Nike to Allied Waste to the Phoenix Art Museum to Entrees Made Easy, OMA serves its clients well and serves its clients hard. And it shows. In 2007 the agency collected the Phoenix PRSA Copper Anvil Award, the IABC Copper Quill Award of Excellence, and numerous Addy Awards. Hurni, too, collected the Ad 2 Phoenix Ad Person of the Year Award, while OMA's vice presidents, Laura Hall and Paige Chadwick, were candidates for *Arizona Woman* magazine's "Arizona Woman of the Year."

"It would be easy to say that the ads I'm most proud of are the ones that made it to Cannes or won a Clio or any of the other awards they've garnered," says Hurni. "But truly, the ones that I like the best are the ones that change a client's business. Seeing the success of that is really something to be proud of."

And while Hurni may confess to skipping commercials on *occasion*, he also faithfully lives up to his successful career:

"Okay," he admits to his [Super Bowl personality](#), "I'm the guy who's 'in it for the commercials.'"

EmploymentCrossing is the largest collection of active jobs in the world.

We continuously monitor the hiring needs of more than 250,000 employers, including virtually every corporation and organization in the United States. We do not charge employers to post their jobs and we aggressively contact and investigate thousands of employers each day to learn of new positions. No one works harder than EmploymentCrossing.

Let EmploymentCrossing go to work for you.