

ADVERTISING STAR



## Brandon English: Copywriter for McKee Wallwork Cleveland

[By Robin Salisian]

“When I was in college, I tried out five different majors and wanted to make sure I got my degree in something I loved,” says Brandon English, copywriter for ad agency McKee Wallwork Cleveland. Kinesiology, psychology, accounting, religion, English. None, however, snagged his attention like writing did.

“[M]y cousin was in the marketing program, and one semester he asked me to check it out. So we took a copywriting class together. The class started off with an in-class creative writing assignment, and right away I was hooked.”

But “[I] never thought I could make money with it,” he admits.

Nonetheless, English graduated with his B.A. in Marketing along with an English minor from Brigham Young University. He later pursued his certification in copywriting from Brainco — The Minneapolis School of Advertising, Design and Interactive Studies.

During college, however, English worked seven years in mental hospitals to pay his way through BYU and ad school. Once he graduated, finding a job — even an unpaid internship — was a challenge; September 11th’s aftermath had hit the market hard.

“I continued working at the hospital while freelancing,” says English. “Most of my freelance work was with Propaganda in St. Louis and a tiny shop in Houston called 808 inc. Working with Propaganda was great because they’re great designers, so when I’d show my book around, everyone would ask me if I was an art director. I got as much feedback from people at places like

Carmichael and Fallon, and they said to keep working with Propaganda because it was great for my book.”

“After a few years a recruiter talked me into taking a job in South Dakota for an agency that claimed they wanted to ‘turn things around,’” he continues. “Now, I know that those words are much more commonly thrown around than accomplished. So after a short stint there, I went to work for a place called Adamson in St. Louis. Same thing — ‘We’re going to turn it around.’”

What finally “turned things around” for English was an article he wrote on Bart McKee.

“In my article I wrote how Bart’s [TalentZoo](#) article inspired me at my last job and how I put it on the wall as a representation of the type of person I wanted to work for. That being said, I never thought I’d actually work for Bart.”

But after being recruited by McKee, flown out to Albuquerque, and introduced to the agency’s people, English began to realize McKee might become his new boss.

“New Mexico’s an eclectic place with nice weather. The combination of those things enticed me. [But] the bottom line...was the work. I was familiar with Bart’s work at Sawyer Riley Compton, and seeing what they were doing here, I wanted to be a part of that.”

And part of it he is. For two years English has called McKee Wallwork Cleveland home. And for two years he’s resided as the ad agency’s copywriter. Located in New Mexico, MWC not only works hard to produce award-worthy campaigns, but it also plays hard to, well, have *fun*. Potlucks, costume parties, and haiku contests are only a few of the activities the employees participate in.

However, there *is* work too. And English’s responsibilities are numerous.

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

A. Play basketball, watch football, and play with my kids.

**Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?**

A. The Lemonheads.

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

A. *ESPN* magazine.

**Q. What is your favorite TV show?**

A. *The Office*.

**Q. Who are your role models?**

A. Jesus Christ and Gonzo.



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He tackles “every medium from traditional to ambient to viral to on-hold phone messages.” As far as a typical day goes, he says, “Because we’re a small shop, I get to work on business for all clients. We rotate our teams, and work is distributed according to availability, so a typical day consists of working on two or three different projects with different partners. We’re usually briefed on a project, do a little research online, and then start concepting right away. The partners are very flexible with how we work.”

“When we concept, we’ll go to coffee shops, restaurants, hotel lobbies, the park, home, or stay in the office,” he continues. “We mix it up to keep our minds fresh. When I’m writing, though, I just sit down and hammer on it. Once we have a solid stack of ideas, we go into the CD’s office, put them up on the wall, and critique them together. It’s a lot like ad school that way. Then we go back and refine the work and present it a second

time. Most of the time I’m either concepting, writing, or presenting.”

One of English’s favorite ads was a youth anti-smoking campaign called “Thank You for Not Sucking.”

“There’s no better feeling than when teens love your work — they’re so brutally honest. Helping some of them to think smoking is uncool and knowing that something we created could save a life — despite all our efforts to just have fun with it — is fulfilling,” he says.

Other ad tactics English finds intriguing are “the kind that integrate into people’s lives rather than interrupting them. A prime example is the ‘[I Love Bees](#)’ viral campaign for *Halo*.”

“I see the future of advertising heading the same direction it always has — towards

people’s heads,” English comments when asked about TiVo’s evasive presence. “No matter the medium or innovation, the work that sucks will head down the mental toilet, and the smarter work will stay in people’s heads.”

Thankfully, the latter is work English can take pride in. And thankfully for consumers everywhere, his passion for writing brought him to advertising. With five years of experience, English has this to offer young ad professionals:

“You must be a masochist. Otherwise, turn around and run. If you really want to be in this crazy business, tenacity will be your best asset. If you can handle having someone kill your ideas at will and turn right around and come back with something better again and again, you will succeed.”

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