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## Profile: Chad Rea

### What makes a copywriter go ecopop?

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[-By Eleftheria Parpis](#)



Chad Rea

Chad Rea used to be protective about his ideas. Now the 37-year-old former agency creative director gladly gives them away, sharing them on [ecopop.com](#), a site dedicated to the exchange of eco-friendly, socially responsible ideas.

"There is no shortage of ideas that end up nowhere but on people's hard drives," says Rea, a copywriter with more than a decade of agency experience. With too many ideas but not enough resources to execute them, Rea does the socially responsible thing. He shares them. "The fact is that

I'm putting them out there for somebody else to take. As long as it gets made and contributes to positive change, then that's a good thing," he says.

The site, a blog launched three months ago, is a colorful discussion about pop culture and environmentalism. Its color-coded, categorized posts include subjects such as "Your soaking in it: Don't act green. Be green. Act pop," "Making a business out of waste" and "Less is more. Why single-packaging sucks." Visitors are invited to add to the post with "Got a better idea?"

While there haven't been many reader contributions, Rea, who reports the site has about 1,000 subscribers, is patient and is trying to figure out how to increase participation as he works on the second iteration of the site. "Maybe people are stingy with their ideas just as we once were. Maybe we need to become a nonprofit before people feel more comfortable sharing with us," he considers. "Ecopop is a social experiment, so we're letting the market determine what works and what doesn't."

For now, ecopop.com is also a colorful calling card for ecopop, what Rea characterizes as "an idea factory designed to change the way we make and buy things for the better." The self-described "free-range punk" is working on a variety of projects that fall under that banner, including computer games, TV shows, a fashion accessory line and a Web 2.0 business. One eco-friendly product he made is for Do, a biodegradable water bottle filled with seeds, fertilizer and soil. "A Molotov cocktail of love," he says, that can be filled with water and thrown into urban environments.

Rea also found a way to make functional art out of trash, making a birdhouse out of discarded trade show booths for an art installation for the Audubon Society. "I found that after they build these monstrous trade show booths, they just throw them away," says Rea, who has done consulting work for the Alliance for Climate Protection and Live Earth. "Seems you can create a revenue stream out of that and do something with it before it ends up in a landfill," he says.

As the entrepreneur explains it, he had a "eureka moment" about his life's work while giving a speech at the Clio Awards in 2003 about "Project Hello," an initiative he created while leading his Los Angeles-based agency, 86 the Onions, to raise awareness about homelessness. Looking around the room at advertising's finest problem solvers, he says, he began thinking about industry-related initiatives in the social-responsibility arena and found there were fewer than expected. "If we all think of ourselves as creative problem solvers and focus some of that talent and energy on some of the problems that matter in this world, we might just solve them," says Rea, who is working with MTV International on a PSA for Switch.org, and with Fuel TV on corporate strategy and its sustainability efforts. "I've touched 130 brands in my career. I don't need to make another widget, but let's make one that creates positive change in the world."

After five years running 86 the Onions, a 12-employee shop that became known for its youth-marketing skills for clients such as Starbucks, Mountain Dew and Ethos, Rea, wanting to dedicate more of his time to personally fulfilling projects, shut down the agency and launched ecopop. "I felt I couldn't really do both. I couldn't have one foot in the gutter and one foot in the grass," says Rea, who found few eco brands were using the marketing methods common for mass brands. "Marketing brands

much like their mainstream competitors, that's the fastest way to global change," he says.

Rea's career epiphany took a lot of soul searching. In fact, he went to a career counselor to help him figure it out. He was so impressed with the change instilled in him, he began counseling others (createyourhappy.com). "Advertising is notorious for being a roller coaster of emotions. A lot of creative people specifically think that's part of the job hazard," he explains. "It's really not. It's really about trying to find your place, your whole, if you will."

Rea describes the process as "figuring out what your happy is." For now, ecopop is his. "It sounds cliched," he says, "but you create your own reality and anything you want to do, whether or not the job exists or whether it has been done before, you do it."

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