

## Internet Cool Kid Ryder Ripps Explains Why You Can't Let Clients Boss You Around

*THE NET ARTIST AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR ON HIS WORST JOBS, SOCIAL MEDIA'S DEHUMANIZING EFFECT, AND WHY BAD DESIGN MAKES US UNHAPPY.*



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Ryder Ripps is an artist, programmer, and creative director who the New York Times once called "the consummate Internet cool kid, as fluent in HTML and JavaScript as in the language of conceptual art."

His latest project is Times New Ramen, a hilarious gag font based on the noodle shapes in a bowl of ramen, but Ripps has a serious side too: as the creative director of OKFocus, Ripps has done work for Nike, Red Bull, Phillips, and more.

We caught up with the tongue-in-cheek yet passionate 28-year-old designer to talk about the cowardice of corporate America, the way social media is gradually turning us less human, why design is important, and Ripps's dream of totally redesigning Facebook to be a site you'd actually want to use.

### **What was the first thing you ever designed?**

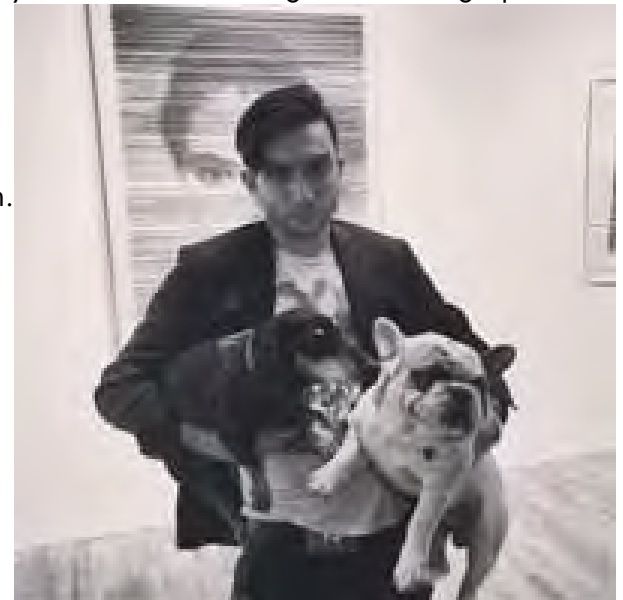
I started using Photoshop in 1996 when I was 10. I think my first "design job" that I took "very seriously" was an attempt to create a logo for my mom, Helene Verin's design company, 2C. (You can see it here.) My mom is also a designer, and her most popular design was the Keds Baseball shoe in the '90s, which they recently reissued. I also designed a lot of graphics for WaReZ groups and H4XOR stuff like that.

### **What is your daily work routine like?**

Feed the cows at 6 a.m. Tend to the grain by 8. Spend an hour on Instagram. Start fun work around 11 a.m. Brush up on Formula 1 racing around 7:30 p.m. Finish the day up over a couple cups of port around 9:50. Exhausting.

### **What is your biggest challenge as a designer?**

Jay-Z once did an AMA on Twitter. Someone asked: "What's the biggest entrepreneurial tip you've learned?" He responded: "Don't listen to anyone. Everybody is scared." Clients being scared is the biggest challenge. Convincing people to put out good work, not just safe work, is the biggest challenge I have I spend half of my time working on stuff that no one sees because of corporate America's inefficiency to innovate. There's just not enough incentive within large corporate structures to be different.





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### **What's your favorite thing you own?**

My cat Sally—she's sweet and cuddly. Other than that, my various collections. I collect promotional pharmaceutical objects (here, here, and here), as well as paper stock certificates of dot com companies that went out of business in the late '90s. Most recently, I have been collecting daguerreotypes, mostly from the 1860s, which are photos on metal that are totally unique, and have no negatives.

### **What is the worst job you've ever taken, and what did it teach you?**

The worst jobs I've taken are ones that don't pay well, doing work that I don't enjoy. I'll work for free (and often times have) if the project is cool/inspiring/innovative/socially challenging and the client is respectful. The worst jobs are the ones where clients hire you because you can do things they can't, and then they boss you around. If you hire a creative person who you believe is talented to make something, it's best to not interfere with them. Sit down, shut up, and let them fix your problem!

### **If you weren't a designer, what would you be, and why?**

Well, I also have an art practice, which is a huge aspect of who I am, so I'd probably be doing that. With my partner, Jules LaPlace, our company OKFocus gives me the ability to make the art that I want to make—not art for an imagined art market. All the while I can still apply my creative genius and skills for clients—which is much more rewarding than having to work a job that stunts creativity. I also believe most business owners are creative people—for instance I think opening a successful restaurant or minigolf course takes a great deal of creativity—so besides art, maybe I'd do one of those things.

### **What do you think the biggest challenge facing the world is that design can help solve?**

For me, good design relieves people's minds of subconscious problems that make us unhappy. For instance, a really ugly and dysfunctional faucet drips all day and makes you say "ew" every time you see it. It's taking up up space in your brain that shouldn't be occupied by faucets. A dysfunctional health care website wastes people's time and the frustration from using it makes people less bearable to deal with in real life. These are the types of issues design can address in a very real way. Yet the biggest real challenges in the world are probably climate change, nuclear war, poverty, and laziness caused by vanity. These are challenges that design should ultimately be addressing but I'm just not sure how.

### **If you had an unlimited budget to design one thing, what would it be?**

An unlimited energy source with zero environmental impact would probably be most useful thing for the world to be honest. Besides that, I guess a really cool handbag?

### **If you could rebrand any company, which would it be, and how would you do it?**

Assuming this isn't like a real client-like job (LOL), I would probably rebrand Facebook to be just a web host where its users would be forced to learn HTML and create web pages from scratch because I think it would be pretty interesting to see what would happen. If this was a real client job, the answer would still be the same, but I'd try to make the Facebook website simpler, more functional and with a more innovative model than their current feed. For example, I want Facebook to connect me with people I don't know but should, not people who I do know. To me that's the most powerful ability of the Internet.

### **What is the worst thing on the Internet?**

Laziness. Infinite information is at everyone's fingertips and yet content's quality and modes of communication are regressing. The problem with the Internet today is the gamification of the feed. We spend most of our time on the Internet playing a game and not realizing it. The reward systems of social media are ruining society by gamifying interactions: in other words, by rewarding the fastest, most binary, easiest to understand interactions. We are becoming a society of clueless finger-pointing, one liners, our emotions deduced to emojis and incessant obsession with self. The worst thing about the Internet is the dehumanizing effect of rendering us all as media.