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Q&A With Jay Coogan

MCAD president has advice for business.

BY STEVEN SCHUSSLER

JAY COOGAN IS NOT YOUR RUN-OF-THE-MILL college president. The business of running a college is challenging and competitive. Time management becomes just as important as daily administration. Coogan has become a master at dividing his time among securing funding, keeping faculty, students and the board of trustees energized as well as running an academic powerhouse for art and design students. Coogan is consistently meeting with donors, entrepreneurs and soliciting new and innovative projects as well as carrying the public relations message for the Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD). He thinks outside the box; he is a great example of a master juggler and multi-tasker.

Q: In July 2009 you moved to the Midwest to be president of MCAD. What did you know about Minneapolis and MCAD before you accepted the job?

Jay Coogan: Nationally, MCAD is a well-regarded four-year, non-profit college with extraordinary facilities and a rigorous curriculum. I'd visited the campus previously—an arts campus in South Minneapolis shared with the MIA and the Children's Theater Co.—and was impressed. Minneapolis has a reputation of being a culturally rich city, but I hadn't gotten around to experience it.

Q: The Twin Cities is one of the nation's hubs of advertising and design talent. What is MCAD's role in that?

JC: The college was founded in 1886—125 years ago—we're very tightly connected to the community. Our graduates often start as freelancers and, over time, build strong advertising and design businesses.

Q: The economy seems to be slowly recovering. How do MCAD grads fare in difficult economic times?

JC: Very well. Artists and designers are innovators and entrepreneurs. Through regular group critiques during their college years, our graduates are creative and resilient. Companies looking for ways to thrive in a difficult economy should hire people with professional training in art and design.



Q: Several Minnesota businesses differentiate their products or services with design. Why bother packaging a product or dressing up a service in this way?

JC: Corporations have found design to be profitable. Very profitable. The margin on a well-designed product or service is often 10 times larger than the margin on a commoditized product. MCAD grads know intuitively how to take a commodity and sell it based on a rich user experience, and several of them have senior creative and design posts with area companies.

Q: MCAD has more than 700 undergraduate students and 40 master's students. What other programs does the college offer?

JC: Business professionals will be most interested in our post-graduate certificate programs in graphic design, sustainable design and interactive design and marketing. The sustainable design and interactive design and marketing certificates are offered entirely online in order to accommodate a busy schedule. Professional certifications are a great way for business people to enhance their skills and qualifications when they may not have time or interest in a master's program.

Q: What is your biggest business success? Your biggest regret?

JC: While at RISD (Rhode Island School of Design), I led the development of a new interdisciplinary facility, the Center for Integrative Technologies, to provide studio space for graduate students and helped to secure several million dollars in external funding for the project. I'm not one to hold on to regrets.

« Steven Schussler (steven@schusslercreative.com) is the founder, chairman and CEO of Schussler Creative, Inc., which specializes in creating, designing and developing theatrical attractions, restaurants, retail stores and entertainment venues worldwide. He is also the author of the book, *It's a Jungle in There - Inspiring Lessons, Hard-Won Insights, and Other Acts of Entrepreneurial Daring*.