

**2014 AIGA Medalist:
Dana Arnett**

Recognition
2014 AIGA Medal
Born
1960, Morton Illinois

By Emily Potts
September 08, 2014

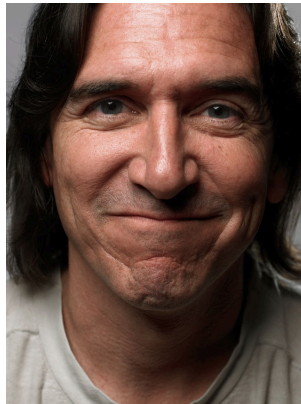


Recognized for setting the highest standards for communicating corporate interests and championing design as a strategic, multidisciplinary function for both firm and client.

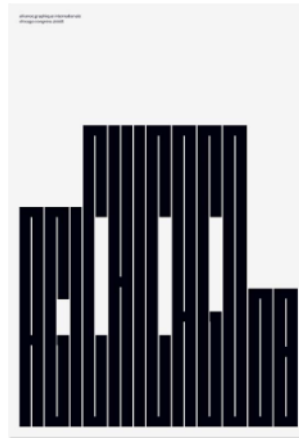
Dana Arnett grew up in a Midwestern town that, like his own identity, was defined as much by its modesty as its wide open expanses. As a child, he loved to draw and paint, and he vividly remembers the first time he saw “commercial art,” in the pages of Communication Arts at a local art-supply store. He soon became enthralled with the work of Paul Rand, Bart Forbes, Saul Bass and legendary ad man Helmut Krone.



Chicago Board of Trade Annual Report 1993 (spread), 1993 Client: Chicago Board of Trade; Design firm: VSA Partners; Additional credits: Dana Arnett, Curt Schreiber



Dana Arnett (Photo: Mark Smalling/VSA Partners)



2008 Alliance Graphique Internationale Chicago Congress poster (invitation), 2008 Client: Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI); Design firm: VSA Partners; Additional credits: Dana Arnett, Jackson Cavanaugh



Chicago 2016 “Stir the Soul” poster, 2008 Client: City of Chicago 2016; Design firm: VSA Partners; Additional credits: Dana Arnett, Jamie Koval, Dan Knuckey

After high school, Arnett headed to Northern Illinois University to study visual communications. In his sophomore year, he was asked to leave the program after the faculty rejected his portfolio, taking issue with his contrarian view and love for experimentation. A week later, a group of esteemed designers from Chicago awarded his work best of show in the university’s student design competition. By then, Arnett had already declared a new interdisciplinary major, “comprehensive design.” In retrospect, he admits this was a blessing in disguise: The more expansive degree allowed him to take risks and develop a broader approach to design, something that would pay off years later.

At a campus lecture the following year, Arnett had his first fortuitous encounter with visionary design entrepreneur and strategist Robert (Bob) Vogele. It was the beginning of what Arnett has described as “a three- or four-year conversation that Bob was open to having whenever I was in Chicago.” Through these encounters, Vogele recognized untapped passion and leadership qualities in the young Arnett, so when he conceived the idea of a next-generation design agency during the early 1980s, he brought Arnett in to help create and lead the now-venerable VSA Partners.

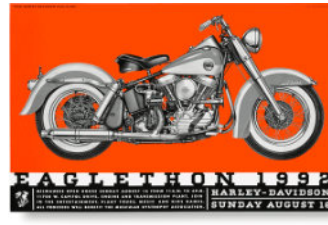
In the early years, designing annual reports was bread-and-butter work, and the Chicago-based VSA was leading the pack. “That work challenged every skill Dana hungered for as a designer, addressing investor interests, creating the right brand expression and interacting directly with the CEO,” Vogele recalls. VSA, with Arnett as its art director and emerging leader, was not only winning awards for its annual-report designs, but also gaining recognition as an agency of innovative design thinkers.



Ben Day film poster, 2000 Client: Potlatch; Design firm: VSA Partners; Additional credits: Dana Arnett, Curt Schreiber



H-D1™ brochure, 2011 Client: Harley-Davidson; Design firm: VSA Partners; Additional credits: Dana Arnett, Dan Knuckey



Eaglethon 1992 poster, 1992 Client: Harley-Davidson; Design firm: VSA Partners; Additional credits: Dana Arnett, Curt Schreiber



Playboy MBF Foundation logo, 1995 Client: Playboy; Design firm: VSA Partners; Additional credits: Dana Arnett, Melissa Keller

Arnett harnessed and drove Vogele's business vision, which for its day was revolutionary—making design a strategic, multidisciplinary function for both the firm and the clients it served. VSA began leveraging its expertise in research, writing and business strategy to sustain long-term relationships with blue-chip companies like IBM, which has been with the firm since 1993.

Today, VSA Partners has evolved into a leading brand agency with a broad spectrum of capabilities—consumer and B2B branding, product and service development, end-to-end digital development and a strategy practice that includes data science and predictive modeling. Under Arnett's leadership, the VSA team—now 300 associates—continues to leverage design as a key driver of business success for clients such as Kraft and Google. Perhaps it's only natural that as the CEO, Arnett, like Vogele before him, now devotes as much time to designing the organization as designing work for clients. As Arnett says, "The trick is building a human-capital business where people can thrive, not just survive." History would lead us to believe that VSA will evolve and thrive long after he walks away.

Arnett is a member of the Alliance Graphique Internationale and a former adjunct professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He has served on the boards of both AIGA (2001–2004) and the Society of Typographic Arts, and he is currently on the board of the Architecture and Design Society at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Dana Arnett will be presented with the AIGA Medal at The AIGA Centennial Gala on April 25, 2014, in New York City.

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