



## **About Sean Cohen**

(creative director, longwinded, fidgety, mammal, in a love/hate affair with complexity)

[Cardamom's Portfolio](#)

[Sean's Resume](#)

[Portfolio](#)

It isn't crazy to want to know more about someone you will work with, so here is too much about me.

### **What I do:**

As a Creative Director I help our companies and brands have better conversations, and understand their present and future by telling stories that dig into – and occasionally uncover – the why, how, and what-ifs of hospitality.

I focus a lot on hospitality:

Hospitality as an industry has depths of emotional intelligence and customer empathy, enormous business-structure dexterity, and marketing/distribution acumen... but occasionally lacks digital sophistication or network-scale muscles. There are important stories that need telling, and weaving the tech into the business narrative is vital still-to-be-told storytelling.

What if there were tools to welcome everyone and treat them well at affordable, scalable costs, and with all the warmth and humanity you and I might show each other? What would that world look like, feel like – how would it operate? That world is coming soon to a hotel near you.

## **My CV in brief:**

I've been doing this whole creative-director thing for about 20 years. Ten years in agency, ten years in hospitality tech. Most recently I was creative director at the hotel tech company [Actabl](#). Prior to Actabl, I was creative director at the hotel operations solution ALICE, and before that, Global Creative Director at TravelClick Amadeus, – here's a dump of neuron-stunting jargon – “A global provider of cloud-based and data-driven solutions for hotels that maximize revenue”. Before that, I was a creative director at several now-defunct small and large agencies and a co-creative director/co-founder at [idfive](#).

## **Outcomes:**

I build long-term stories that substantially increase the sales and valuation of companies. I have proof of this.

I am a high-output, hands-on branding and communications creative director. I lead teams that make LOTS of stuff that moves a conversation forward. Sometimes, the voluminous output is consistent and repetitive; at times, it rhymes and takes varied forms. After some time as the creative lead for what felt like a billion eCommerce hotel websites, I became a SaaS-oriented B2B creative. Together, we transformed our puny little 300 million distribution-heavy TravelClick into the data behemoth sold to

Amadeus in 2018 for 1.5 billion. I helped take ALICE, valued at 30 million in 2018 with a partial Expedia ownership - to a private equity deal of 120 million sold to Alpine's ASG fund 3 years later. We merged with three other acquisitions, and most recently I was the creative director at Actabl, which is growing at about 18-20% a year. Mostly these days I spend with my Cardamom clients, who are all repeat customers and all seem to want a piece of me.

**What I add to the day-to-day:**

- I add propulsion to every conversation
- I am curious, I ask why
- I find, and seek, out things that should no longer matter, and I try to get rid of them. This frees up the conversation tremendously.
- I offer to help co-workers before they ask
- I enjoy, insert, and value moments of silliness
- I LOVE and celebrate and cherish good work from my peers
- I help find other great employees to join the team
- I cut costs by suggesting - frequently - that we consider a cheaper and more homespun alternative.
- I increase costs - frequently - by suggesting we do something odd or outrageous.
- I reorganize my favorite bookshelf whenever possible. Currently, it is color-coded by spine, which is irrational but works.
- I've started a club

- I tell jokes at no one's expense
- I smile a lot.

### **(more?) About me:**

When not waist-deep in some sort of incomprehensible data or pushing pixels I attempt to corral three high-octane children and beg my wife to turn a blind eye to their latest batch of preposterous misconduct.

My favorite color is ice cream. My biggest childhood regret is that I didn't grow up bioluminescent. I have a nomadic curiosity, I am dreadfully hard on systems and first drafts while gentle on people. I like the hell out of business. I alternatively adore & suspect tech of trying to make me happy.

### **Process**

I protect optionality as long and as far into the project timeline as otherwise, sane colleagues will permit, and I have an incurable optimistic streak. People have accused me of being chipper, fun-loving, and "a damned bouquet of effing sunshine."

I am in a torrid love affair with hospitality. In the "if you have a hammer, every screw looks like a nail" theory of lucid thought, I suspect all businesses have a nugget or two

to glean from hospitality: a bit more intimacy at scale, or a down-home dose of "welcome, sit here at my table while we break bread." Hospitality has a ton to teach every other industry.

My process is collaborative, iterative, barely harnessed chaos, and – at times, but not always – quite fun. Odd fact: Salespeople are fun, while marketing people are somehow less fun, even if they are funnier (and in this, I include myself).

### **Learn-it-all**

I am not a know-it-all, I am a *learn-it-all*.

The paint on my brush is data – and a good set of numbers is like wearing glasses, data helps you see more clearly and pushes you to tangibly envision stuff you wouldn't otherwise acknowledge or sense. What are the facts? Can you quantify that? Does the map meet reality, where don't they align? What can't you prove with numbers? Can you prove you love someone or something? By what metric? That is always so illuminating.

### **Writing IS Drawing IS Speaking IS Designing**

I have always longed for more than just words. Your favorite poem is fragrant, evocative, and bursting with explosive thoughts, but your average internet paragraph isn't more than a dry aimless stroll down a dull, dusty, street. And the next business paragraph you happen upon would make that unswept street seem like a festival in Rio. So no, words, as I meet them daily and in their common neighborhood, don't do it for me.

Words're mushy and sometimes saccharine pleasant, often annoyingly repetitiously duplicative. They're subtle and subjective, noisy and rambling and flowery. Words are okay. Whatever.

I am not persuaded that our buyers read what we write anymore. Are we speaking in a language people can hear?

I like pictures, animation, events, parties, infographics, fast things, impact, documentaries, and speeches uttered from the heart – words with music, images with text, and movement with direction. I want drum beats signaling progress with harmony, an unignorable staccato that means opportunity, excitement, and business.

**I am ready to get ready**

Let's not waste time inflating credentials, throwing around exaggerated job titles, or feeding you a line of crap about how past experiences and skill sets align perfectly with your needs. Most companies require specifically tailored skills and a deeply knowledgeable situation-specific approach - I would need to gain that. I learn quickly and learn well, and I tell stories that people remember and that inspire pipeline and high conversions to sales.

Being a creative director isn't a real job - like where you make sober Decisions For Others in a big shiny building, or in a high-backed chair in the c-suite, or in pants. It is all about being curious, fearless or interested, or passionate enough to decide to say something or tell a story, and then having the strength to tell and defend the story through its birth and awkward years... and then being humble, introspective, and thoughtful enough to gauge its reception and iterate to improve the tale over time. You need to be able to listen when people share what your idea sparks in them. You might need to tell your tale 60 ways, in increasingly succinct forms, till you happen upon the headline or image that brings it all together... then you riff on that. Not so much duplicating the message, but dancing with it, rhyming with it, twisting it about so it can be seen from every side.

**Personal**

In addition to working in unhealthy amounts, I am also fun to work with (self-proclaimed but still true). I am married to a wonderful creative director, I have three kids in various states of chaotic awesomeness, and I live in Baltimore. I have a [small newsletter](#). I run an after-school program at the local elementary school called Critter Club. I spent some time at a [Scout Camp](#) this past summer and enjoyed the smelly dirty wet hell out of it.

The first, and sometimes the second – but rarely the third – pancake always stinks. Part of the job is to make pancakes and then to show or share the third or 23rd pancake. Add butter, blueberries, or chocolate chips, and try again.

### **Marketing is a conversation – enter fast and listen long**

I think marketing at its root is about the word “remarkable.”

Remarkable is just another way of saying this – whatever it is – is worth repeating.

It is worth making a remark, saying something about it.

If it isn't remarkable, it just ain't marketable.

Working at most companies is like being flocked by a hungry herd of wayward snails.

Executives are so slow they are terrifying. And they are anxious because, from their perspective, they are moving at a breakneck speed. There is a faster market about

them, swirling with opinions, conversation, and opportunities – and in most cases, it is happening around and without them. Most of these snails smell the wafting opportunities just out of reach, but their reluctance to risk having a conversation with the market means they aren't fast enough to catch up nor patient enough to stick their head in – listen – say a few words – and see what happens. This is marketing. Marketing is a conversation with flesh and blood people who need help making decisions.

Conversations take time. It is courteous to be fast. Fast to respond, fast to initiate, fast to put out a partial solution, fast to ask good questions, fast to tell the market who you are and why. Fast to start a conversation and engage. Fast to tell your truth, fast to ask for more time if you need it. Fast to get real or get out. Fast to be wrong. Fast to correct what was wrong. And it is wise to be patient with the people, the partners, and the conversations you've entered into.

I find myself slower right now than I want to be. Less patient with the conversations happening around me than I want to be. I am also less patient than I want to be – mostly with myself – and I guess I am looking for an environment, a company where there is a hunger to move fast and patience to build something great.