

Justin Ahrens

Co-Founder and Chief Evangelist



As Co-founder and Chief Evangelist of Rule29, Justin Ahrens lives the firm's philosophy of Making Creative Matter®.

Drawing from decades of creative experience, Justin leads Rule29 by diving into a business problem and designing a strategic, engaging solution. But he gets a bigger charge out of seeing the positive impact that solution can make – for the client and for the world.

Justin speaks the languages of both business and design, guiding Rule29's strategic and creative direction on every project. He fosters the collaborative approach that's at the heart of the firm's relationships with clients ranging from Fortune 100 brands to nonprofits to small start-up companies.

Throughout his career, Justin has upheld a commitment to give his time and talents to help his fellow creative professionals and support important social causes. He's served on the board of advisors for various groups, including the industry-leading HOW Design Conference and professional organization AIGA, where he served as a National Board Member helping lead the national perspective on social impact design. He regularly speaks at national and international design and business conferences about creative inspiration, leadership, culture, story, and design strategy at such conferences as the AIGA Design Conference, Design Thinkers, Adobe Max, Creative Mornings, HOW Live, Brand New, HOW Interactive, TEDx, and many others. In 2003, he was named by GD:USA as one of the leading "People to Watch" and in 2017 GD:USA named him as one of the "Responsible Designers To Watch" as someone leading the charge to use design and communications principles and skills to make the world a better place as he sees it. He occasionally serves as an adjunct design instructor and most recently has helped with senior- and graduate-level design and strategy classes at Notre Dame and Kent State University, where students and professionals work together to tackle social problems.

Justin is serving or has served as an advisor to the nonprofits Lifewater, Life In Abundance and EPIC (Engaging Philanthropy, Inspiring Creatives). His work with LIA and Lifewater has increased awareness and raised funds to aid people living in the urban and rural slums of sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. His most recent project has been raising awareness and funding for community water projects in Africa through Wheels4Water. In fact in 2017, Fast Company recognized the project as a world changing idea and invited Justin to share about Wheels4Water at the White House for President Obama's inaugural SXSL: a gathering of world changers to share ideas and impact to make the world a better place.

Justin has authored several books, including *Life Kerning* (Wiley), *The Best of Business Card Design 9* (Rockport) and *Urban & Rural Hope* (Life In Abundance International). For LinkedIn Learning, he is an author and leads courses about how to run your business and creative career. He is also a co-host of Rule29's podcast *Design Of*, where they explore story, people, and process. Leading publications and organizations such as HOW, Fast Company, *Communication Arts*, FPO, *Print*, AIGA, *Graphic Design USA*, and *Graphis* have featured Rule29's award-winning strategic creative work or has had Justin as a judge.

His passion for design is second only to his passion for being a partner to his wife, Sarah, and father to their four amazing kids (who think Dad's job is listening to hip-hop music, drawing pictures, and playing on the computer).



SAMPLE TALKS

Why Culture > Creative

In this session, Justin Ahrens explores why a company's culture is potentially the most important (and most elusive) element for success in the design industry. He shares how to go about fostering the kind of company culture that employees want to be a part of and that clients want to work with.

Seeing Different

As creatives, we are built to see the world differently than most. It's one of our unique, innovative traits. We all say we want to be a part of changing the world, but how do we actually accomplish this?

Experiencing Wonder

All good art possesses a bit of wonder. Design, however, often tells the viewer what to think rather than inviting them into an encounter with wonder.

Life Kerning

In graphic design, 'kerning' is the fine-tuning or adjustment of space between letterforms. Life Kerning applies this concept to both the lives and careers of business professionals.

OTHER TOPICS

- Branding Passion
- Good Is Good for Business
- Designer Sobriety
- Making Creative Matter
- Collaboration: The-Two Headed Monster
- Self-Promotion
- From College to Career
- Culture & Creativity
- Storytelling 101

SPEAKING

- Brand New Conference
- Adobe MAX Conference
- Creative Mornings
- AIGA National Conference
- AIGA Gain Conference
- HOW Design Conference
- HOW Interactive Conference
- RGD Design Thinkers
- TEDx
- STA Design Events
- AIGA Chapter Design Events
- ADFED & AMA Groups
- UCDA Conference
- Design Schools
- In-House Art Departments
- Marketing & Creative Groups
- Corporate Boards
- College & Universities