

Viceroy Creative CEO: How swagger, and weather, keep New York brands hot

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LOUIS SEIGAL

Viceroy CEO David Moritzco decided to pose nude for a photo spread that accompanied his company's rebranding announcement.

You may have heard, and seen, a lot about [Viceroy Creative](#).

That's because last year the New York design and marketing firm grabbed headlines when its CEO, [David Moritz](#), [posed nude for a photo spread](#) that accompanied Viceroy's rebranding announcement. Founded in 2008, the company used to do business as Mode Design Group. Since then, it has amassed a who's who of clientele, including YouTube, Sony, Starbucks, MTV and Playboy.

Type "Moritz" into Google, however, and the search results have more to do with how he, creative director [Gabrielle Rein](#) and account manager [Raegan Gillette](#) got in shape for their notorious campaign than anything else. But the New York Business Journal wanted to hear something different — what Moritz, 35, thinks of his city. Turns out, the Scarsdale resident had a lot to say

about N.Y.C.'s local business culture and what he enjoys doing during his down time — when he's not buck naked, of course.

What do you like most about the city?

The energy. When I first moved here as a freshman at New York University, my dorm was a converted apartment building on Union Square Park. Directly next door, The Coffee Shop still had a velvet rope, employed only models, and was this ironic exclusive restaurant cafe.

I had just arrived, walking down the street and I felt all this great, positive electricity in the air. I had a spring in my step — maybe a swagger. And I swore that I heard music, some kind of upbeat rock anthem. At first, it was faint and I wasn't sure if it was just in my head. Then, after a while, I was sure it was real but it stayed at the same low volume, as if walking by a venue playing music. The music was following me! I had a moment to think to myself, "Is there music pumped into the streets in New York City?" And then, finally, a guy walks by me with a boom box on his shoulders. He must have been behind me all along. This was 1999, so that must have been the last boom-box-on-the-shoulders, unless hipsters bring it back.

Anyway, I've tried to hold onto the feeling, and most people who've lived here know what I mean. This energy is the best part of the city, and there are so many manifestations of it — from resilience and optimism in the face of struggle, the entrepreneurial and creative spirit, the embrace of variety, the fun and authenticity. There's so much inspiration here.

What is it about N.Y.C. startups that set them apart?

It's not the perfect place for every conceivable business but, for many, it's the best or the only place to start. New Yorkers have their own style and that has to influence the personality and brand identity of a company that starts up

here. It's just going to have a different feel to it than Southern California or Seattle, or even London.

I could go on about the grit and determination of New Yorkers, and it's most certainly true. However, entrepreneurs generally need to be very determined with a lot of stamina to weather all kinds of adversity. Most people agree with me that the inclement weather of New York City is related to its productivity. We only have a week or two of really nice weather twice a year, and the rest of the time it's very cold or very hot in general. If the weather were nicer for longer periods of time, I'm not sure we'd be able to get as much done. It's hard to stay inside and concentrate on the few nice days we have. Maybe we'd take it for granted if it was nice all the time but, generally, I think the weather not drawing us outside and the nightlife staying open late helps people sit at their desk and get things done.

Do you have a favorite restaurant/coffee shop/location that you like to frequent?

One of my best friends from NYU now owns about a dozen venues in New York City, including Ainsworth and Hudson Terrace, so I like to go to his spots. When I was in college and law school, I actually owned a few bars with him and some other friends. We also know the EMM and Strategic Group people from way back, and they have some great places. My friends and I would often frequent their venues far too frequently. We also have an extensive whiskey library right in our office, which is a very relaxing spot.

But now that I find myself technically a mature adult with a two-year-old daughter, I'm in search for a nice relaxing place to frequent. I was recently made a member of The Explorer's Club, whose headquarters is on the Upper East Side. That's an interesting place to hang out. Every one of these organizations I mentioned is now a national or international institution — all started right here in New York City.

Were there any major lessons you learned about starting a company in New York?

I learned the power of the New York brand. I knew it would be hard, competitive, and risky but I learned so much. One unexpected benefit I found was the cache of being a New York company. We all know it's a global market now. When you think about starting a business in New York, if it's not going to be purely local forever, you'll find that you get a leg up being the New York company. There's so few unexpected boons and benefits for most entrepreneurs — it's usually just slogging away, even when things are good. So, for all the cost and competition of being here, you do get something very tangible and beneficial from it. You get to be a New York brand and that's one of the most powerful brands that you can be worldwide.

Is there one particular financial backer that you worked with that was especially helpful in getting Viceroy Creative launched and why?

I would have to give a shout out to our two first big clients, Pepsi and Patron. They weren't financial backers but, when we opened our doors for business, Pepsi was there with a ton of work for us and I can never forget that. Patron followed shortly after. They opened their arms to all our biggest ideas, which have paid off for everyone. I have to acknowledge TD Bank, which gave us our first line of credit and enabled us to launch.

One thing New York City startups should remember is that, while Manhattan may seem like its own world, you get proximity to a wealth of communities all around that would be major urban areas in their own right anywhere else. If you're looking for a bank loan, JP Morgan Chase headquarters might not be the right place for many startups. Try a Westchester regional branch — they might be happy to have your business. That's what we did and it worked out. Lastly, I have to acknowledge my other business that invested in Viceroy, [Society Awards](#), and my family who invested in that. It's an N.Y.C. family business.



Anthony Noto

Reporter

New York Business Journal