Commercial Success:
Director is making his mark with ads and other projects.

Chris Crutchfield ’06 didn’t know if it would work. He just knew he had to try.

Crutchfield enjoyed his part-time job at an Apple retail store in his hometown of Charlotte, N.C., and his video production business was starting to take off. But he felt like he could make his creative mark—as a director, editor, maybe even as an actor—in a larger setting. So, in 2010, he scraped together the few thousands of dollars he had, sold most of what he owned, packed what little was left into his Mini Cooper and drove to Los Angeles. “I really liked the idea of moving out with no sort of job in mind,” he says. “You only get one or two chances to make life-changing moves.”

Three years later, Crutchfield’s gamble has paid off. He has directed or edited dozens of commercials, music videos and countless other projects. He was part of a group that made a Doritos commercial as part of a national contest that ended up being aired during this year’s Super Bowl. For each of the past three years, Crutchfield has made the popular year-in-review “Zeitgeist” video for Google that features the people and events that showed up most frequently in online searches. He’s even been named an “Awesome Director” by a group of independent filmmakers.

Getting to this point required Crutchfield to learn some lessons about how the creative world works in Los Angeles. “I just relied on meeting people,” he says. “I had been told the importance of just becoming part of the city. To get work, it’s who you know.” Crutchfield also had to learn how to make each project more of a team effort. He had seen himself as a jack-of-all-trades, someone who could handle a project from start to finish. In addition to his video production skills, Crutchfield is an actor and musician. “I thought the more I could do myself, the better I looked,” he says. “[But] out here, they think you must be confused if you direct and edit.”

So Crutchfield mostly works as a director. He enjoys what he calls “the giant problem-solving game” of putting together a production and, while he can imagine directing feature films some day, he’s content to continue working on commercials and smaller projects for now. “Things have turned out better than I hoped,” he says. “I really didn’t make this move with any grandiose dreams. I just wanted to make it, to survive. I’m doing that and more.”

—Bill Krueger