A New Advertising Age:

Tim Allen ’99, ’02 MR helps companies become part of customers’ lives.

When Nike approached R/GA, an international advertising agency based in New York, to manage its interactive advertising effort for a new product three years ago, Nike executives told the agency to think big. That was not a problem for Tim Allen ’99, ’02 MR, vice president, executive creative director and global head of experience design at R/GA. He has many more ways, including extensive use of social media, to reach potential Nike customers than did his predecessors in the world of advertising.

While print advertisements or radio and television commercials were the only options in the 1960s Mad Men era of advertising, they are only a small part of how today’s advertisers win over customers. Allen aims to help his clients become part of their customers’ daily lives. “I enjoy the challenge and process of understanding people and then translating that knowledge into creative solutions,” he says. “It never gets old.”

In 2010, Nike approached R/GA with a new device called the Nike+ FuelBand that users wear on their wrists to track daily activity, like calories burned and steps taken. Allen’s team worked with Nike to design the “user experience” for the Nike+ FuelBand, determining how the device functions. They encouraged device wearers to share their experiences with their Facebook friends or Twitter followers.

“This type of interactive design goes a step beyond traditional advertising where we now let Nike become an integral part of people’s everyday lives,” says Allen.

Allen, who lives in Manhattan with his wife, Utawau, finds creative inspiration from his life in New York City. Despite traveling frequently for work, he teaches interactive design courses at the School of Visual Arts. Since childhood, Allen has enjoyed expressing himself through painting, but has found that his biggest creative outlet today is the work he does at R/GA for clients like Nike.

The Nike effort has been successful, winning dozens of awards, including AdWeek’s “Digital Campaign of the Decade.” At R/GA, Allen manages more than 100 user-experience designers for clients such as L’Oreal, MasterCard and Coca-Cola. “We try and look at all the ways a customer can interact with a brand and make them fit together to tell a story,” he says. “That’s the one area advertising hasn’t changed. We’re still trying to tell stories.” —Caroline Barnhill ’05