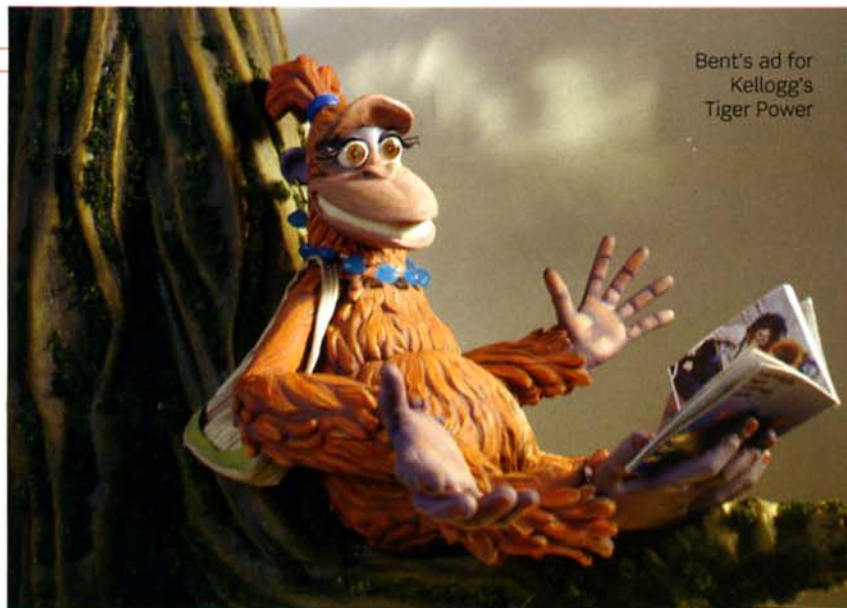


# ANIMATION

TELEVISION



## Bend It Like Bent Image

The two-year-old Portland-based studio mixes media and pays homage to fave classics with its witty toons.

Chances are if you're a regular TV watcher, you already have a clear notion of how creative and cool the folks at Bent Image Lab are. You might have noticed the Portland, Oregon-based shop's clever stop-motion ads for clients such as Ritz, Kellogg's, Klondike and Office Max. In December, you might have laughed your head off at their spot for Robert Smigel's *Saturday Night Live* (TV Funhouse) called "Santa and the States," in which Rudolph and company had to deal with the bitter divide between the Red and Blue states.

This month, the Bent team (led by Chel White, Ray Di Carlo and David Daniels) cranks it up a notch with a new commercial for Kellogg's Tiger Power cereal, which marks the first time famous ad icon Tony the Tiger has been retooled as a stop-motion character.

The colorful spot is a throwback to the old Aardman *Creature Comforts* short, in which zoo animals discuss the minutia of their lives. In "Tiger Power," ostrich, orangutan and giraffe mothers chat about the importance of protein, fiber and calcium in their offsprings' diets. Not surprisingly, the project's lively character designs were done by none other than the brilliant Peter de Sève (*Ice Age*, *Finding Nemo*).

"As a designer, de Sève fit the bill better than anybody else," says director David Daniels, whose pre-Bent credits include *Pee Wee's Playhouse*. "He



David Chel Ray

was somebody that we'd already referenced in our own bid work internally. Several of the strongest gags were drawn out by Peter during the character-design stage."

Creating a stop-motion version of Tony the Tiger certainly wasn't an easy task. "As an animated character, Tony has existed as 2D and as CG once or twice, but he's never been an object in the real photographic world," notes Daniels. "He's built on a series of spring coils which allow each section of his body to be individually manipulated, and it's a very unusual armature technique."

This multi-morphic Tony was made up of coils and paddles covered with quarter inches of clay. The big sculpting marks were

painted out and, Studio Artist was used to soften the bumps and give him a "perfect silicone look," according to Daniels. The ad's other animals were made of foam with computer-milled steel armatures, while Adobe After Effects and other CG plugins were used in post to create just the right look.

The right look has been something the Bent Image team takes quite seriously. "Never twice the same solution" is Chel White's favorite mantra, and it's been the running theme through their projects since they formed the company in 2003.

White, Daniels and Di Carlo realized that a sizable number of their talented artist and animator friends and colleagues were out of work. "We called one of our animators and found out that he was learning how to drive a taxi to support himself," recalls Di Carlo. "All these world-class animators were becoming cab drivers and janitors. That's when David, Chel and I got together and formed the company here in Portland, because none of us wanted to leave this city. We also extended an invitation to director Pascal Campion, who joined us from Hawaii."

The studio principals say they thrive on mixing media and all kinds of animation. "We can do CG, stop-motion, 2D spots and graphics," says White. "Basically, we love mixing things up and don't like to limit ourselves to a certain kind of animation, and we also do live action."

And what kind of advice would they offer fledgling toon aficionados who want to break into the business? "A lot of young people don't understand that there are always going to be people out there who are more talented than they are," says Daniels. "But the people with good work ethics are the ones who are going to succeed. It's true what they say about the business being about 90% perspiration." ■

To get a good feel for Bent's moments of inspiration and perspiration, visit [www.bentimagelab.com](http://www.bentimagelab.com).

