



Matt Miller, Contributor

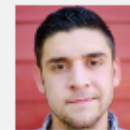
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How To Make Money Off The Animated GIF Comeback

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There are some striking similarities between the career of [Robert Downey Jr.](#) and the GIF. After the invention of the GIF file format in the late '80s, pixilated animated GIFs—those “under construction” signs and goofy flames—became a staple of the early Internet in the '90s.

When Web 2.0 rolled around these GIFs hit a rough patch—albeit with less drug use than Downey Jr.—, and in the early 2000s were replaced by embeddable video.

But in the past three years the animated GIF has made a comeback. A number of young bloggers and artists have found a new niche for the long forgotten GIF—it can bridge the gap between video and still photo.

It's within this niche that these flipbook-like, moving images have exploded in popularity thanks to sites like [Tumblr](#), [Reddit](#) and [4Chan](#).

Quickly, the medium is going viral on the web, and with this surge in popularity, many savvy professionals have discovered the animated GIF's value extends far beyond the meme world. It has a value for advertising, app development, page views and pure creative expression.



Animated GIF by Mr. GIF

I'm a 20-something culture, media and tech junkie writing about why the most advertised-to generation connects to Snooki's tan, parody Twitter accounts, torrenting music and attractive vampires. Like many young writers, my career consists of unpaid and (surprisingly) paid internships across the country. I've written news at the Greeley Tribune, reviewed concerts for the Denver Post Reverb section, I write for Metro Silicon Valley and [sv411.com](#). I grew up on social media and spent my childhood exploring the World Wide Web. Find me on [Twitter](#) or subscribe to me [on Facebook](#) or whatever else kids do these days.

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'Mad GIFs'

In search of new mediums to explore, artists and some notable major brands have teamed up to use the GIF resurgence as a chance to create some unique ways of marketing.

For artists the animated GIF is a format to experiment with movement in graphic design, photography, painting, drawing, etc. For brands the GIF is an appealing advertising method due to the eye-catching nature of the format along with its ability to convey a message quickly.

Pamela Reed and Matthew Rader, two [New York](#) artists who make up the duo [Reed+Rader](#), have been exclusively working in the digital world since their GIFs started getting noticed in 2008. They realized the limitations that print mediums have on fashion, art and advertising.

"The whole GIF thing for us really spearheaded this idea of taking advantage of the platform of the web," Rader said. "On the web you don't have to have still pictures like you do in the mediums we're familiar with like magazines... you just have paper."

Now they get commissioned by brands to create GIFs for advertising campaigns. Just last week they did a project for [Victoria's Secret](#) where they created animated GIFs using images of the models.



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This relationship works the same way any photographer or designer would sell the rights for a photo or logo to be published in a magazine or on a billboard, except it's through a file format that hasn't been popular for about a decade.

It's through commissioned work like this that Reed and Rader make a living.

Artists have a chance to experiment with a mostly uncharted form of art and

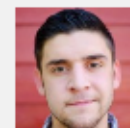


Animated GIF by Reed + Rader

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in turn can sell it to big brands like Victoria's Secret that are looking for innovative ways to engage customers, especially younger ones with whom the GIF is trending.

Jimmy Repeat and Mark Portillo, another pair of New York artists who run the [GIF Tumblr](#), [Mr. GIF](#), are also making money by creating content for big companies. Just in the last year they said the demand for animated GIF advertisements has exploded.

"People want something that looks cool," Repeat said. "Like a static JPEG, somebody could draw you a really cool picture, but if that picture moved it just makes it that much greater. The work that we make just has more of an impact than just a logo."

The two have created [GIFs for Anthony Bourdain](#) (a moving photo of the celebrity chef making a very Bourdain-esque hand gesture), Jimmy Fallon, MTV and worked with XXL magazine to [GIF Rick Ross](#).

"People are always going to need photos and logos for certain things, and especially now with GIFs being really hot, they want to take that extra step to make it a bit more special," Portillo said.

The GIF Virus

The animated GIF is kind of like a fun version of the flu—it's shared easily and it's shared fast, and just like medical companies that sell flu vaccinations, there's money to be made off the virus.

Both Reed + Rader and the guys of Mr. GIF got their starts after their animated GIFs went viral on the internet.

"We get most of our jobs just because our work is shared," Reed said. "All of a sudden we'll see it tweeted a few more times and then all of a sudden it's on 100 blogs because it's passed around. The next few weeks clients will start to

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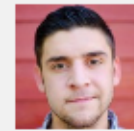
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They said the biggest thing about the GIF is how quickly it can be passed around, mostly due to the brevity of the content—a loop of about a few seconds—, and how simple the technology is.

“It’s a super simple, easily shareable format,” Rader said. “You can just click it and save it on your computer you don’t have to jump through hoops or dig through HTML code. It kind of just works.”

Through the sharability of the GIF, there’s a huge opportunity for both individuals and companies to get their image and their products seen not just by a ton of people quickly, but to leverage that virility in ways video and photo can’t quite match

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A photo is easy, but it has a lot of limitations. A video is complex, but it can say or do pretty much anything. The GIF though, it's pretty simple and it's fairly versatile.

[Patrick Davison](#), a Ph.D. student at NYU's Department of Media Culture and Communication who has worked with Know Your Meme, a website that researches and documents viral Internet culture, gave me a great example of the middle ground the GIF can cover.

Say there is a television show that has a Tumblr. Fans of the show or producers of the show can take clips and make animated GIFs to post onto the Tumblr account to engage audiences on the Internet.

"If you're making a television show there's only one thing you can do with it, which is watch it," Davison said. "If you can transform parts of the show into animated GIFs then all of a sudden there's little bits of it that you can do things with. That sort of particulation lets people who like that media engage with it in different ways."

For an example just look up the "[GIF](#)" tag on Tumblr, which the guys at Mr. GIF said is second only to the "LOL" tag in terms of popularity. A vast majority of the GIFs are looping clips from TV shows and movies. There's everything from clips of "The Colbert Report" to collages of images of Joseph Gordon-Levitt's head.

GIFs Going [Mobile](#) On Apps

Just as Instagram was the mobile response to the number of photographs getting shared on the web, developers are starting to create apps that give anyone with an iPhone or Android the ability to create an animated GIF through the phone's camera.

In the [Apple](#) App Store, [Cinemagram](#) and [GIFBoom](#), are listed in the top 50 free photography apps.

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These are just two of many apps that have popped up within the last year or so that give smartphone users the power to make moving photos.

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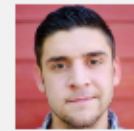
"We did our research and found that animated GIFs have become very popular on the Internet, especially among young people," said GIFBoom founder and CEO Tao Huang. "It's a very good medium for people to communicate."

Since GIFBoom launched about a year ago the app already has millions of users, Huang said.

While neither GIFBoom nor Cinemagram have started to seek revenue, both developers see the market as one that can be very profitable.

"We see it as an interesting market because a lot of people are starting to capture life and record life with this type of a medium," said Cinemagram

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founder and CEO Temo Chalasani. After it launched in mid-March, Chalasani said the app blew past one million users in six weeks.

He added that Cinemagram is already working with partners to monetize the app based off of advertising and sponsorship.

One app, [Cinegif](#), which launched in May, has already started generating revenue. Selling for 99 cents in the app store, Cinegif currently has more than 25,000 users.

The app's CEO, Graham McFarland, said this GIF market will continue to grow thanks to young people driving its popularity.

"We believe that the animated GIF trend will continue and build momentum as it enters the traditional business marketing and advertising industry," McFarland told me in an email. "What teens and artists started will certainly be visible in the near term in everyday e-mail marketing, website design, video teasers, social media and newsletters."

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