

/profile

# Brian Lee Elliott

Meet Brian Lee Elliott, the man whose web design output is bigger than that of most agencies! Having already produced See Windows Vista, the video showcase of Microsoft's new operating system, BLE Interactive is a one-man outfit that's on the up



## Brian Lee Elliott

Job Title Art director and Flash developer

Age 30

First Job Cleaning dormitories

Company BLE Interactive

[www.bleinteractive.com](http://www.bleinteractive.com)

**.net:** How did you get to be where you are now?

**BLE:** I went to college to study fine art, as commercial art wasn't very appealing to me at the time. However, deciding that I didn't want to starve, I came to my senses and enrolled in a graphic design program. In my third year, I got an internship at a burgeoning web firm and was enthralled with the potential of the internet. I decided to commit my career to it, which was a pretty drastic contrast to the painter I envisioned myself being! I went through the dotcom bubble and struggled in my early career to find my voice and style (and a job, at times), but within the last two to three years, I've been fairly happy with my direction.

**.net:** Why branch out on your own?

**BLE:** I was fortunate enough to have a great client who helped me transition from firm to freelance. I had been kicking the idea around for a while, but was afraid of not being able to drum up enough initial business to support myself. I found out pretty quickly that there's more work out there than I ever imagined, and my speciality was in demand.

I think freelancing can be a liberating experience, but it's not for the faint-hearted. I now have the freedom to take a vacation when I want, or run errands in the middle of the day without consulting the boss first. The downside, of course, is that you're responsible for running a business, which takes a lot of time. You have more invested in the outcome of your business, in its successes or failures.

**.net:** How do you attract your clients?

**BLE:** I just try to focus on doing the best work I can. From my experience, it's the key marketing tool a freelancer has at his or her disposal. Apart from my own website, I haven't done any marketing.

**.net:** You've had some pretty big projects. How do you do it all on your own?

**BLE:** I usually work with teams, though I'm almost always the lead for both design and Flash development. I've become used to working a 60-hour week – sometimes 80 hours. It's like juggling eggs: you just try to keep 'em all in the air at the same time, otherwise you've got a big mess on your hands. I try to temper the big projects with smaller ones, though, so I think that helps.

**.net:** What was the thinking behind your own site?

**BLE:** It was kind of serendipitous, I suppose. After kicking around dozens of ideas, I eventually started thinking of myself as a professional puzzle solver, which is a great shtick, because creative directors are my primary target client at the moment.

The technical challenge was in making the puzzle dynamic. I wanted to build it so I could add portfolio pieces using XML, and have the puzzle generate itself according to the number of images I throw at it. It's completely flexible, which helps me keep it updated.

**.net:** What's the most common problem, in your opinion, with the way in which most companies treat their websites?

**BLE:** I feel that many companies are afraid to take chances with their marketing. They fail to inject their own personalities, their unique perspective, into online marketing. I look at it as saying, "Hey, this is who I am and how I think. If you like who I am and how I think, we should work together!"

**.net:** You do interactive DVDs and videos, too. When do you get the time to sleep?

**BLE:** Sleep? Who needs it? To have some level of success, I guess you sacrifice other things. I used to have hobbies. Used to!

**.net:** What's the one thing you've still to achieve in design so you can say, "Yeah, I've done it all"?

**BLE:** There's so much I've yet to do. I'd like to do more experimental work for myself. I'd also love to have the opportunity to work on more kiosks and other environmentally specific interactive media projects. The prospect of designing for mobile devices intrigues me as well, especially with the advent of visionary new products like the iPhone. I felt there were too many limitations to designing for this new media in the past, but it seems like it's really coming into its own now.

**.net:** What motto do you live and work by?

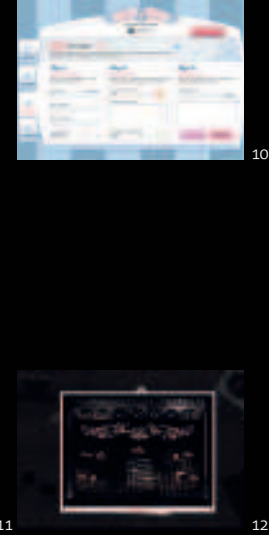
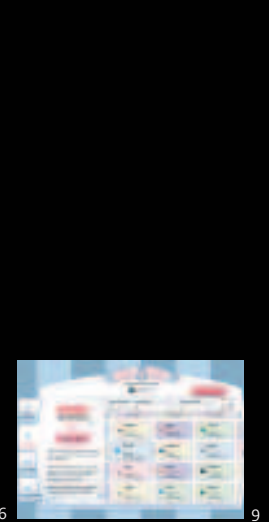
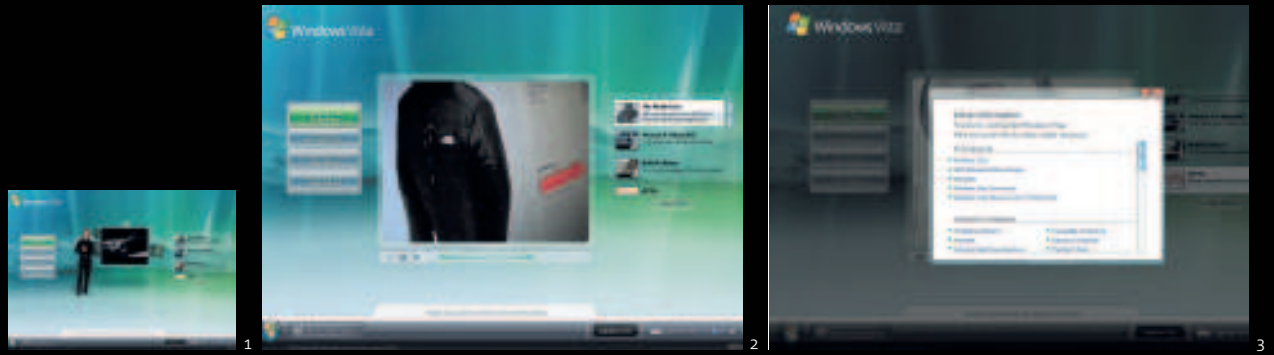
**BLE:** Ben Franklin said: "Well done is better than well said." I think that's brilliant. I know a lot of designers who talk a good game, but when it comes down to it, they don't have the drive to put in the work. Ambition is the natural companion of talent.

**.net:** What do you make of Yahoo Pipes, and are mashups something that you're interested in?

**BLE:** I haven't played around with Pipes very much, but the concept and interface is intriguing, I have to say. Seems to be another good example of how RIAs are being used to make the internet more interesting. I haven't personally worked on a mashup, but I have looked pretty closely at the Flickr Flash API, which is really quite robust. I hope to incorporate that in an upcoming project. ●

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(1-3) See Windows Vista ([www.seewindowsvista.com](http://www.seewindowsvista.com)) is a website that Seattle branding agency Worktank hired me to work on. It showcases the potential of the new Microsoft Vista operating system. The site's content is entirely video-driven, with the actor Tom Skerritt narrating. The blogosphere quickly caught wind of it and we received 70,000 hits within the first couple of days of its launch. It has received several awards, including Best in Class from

Interactive Media Awards and Web Marketing Association, among others. (4-6) Trace Lofts ([www.tracelofts.com](http://www.tracelofts.com)) is an extremely cool condo development project, taking place in Seattle's eclectic Capital Hill neighbourhood. The block that it sits on is literally being transformed because of it. The design relies on a collage-type style that's intended to speak to the designer/architect/creative professional demographic that the developer was targeting.

Design Elements Inc commissioned the project. (7-8) Decatur Condominiums ([www.liveatdecatur.com](http://www.liveatdecatur.com)) is another condo project, this time being developed in the First Hill neighbourhood of Seattle. The site relies on the wonderful photography of Charlie Schuck and the exquisite branding of Design Elements Inc, both of which successfully anchors its visual style. (9-10) Share A Wish ([shareawish.worktankseattle.com](http://shareawish.worktankseattle.com)) is an online application that enabled Worktank's

friends and clients to share their wishes for the 2006 New Year. Visitors to the site can write their wish, select an icon to accompany it, colour-code it, and then upload all this to a database for all to see. (11-12) TBLE Interactive ([www.bleinteractive.com](http://www.bleinteractive.com)) is my personal portfolio website. Its content is dynamically driven via XML. I enlisted Google Analytics to track user metrics, and in the first few weeks of its launch, it received more than 10,000 unique visits and had been

viewed in more than 100 countries – an amazing result. It has also received many Site of the Day awards, and has garnered a fair number of email inquiries regarding my work.

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