

Max Kryzhanovskiy

The True Journey

When Max Kryzhanovskiy moved to the U.S. from Ukraine at age eleven, he knew no English. Along with his parents, grandparents, great grandmother, and uncle, the small family of immigrants settled in Albany, New York, with no friends, family, or roots in the area. "My parents had always talked about how America is a land of opportunity where you can live your dream and achieve anything you set your mind to," he remembers. "It sounded so easy. I imagined I'd start a business and be a multimillionaire in the blink of an eye. Now, twenty years later, I'm living proof that, although it's not quite as simple as that, you can achieve anything you want here. Achieving success in America is a true journey, but it's one worth taking."

Now, Max is the cofounder, President, and CEO of MOS Creative, a full service creative and digital media agency that focuses on data analytics to build high quality user experience, mostly in the digital space. Since his first days in the country, learning the language from classmates at school and watching cartoons at home, his interpersonal skills have flourished into an understanding and mastery of expression so complete that, today, his success revolves around the power and nuance of communication.

In essence, MOS Creative is in the business of capturing and conveying emotion to help people understand and connect with the products and services of their clients. As much a science as an art, its work utilizes data and analytics of the various pieces of information that inform a consumer's buying decision. "Some people don't believe in the power of marketing, but we have so many channels for gathering information today and so many ways of reaching people, whether it's through smartphone devices, computers, TV, radio, or something else," Max points out. "Through the digital landscape, it's incredible how we can capture data and follow a sales process

from A to Z to increase the bottom line. Every step of the way, through granular data, we can see where people are coming from, what they're reading or downloading, and what they like or dislike."

Max and his team use this knowledge to nurture the consumer experience and serve better content, which might mean writing specific copy or designing specialized video and animation. "We aim to create the highest quality experience for the customers of our clients, but also for our clients themselves," he says. "We work hard to understand their needs and design a perfect fit product for each client."

Underlying Max's devotion to his work is a lifelong passion for sales that runs in his family. Though his mother had a background in nursing and his father worked in the taxi business, both began traveling to Poland, Bulgaria, and Turkey, where they would purchase goods cheaply and then bring them home to Odessa, Ukraine, to sell. "They really connected with the hustling mentality of Jews living in the city at that time," he remembers. "They were about buying low and selling high."

From his parents, Max learned the value of strong interpersonal skills, loyalty, honesty, transparency, and deep relationships. Their pursuit of sales brought out his own innate ability for the craft, and as a young boy, he would organize his friends and set up car wash stations to earn money. When his parents brought him unusual trinkets from their trips to other countries, he would sell them instead of collect them. "I always knew I wanted to be in business for myself, and I always loved sales," he recalls. "I understood how to talk to people and bring out the value of a product for others."

When it came to pastimes, Max enjoyed a happy childhood, developing a wide network of friends and reveling in the competitive nature of European soccer, field hockey, and track and field.



The world around him, however, was far from stable. As the Soviet war with Afghanistan came to a close in 1989, the government fell apart, giving way to mob violence and pervasive killing. "It was like the Wild West," Max says. "I remember in vivid detail the soldiers coming home in boxes and the funerals that were held in the entrances of buildings so people could come pay their respects. It was a crazy time."

Max's father had seen the success of Russians and Ukrainians who had immigrated to America in the early eighties and wanted that future for his family. As conditions in Ukraine worsened, Max's grandfather finally consented to leaving their homeland, and through a Jewish organization, some old friends from Odessa sponsored them to cross the Atlantic and settle in Albany.

In this new life, Max's mother worked in a restaurant and then as an office assistant. His father got a job at BJ's and then assembled furniture for Cheapo Depot. The language barrier was hard, and the once-talkative and social boy found himself cut off from his peers by the cultural and linguistic divide. He was ultimately expelled from school for defending himself from bullies through fighting, so the family decided to move south to Pikesville, Maryland.

Max's grandmother had always pushed him, reminding him that he was a smart boy and could ascend to that next level if he wanted to. Starting high school in a new town, and with the support of his close-knit family behind him, he began to make that ascent. His social nature was revived, and he immersed himself in sports and social life. "I made a really successful traveling team called the Thunder Football Club, which had state championships several years in a row," he recalls. "The dues weren't cheap, but my parents paid my way. In retrospect, I wish I had dedicated myself more to sports. I had the drive and athleticism, but my mind was on other things at the time."

One of those things was work. Max always had a job, whether it was selling reproductions of antiques, windows and siding, or knives. As members of a Jewish fraternity, he and his friends also got considerable experience throwing parties to raise money so they could travel to visit chapters in other cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. With the help of his parents, he began investing some of his savings in

real estate. His entrepreneurial ideas centered around technology and forecasted the social media boom that would later change the fabric of society so drastically. Meanwhile, his mother became an aesthetician, and his father purchased his own truck to make deliveries. The Kryzhanovskis were living the American Dream—a reality cemented when Max began his college studies at Towson University.

Max took courses toward a finance major that were supplemented by a job at Morgan Stanley. The experience, however, turned out to be everything he didn't want in a future career. "I was on the fixed income side, sitting in front of two computer screens all day comparing debits and credits," he remembers. "I wanted to be on the floor dealing with brokers and actual clients. I always knew I was a people person, but I didn't realize how important that was to me until they asked me to start training the temporary employees who were coming in. I realized that I get so much energy from working with other people that I don't even need coffee."

One of Max's college courses routinely invited business leaders from the community to come speak about their experiences. He'll never forget the day that Brian McCardy, the owner of a printing supply and document management company, came in and challenged the students to collect used laser toner cartridges from businesses and organizations around town. When the man said he'd pay between \$5 and \$85 per cartridge, a light bulb went off in Max's head. After class, Max went directly to the Towson Library to speak with the woman in charge of printing services. She had a room full of old toner cartridges she didn't know what to do with, so Max made arrangements to come pick them up and set up a recycling box there for incoming used cartridges. Max didn't have the contact information for Brian, but he quickly found other businesses willing to buy the used cartridges. With that, he began visiting businesses all around town, offering to pick up their used cartridges on a routine basis and pay them a cut of the money he made from their sale.

When he told his friends about his big idea, the only one who didn't write him off was Alex Kutsishin. The two decided to join forces and launch Maximum Refills, the earliest iteration of MOS Creative. After several successful months, they decided they wanted to start selling toner cartridges as well, generating profit on both ends

of the operation. They flipped through the Yellow Pages, found a company that might be interested, and went in for a meeting. When Brian McCarty himself happened to walk by the meeting room, the whole effort seemed almost divinely inspired. “We recognized each other immediately,” Max laughs. “He told me that running into me was one of the greatest things, because he saw that one of his presentations inspired someone to actually go out and build a business. It was unbelievable how it worked out.”

As the modest company began providing more services and reaching for new opportunities, Max and Alex changed the name to Maximum Office Solutions, or MOS. As the cofounders grew more entrepreneurial, they were offered the chance to run a nightclub, having spent their days in college hosting glamorous nights out that attracted good crowds. “That actually became a great marketing strategy for MOS, because people want to do business with people they like,” Max points out. “As people came to our nightclub and had a great time, they asked what we did during the day and wanted to support us that way as well.”

MOS continued to grow, adding creative services like business card, promotional material, and website design. The business became less about selling commodities, and more about identity creation for other companies. With that, two years after Maximum Refills was launched in 2007, the company came into itself as MOS Creative. “Our experiences in different industries really informed our awareness,” Max points out. “Our night club business was about building an experience, while our MOS Creative work became about building an experience through serving specific content. In marketing and advertising, the pretty stuff you see and experience is just the tip of the iceberg. I was intrigued by the data and details that drive creative.”

Always driven to press the entrepreneurial envelope, Alex suggested they begin pursuing the new and rapidly growing digital space. “We envisioned building a platform for easily designing mobile websites—kind of like the Godaddy model for creating mobile websites—and then scaling it,” Max recounts. “We built a system that worked well, so we decided to take it to market by creating a new company. At that point, we didn’t understand the difference between a service company and a product development company, which needs lots of capital for building,

testing marketing, PR, sales, and support.”

Eventually, the partners realized they were investing all their time and money into this new idea, diverting important resources away from MOS Creative. One of their clients became an investor, and then the CEO of the new company. Ultimately the CEO decided he wanted to keep the company’s software components but not the services like custom design and development, so MOS Creative acquired those aspects of the business. Then, toward the end of 2013, all three decided to go their separate ways professionally, leaving Max to lead MOS Creative toward its goal of building high-quality experiences across platforms and delivering content to desired profiles.

Now, Max works each day in the exhilarating environment of an industry that is evolving at an unbelievable pace, breaking down the silos that exist between platforms to create unified, compelling company analytics and identities. Working to bring their clients into the creative process in avant-garde ways, MOS Creative has its own green screen studio which they plan to rent out so people can start creating videos of their own with the help of the firm’s staff animator and videographer. “It’s all part of working with clients to develop a full solution,” he affirms. While companies between \$5 million and \$50 million are a perfect fit for MOS Creative, Max also loves working with startups. “It’s such a joy to help them build into something,” he says. “I love working with passionate people who love what they do.”

As a leader, Max has an open-minded philosophy. If someone comes into his office, he asks them to share with him what they think about it. What in the industry is being done well or could be done more efficiently or effectively? “Everyone has a good idea, so I encourage them to share,” he says. “I’m a hundred percent open to listening and changing direction. I’ve developed specific systems and processes on my own to see if they’ll work, but I embrace suggestions for change, because I don’t have all the answers.”

In advising young people entering the working world today, Max emphasizes the importance of networking. Identifying it as one of the greatest challenges young people face today, he points out that the advent of new technologies like smart phones and social media can create a barrier to developing strong interpersonal skills.

"It's crucial to know how to sell yourself," he affirms. "Start networking and learning how to talk to people. It's all about how you present yourself and communicate your vision."

This advice stems from a lifetime spent understanding the value of true communication and connection, and then bringing that value to others. Indeed, taken collectively, Max's journey is about learning new languages and mastering innovative ways of communication. It's a journey of throwing himself into new sports, new countries, new industries, and new ideas, living life not with fear, but with impassioned interest in the challenges and experiences that can make him a better person, and a better leader. It's a journey of the family that grounds him, just as it's a story of the new friends, partners, and relationships that open him to deeper connections and broader vision. It's the true journey—never easy, but always worth it.

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— By **Gordon J. Bernhardt, CPA, PFS, CFP®, AIF®**

About Gordon J. Bernhardt

President and founder of Bernhardt Wealth Management and author of Profiles in Success: Inspiration from Executive Leaders in the Washington D.C. Area, Gordon provides financial planning and wealth management services to affluent individuals, families and business-owners throughout the Washington, DC area. Since establishing his firm in 1994, he and his team have been focused on providing high-quality service and independent financial advice to help clients make informed decisions about their money. For more information, visit www.BernhardtWealth.com and [Gordon's Blog](#).



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