

## Bran Ferren

Technologist, Designer, Engineer, and Former President of Research and Development at Walt Disney Imagineering

Bran Ferren is the former president of research and development and creative technology for Walt Disney, as well as a designer and technologist working at the intersection of entertainment, product development, engineering, architecture, and the sciences. Once known for entertaining millions by creating special effects for Hollywood, theme parks, and Broadway, Ferren is now co-founder and Chief Creative Officer of Applied Minds, where he focuses on solving impossible technology challenges with previously unimaginable inventions. Named one of the “100 Most Creative People in Business” by *Fast Company*, he is exclusively represented by [Leading Authorities speakers bureau](#).

In speeches, Ferren details how technologies will transform experiences including storytelling and designing, as well as how to combine design and engineering to develop products that stand the test of time. Answering questions like, “Why should we care about this new technology?” and “What are these things going to do that are going to make our lives more valuable, more interesting, and better?” Coming from what he calls a “fundamentally different” perspective, as a storyteller, Ferren opens up new conversations and ideas about what technology means for the future of human interaction, work, and play. He also offers predictions about how he thinks technology will evolve and the problems and opportunities it will present.

After dropping out of MIT in 1970, Ferren became a designer and engineer for theater, touring rock bands, and movies, including *Altered States* and *Little Shop of Horrors*, before joining Disney as a lead Imagineer, then becoming president of R&D for the Walt Disney Company. His design career has included special visual effects, lighting and sound design for many Hollywood films, Broadway shows, World’s Fairs, Theme Park attractions and Rock & Roll tours. He has also designed exhibitions, special purpose vehicles, consumer products, and major architectural and interior projects. As a designer and technical consultant his clients have included General Motors, IBM, Warner Communications, The Walt Disney Company, Revo Sunglasses, Strand Lighting, Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin corporations. Ferren was also the first individual to patent the “pinch-to-zoom” technology made famous by Apple; the tech giant’s own patent on this technology was invalidated based on one of Ferren’s 2005 patents.

In 2000, Ferren and partner Danny Hillis left Disney to found Applied Minds, a playful design and invention firm dedicated to distilling game-changing inventions from an eclectic stew of the brightest creative minds culled from every imaginable discipline. He serves on several government science, technology and management advisory boards. Current and previously held positions include: National Security Agency Advisory Board, National Reconnaissance Office Technical Advisory Group, Defense Science Board, Army Science Board, Department of Homeland Security Technology Advisory Group, Chief of Naval Operations Executive Panel, FCC Technical Advisory Committee, Security and Exchange Commission Technical Advisory Group, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Technical Advisory Group, US Strategic Command Advisory Board, and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency Advisory Group.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences gave Ferren Technical Achievement Awards for the Computer-Controlled Lightning Effects System and Laser Synchro-Cue System, as well as the Scientific and Engineering Award for an Advanced Concept Optical Printer, used for special effects cinematography. He was nominated for an Oscar in 1987 for his work in *Little Shop of Horrors*. For his work in theatre, Bran received the New York Drama Desk, Los

Angeles Critics Circle and Maharam Foundation Awards. He was the recipient of the Wally Russell lifetime achievement award for lighting design, and the Kilby award for significant contributions to society.

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