

LIVING THE DREAM

Putting your
creativity
to work
[and getting paid]

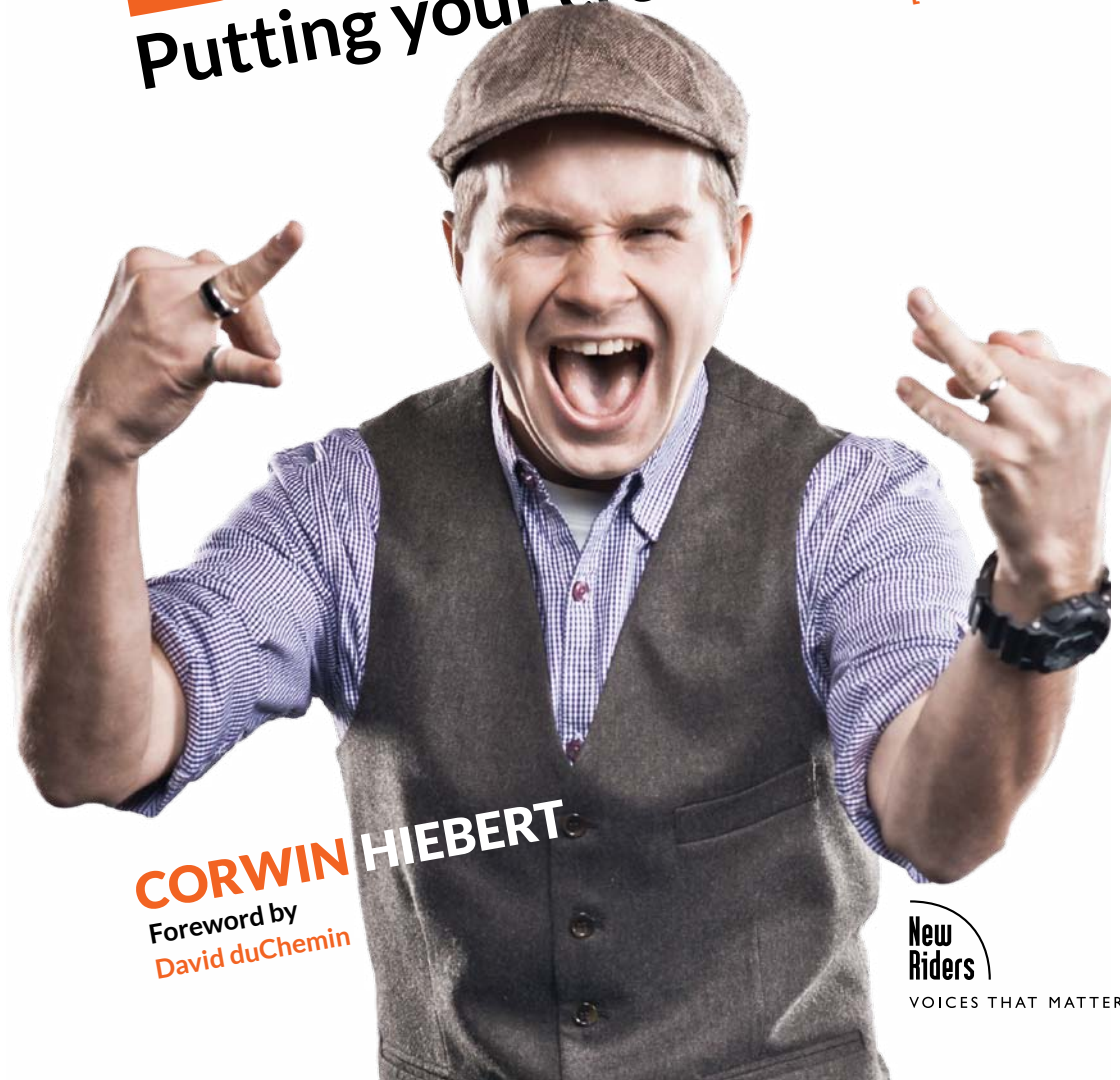


CORWIN HIEBERT

Foreword by
David duChemin

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[and getting paid]



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New
Riders

VOICES THAT MATTER™

Living the Dream: Putting your creativity to work (and getting paid)
Corwin Hiebert

New Riders

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*This book is dedicated to my wife, and best friend, Eileen.
Being connected to your creative spirit inspires me beyond words.*

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About the Cover David Vandas is an independent creative director/producer based in Vancouver, Canada. He's my friend as well as my client, and I'm inspired by his enthusiasm for the creative life, his friendship, and his commitment to inspire those around him.

Web: www.DavidVandas.com Twitter: @VandasCreative

Image credit: Dave Delnea

Foreword

Every time the nurses walked into my room they would ask the same question: “How are you doing?” I think it was a matter of habit. And every day I would answer the way I always do, without sarcasm or irony, but perhaps also out of habit: “Living the dream.”

They laughed every time. That I was lying in a bed from which I could not get up, with two shattered feet and a cracked pelvis, was, I think, what made them laugh. They thought I was kidding. I wasn’t. I was alive. Although they talked about me never walking the same again, I knew I’d walk and be able to do my work, and that was enough.

I am a photographer. I’m an author, an adventurer, a nomad, and an accidental entrepreneur. I make a living doing something I love: creation. I create photographs, books, eBooks, and—a couple of times—businesses.

I’m passionate and unashamed about the idea that doing business—and running a business—should be an act every bit as creative as the more artistic endeavors pursued by anyone reading this book. I can do my work—not my job, my *work*—from anywhere in the world. I’ve done it on all seven continents, in five-star hotels, and in remote areas of Africa so far from civilization you’d need to drive two days to find a road. And I’ve done it while lying in bed recovering from a 30-foot fall onto concrete in Pisa, Italy, in April 2011.

The work I do has introduced me to astonishing people, allowed me to collaborate with people who inspire me, and allowed me to follow my muse anywhere she asks me to go. That I have had this freedom is in large measure due to the man who wrote this book, my manager and my best friend, Corwin Hiebert.

My dream is to spend every day doing what I was made to do: my work. I want to make photographs where and when I choose, to write my books and blog from the places on this planet I’ve always wanted to experience. That’s my dream. So when I say I’m living the dream, I am doing so in every way.

Your dream might be different. And it will grow and evolve as you do. But for too long creatives have been told that the worlds of creativity and commerce are irreconcilable, that if you dream about doing your work, you should forget about making a living, as though making a life and making a living are incompatible. They aren’t. In fact it’s the so-called Creative Class that seems best equipped to do business at all; we have not only the mind to solve problems from new directions, but the disinclination to do things as they’ve always been done. We have a willingness—even a compulsion—to forge new directions. The late Steve Jobs comes to mind.

Of course, the problem with all this talk of “dreams” is that we continue to describe the life we long for—creating satisfying work on our own terms and not going bankrupt for the privilege—as though it is, in fact, a dream. It’s not. I mean, it’s not merely a dream, as though it were ephemeral, illusory, just a little out of reach. We just have to acknowledge this: It’s possible.

If you’re tempted to write me off as yet another lunatic preaching the too-familiar promises of laws of attraction and positive thinking, please don’t. Do I believe in thinking positively? Yes I do. But do I believe that to mean you get what you want simply because you want it badly enough? Not in the least. You want something badly enough, you’ll do what it takes to get it, and for most of us that means working harder than we’ve ever worked.

When I fell off the wall in Pisa, doctors told me I’d fractured both feet severely. My pelvis was cracked but it would heal. My feet, however, would require surgery, and I would never walk without a limp. As I write this I’ve limped my way onto another plane, my foot freshly stapled and looking like popular portrayals of Frankenstein’s monster after what should be the last surgery.

In August 2011 I spent a month in full-time residential physical rehabilitation. I was learning to walk again. Beside me were others learning to do the same. Some, like me, still had their legs, though scarred. Some were missing one leg and others missing both. The causes were many, but most of them were motor-cycles or road-side bombs in Afghanistan. I was the only idiot who fell off a wall.

Day by day, people cheered our positivity. But not one of us learned to walk in that gym by being happy, positive, or asking the universe for help. Those things might give us the courage to keep going, but it’s the keep-going that causes progress. Every day we stretched, we did little movements and small exercises. We did the mundane stuff and it didn’t feel like walking. It felt like work. And those little pieces added up and every day the walking got smoother, or stronger, or we gained another 100 meters of endurance.

Kittens and rainbows be damned; we did the work. We just showed up and did the work. And at the end of the day we took our pain meds and some of the guys wiped the blood from their stumps where the prosthetics were chafing, and we bitched a little. But we went back the next morning and did it again.

Thinking positively gave us the strength to go to the gym every day for another round of abuse. Laughing about it made it easier. But it was still work. And we did it because we all wanted one thing: to walk again. Sometimes we fell over. We picked ourselves—or each other—back up and tried again. A month after

I'd entered that place with a wheelchair, I walked out with a cane, got on a plane—still limping, but walking—and flew to Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand. A month after that I hobbled around Mexico and Honduras. A month after that I hobbled around Ushuaia, Argentina before getting on a boat to hobble around Antarctica. It wasn't happy thoughts; I just did the work.

If you think Corwin's book, *Living the Dream*, is about a secret formula or get-rich-quick scheme, or that your brief journey with this book will put you poolside at a luxury hotel while your bank account grows, then you'd be better served to put this book back on the shelf, save your money (you'll need it), and stroll a couple of aisles over to the Self-Help, or possibly the Psychiatric Disorders, section.

I've never worked so hard in all my life as I have since I started my business. But it's work I love. I don't want a life without work. Work, among other good things, gives life meaning. It fills our days with creation. People don't want to stop working; they want to start doing work they love, and stop doing work they loathe, work for others that drains their souls. But make no mistake: It's still work.

Not everyone who reads this book is going to make it. How's that for positive thinking? This book cannot sharpen your creativity; it can only make use of your creativity to the level you nurture and hone it. It cannot give you courage or eliminate the risk inherent to chasing your dreams. I went bankrupt chasing mine the first time.

This book can't even make you work hard; only you can decide how badly you want this and work as hard as it takes to make it happen. What this book can do—and I know because I'm one of the benches on which Corwin has hammered out the ideas and strategies he shares in this book—is give direction to that work, open your eyes to some of the blind spots, and help you take your Creative/Artist hat off for a while in order to think like an entrepreneur. This is what you must be until the day your rich patron pulls up in her silver Rolls Royce (don't hold your breath), you make your first million-dollar sale (really, stop holding your breath), or you win the lottery (breathe, dammit, you're turning blue.)

If your dream is just to do the work you love on your terms, to create something simply because you can't not do it, while all the other voices are telling you it's not practical, that it's career suicide, and if you know that you've got one kick at this life and there are beautiful, amazing, new things to create and experience, and you know that going to work would only get in the way of doing your work, then roll up your sleeves and get started.

► **David duChemin**

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Creative at Work Dave Delnea—a commercial photographer based in Vancouver, Canada—shooting in Iceland. His clients include Ritz-Carlton, Trump Development, Raffles Hotels and Resorts, Johnson & Johnson, lululemon athletica, and Mountain Equipment Co-op.
Web: www.davedelnea.com Twitter: [@davedelnea](https://twitter.com/davedelnea) Image credit: David duChemin

INTRODUCTION

A BUSINESS BOOK FOR CREATIVES

Whether you're considering starting a small business; doing freelance photography, design, video, or illustration; or you're in the early stages of running an independent venture, then this is a business book for you: the creative entrepreneur. You may not see yourself as an entrepreneur yet, but you are. The marketplace needs and wants your creative talent, and you're eager to strike out on your own, to attract clients and customers, and to make a work life for yourself that relies on your creativity.

Independence, freedom, and success happen over time. To enjoy these things you'll have to continue challenging the status quo and taking risks on a daily basis; making a living doing what you love is earned, not wished for. I'm guessing you have already discovered that. *Living the Dream* builds off that idea, that there's no place of arrival—it's a journey that is focused on being creative and getting paid.

The smartest guy I know is Dr. Ben Kadel (rhymes with “bottle”), a social psychologist and entrepreneur who specializes in the emotional dynamics of work. When it comes to pursuing a venture of any kind, he believes the task at hand is “to find the ‘sweet spot’—that point where your great joy meets the world's great need. You know that you're in your sweet spot when you are energized, focused, and ready to take on the next challenge. Consistently find your sweet spot and you will find the best in yourself. All great work involves a dialogue between your vision for the world as it could be and pushback from the reality of the way the world currently is.”

Putting your creativity to work means getting excited to contribute to the marketplace and becoming content with where you are in the process. If you're feeling challenged and excited, you're doing something right, and maybe the nagging voices in the back of your head should just take a hike. In this book I'll help you identify an attainable dream and put the right pieces in place to help you on your way.

What You Should Know About This Book

This book is a conversation starter, an idea generator, and a guide to help you discern for yourself what areas of your small business you need to focus on.

Format

I've divided the book into two sections: Managing Your Creative Business and Marketing Your Creative Business. There are, of course, common threads between the two areas, but I put management first for a reason: A well-managed business is more attractive and more worthy of promotion.

This is not a linear book. I talk about fitting into the culture of a client's business before I talk about the contract you've signed to get there. It's not a system that you should enact, or a blue pill you should take, and it certainly isn't a get-rich-quick scheme. This book is a bit like an à la carte business course for creatives: Take what you want and get to it. I've also chosen an interdisciplinary approach, never restricting my advice to, say, photographers or designers; good business is good business regardless of what creative industry you're in.

Stories

If you're like me, you don't learn very well from people you don't know. A talking head will never leave a lasting impression. So I've included short stories from my life, mostly my childhood, that should help you get to know me a little better—or at least make you laugh. These little snippets from my life experience describe the things that have shaped me, hurt me, scared me, or brought me closer to knowing who I am and what matters to me, and I hope the correlations I draw between the anecdotes and the chapters they introduce will connect for you.

Images

The images in this book, for the most part, feature independent artists and creative talent, or their creative work. The images highlight entrepreneurship, interesting ideas, and cool people. Sometimes they connect directly to the subject at hand, sometimes they don't. I hope you find them inspiring. Think of them as a fast-acting ointment, easing the pain of reading about a topic that stings, as I ask you repeatedly to take a hard look at yourself and your business and assess what you need to do better.

Business Advice

My primary goal with this book is to remove some of the mystery associated with starting and growing a creative business. The concepts, best practices, actionable ideas, and insights I provide should help steer vocational creatives so they can get started or inject new life into their ventures. Throughout the book I've featured inspiring and innovative people that provide context to the discussion or simply a welcome reprieve from all the talky-talk. I've also tapped on the shoulders of some pretty serious subject-matter experts, like lawyers, accountants, and consultants, to go a little deeper or provide some additional context.

Action Boxes

I hope the advice in this book will help you make the right decisions, or ask the right questions, as you continue on with the adventure of your small business. That is why I created action boxes. These action-oriented elements are formatted differently than the body of the chapter so that you can take special note of a supportive position by someone I trust, or consider how to move forward. They feature quotes, statements, questions, or tasks that you can use to take the next steps.

Twitter Handles

I've included web URLs of the people and tools I think you'll benefit from learning more about, and I've also dropped in Twitter aliases. I included these for two reasons:

- ▶ It's fun to connect with other people, and following them on Twitter is a simple way to do that.
- ▶ I wanted to prove that being creative and successful has nothing to do with how many Twitter followers you have. Many of the creatives I mention are quite unpopular (so am I).

Creatives Explained

By way of a disclaimer, I use the description “creatives” as a proper noun. By convention, it's a term that means “Those who display productive originality.” I'm working off a similar definition here. There are a few different interpretations of this (such as cultural creatives), but for the sake of this book, when I refer to “creatives” I'm picturing emerging or established artists who contribute to the economic workforce through their creative endeavors, such as photographers, designers, illustrators, bloggers, basket weavers, or candlestick makers. I talk about creatives and artists synonymously.

A Little About Me

In case you're wondering what it is I do for a living, legendary agent and film producer Jerry Weintraub explains it better than I can in his book *When I Stop Talking, You'll Know I'm Dead: Useful Stories from a Persuasive Man* (Twelve, 2010): "I take the pressure off. I handle the mundane concerns so that the [creative] can do what only he or she can do: perform, create." I am not an agent or representative (or a film producer); I'm a business manager—an action man. My clients are independent creative entrepreneurs who want to focus on what they do best. I take care of the rest.

As a creative entrepreneur, you crave to break free from the constraints of the modern workforce, be autonomous, happily pursue your creative enterprise, and make money while you're at it. I'm convinced that creative people can bridge the distance between their reality and their dreams one good business decision at a time.

Let's do this!

Corwin Hiebert
Vancouver, Canada

8

**GENERATING
DEMAND
FOR YOUR
SERVICES**

Marketing is a lot more than just being available to the market. By sharing fresh ideas, sharing your unique attributes and leadership, building a brand that's memorable and meaningful, and putting it into action, you'll draw a crowd instead of just standing out in one.



Creative Work Designed and crafted by Vancouver-born Kari Bergrud, Belvedere is a collection of gentlemen's accessories inspired by the 1950s with a dash of modern style for today's classy gent.

Web: www.belvederegents.com Twitter: @karibergrud Image credit: Zach Bullick

I was not a tough kid growing up, so as a young boy I survived the school playground not with muscle but with speed. When bigger boys would taunt me or try to make my existence miserable, I would either try to win them over with quick-witted charm or simply run away. One day in the fourth grade I responded with a third tactic: weaponry. I needed a more convincing method of getting what I wanted and, as an avid jackknife collector, I figured if I brandished a blade I'd be able to take charge of my own destiny.

The next altercation happened on the swing set and, instead of trying to make nice, I pulled out my knife, flipped open the blade, and said with a nervous voice, "It's my turn. Get off." The older, stronger boy jumped off and ran away. A couple of minutes later the monitoring teacher confronted me about the



Creative Work The Belvedere brand was created by Zach Bulick, a Canadian-Texan designer/illustrator from Vancouver, Canada.

Web: www.zachbulick.com Twitter: [@zachbulick](https://twitter.com/zachbulick)

incident, confiscated my knife until the end of the day, and said I would be serving a detention. After school, she instructed me to come to the front of the class and write, “I will not bring a knife to school” repeatedly on the blackboard for 30 minutes. Lesson learned. The teacher returned my knife to me and off I went.

By today’s standards, I got off pretty easy—the school never even notified my parents. But the situation often comes to mind as I think about the current-day creative entrepreneur and the marketplace you play in. Creatives tend to respond to the challenge of marketing their businesses in a couple of different ways: either they run for the hills, claiming it’s too hard to promote themselves, or they take the extreme approach of pulling a stunt that produces short-term results at the expense of building businesses they can sustain.

Eliciting Curiosity

Putting yourself out there as a talented and serviceable creative is tough stuff. I get it. With more and more small businesses springing up, and skilled people in the workforce, it appears that on a macro-level creative valuation is being targeted from multiple angles; clearly these are forces you can't control. However, you can control how you present yourself to your sphere of influence and shape the perception of you and your business. This microcosm can act contrary to the general market based on what your prospects need, value, and who they hope to engage. Building a meaningful connection with your target audience should be the focus of your marketing efforts, and you can do that most effectively when they come to you.

Many business owners feel they'd be more successful if they had less competition, but I disagree. I see countless creatives approaching their marketing efforts in ways that aren't attractive—or worse, aren't creative. Creatives seem to either run scared from the big, bad buyer or act like a loud, annoying bully trying to convince buyers they're the real deal. The mediocre ones who don't fall into those two categories flit about from stunt to stunt, not sure what to do or say or how to get the attention they feel they deserve.

The solution is to stop chasing. Stop spinning your wheels, stop marketing like your competitors, stop regurgitating stale schemes, and stop making noise about your work because everyone else is. A successful marketing mindset seeks to generate a spark in the mind's eye of an ideal client (and those who influence them), rather than to simply make noise.

All the marketing jargon that has been filling your head for years isn't useless; you simply need to sift through all the junk and make sure that what you do attempt serves a greater goal than just pulling in some more money. It needs to build your brand, it needs to satisfy your purpose, and it needs to make the long game an adventure you're proud of. When your actions—both as a creative humanoid and as a business owner—pique just one person's interest, you'll have produced the most valuable sales opportunity there is: being in demand.

DEMANDING ATTENTION = ILLICIT MARKETING
ELICITING CURIOSITY = GENERATING DEMAND

Your creative legacy deserves better. Your creative spirit demands to be handled more deliberately. Your business will succeed as you develop the habit of doing and saying things that make people curious.

SEVEN WAYS TO STIMULATE CURIOSITY

Want to get off the marketing treadmill? Consider implementing one, or more, of these attention getters:

- ▶ Act on impulses that spark your creativity or that help you learn or experience new things. Practice being curious yourself and share it with friends and peers.
- ▶ Become a militant supporter of others. Ramp up your enthusiasm for innovative and creative people and organizations, going the extra mile to help them succeed.
- ▶ Make some notes about how you make buying decisions, what kinds of conversations or opportunities excite you, and what your vendors do to sell you on something.
- ▶ Scheme up a plan for a personal project, creating achievable milestones, and then announce it to your social networks as a “Work in Progress,” keeping them in the loop as you go.
- ▶ Attend an event or travel somewhere you’ve never been to before. Document your experiences in a creative medium you don’t normally work in.
- ▶ Find a subject that interests you and determine what opinions you have, and then find evidence to support a strong position you can stand behind vigorously.
- ▶ Give yourself a makeover. Experiment with an out-of-the-ordinary style. Change-up your hair or wardrobe. Do something that gives you a boost of confidence. Don’t try too hard; the change should amplify your personality, not alter it.

To help nudge you in the right direction, consider the concept of push/pull marketing, at least how I see it as it pertains to a creative venture. Pushing your offering onto an unsuspecting network only works if the viewer takes the bait and reaches out to you. There’s no engagement; it’s simply guesswork about which tactic will land in a willing party’s lap. You’re going for volume and you’re hoping for the best. On the other hand, pulling is an action that is customer-initiated as a result of you connecting with the right people, at the right time, in a manner that meets their individual needs. Demand may be scarce but it’s there, and you know it because your level of engagement is high. Defining your target market right down to the companies and the people you want to serve and then taking the kinds of risks that excite you, both creatively and personally, will put you in a position to be noticed. That’s the kind of foundation you can build on. Survival of the fittest has less to do with marketing wizardry and more to do with looking good while making valiant attempts at activities and ideas that convey who you are, what you do, and why you do it.

Scott Stratten, in his book *UnMarketing: Stop Marketing. Start Engaging.* (Wiley, 2010) reminds us that we need to market in a way we can stand behind. “We’ve been taught to market to others in ways we hate being marketed to (cold-calling, flyers, ads, etc.),” Stratten writes. “So why do we still keep trying the same stale marketing moves?”

Business owners who promote themselves through the very methods they detest convey an attitude of desperation. Marketing efforts that employ means that don’t connect with you will fail at connecting with those you’re eager to reach. It’s a matter of authenticity; it’s off-brand because *you* are your brand, and as an independent business owner your marketing efforts must reflect your talent, expertise, passions, and ability to deliver on a promise. If “push-marketing” isn’t your style, don’t use it; creatives should never apply marketing strategies that contrast with the character of the person behind the creative work. If you judge the marketing ploys of your competition as cheap stunts, don’t use them. Put the same critical eye to your own efforts to ensure they’re producing high levels of engagement; if they’re not, it’s time to hit the reset button.

Leverage your bravery and confidence, and rely on your ideation and influences. Put more energy into being more attractive to watch, cheer on, support, brag about, and engage with. Let your creative mix shine.

Developing Auteur-like Attitude

Great artists tend to have a certain *je ne sais quoi*—an elusive yet attractive way about them—but the self-employed can rarely feel they can afford the luxury of such artistic sensibilities; however, nothing could be more important. The marketing conventions out there appeal to your insatiable desire to stand out from the crowd, but why struggle to fight off the competition? Why not try to rise above and strive to attract a crowd?

Skills and experience are the foundation of a creative business, but in the end they don’t matter as much as many would like to believe. I wish I could buck the trend here and tell you that talent and longevity are all you need to be successful, but I’d be lying. The market doesn’t care about talent in the same way a craftsman does, and it sure does love to chase the new kid on the block. We’re exposed to mediocrity at an unprecedented level these days, so I’ll just assume I’m preaching to the choir on this one.

We live in a jacked-up creative economy. The labor market has changed dramatically these past few years and, due to a suppressed economy, affordable

technology, specialized education, and fake money (credit), the market has been saturated with talent. Every new small business owner is likely more wet behind the ears than they'd care to admit. Naivete reigns if skills and experience are the only thing you're counting on to differentiate yourself from the competition. Success requires taking a venture well past the realm of talent and pursuing, with great fervor, something deeper, something more valuable to your business in the long run. Creative entrepreneurs should strive to become auteurs.

When a creative's style permeates their work to the point that they control every facet of their output, they have achieved a level of uniqueness that is definable and recognizable. An auteur has a discernible vision they can, in some way or another, claim as their own. This is very much a film industry term and, in that vein, Woody Allen stands out as an auteur. As a film director, his work consistently explores the same themes and notions regardless of the cast, setting, or script.

Comparing ourselves to an award-winning American icon probably isn't the most useful exercise, but his example is potent nonetheless because we all know his work, regardless of whether we like it or not.

I value the lofty ideal of creatives wanting to become auteurs in their own right because it resolves the dilemma many artists prematurely worry about: whether it's worth selling out to become successful. The real issue behind selling out is not a matter of whether you get a big payout or not, or whether one person's ethics are in line with those of her peers; it's whether you're giving up control of your art. Determining the level of control that means the most to you is the mature way to assess a business opportunity.

Many creatives appeal to their artistic sensibilities by chasing their muse around dark hallways in the middle of the night or brooding in the way only an artist knows how to brood. But what if you spent your time and energy on something a little less mysterious? Get your hands dirty and evaluate your creative inputs; grind out your unique vision; establish your voice, your message, and your story; and put your ideas through the wringer until they're repeatable and manageable. The results of that process will show the market who's boss, and new challenges and opportunities will come knocking.

If aspiring to be an auteur sounds over the top to you, consider adopting what I call the street-wise auteur, the linchpin of author Seth Godin's philosophy of creative business: "Be remarkable, generous, a creator of art, make the tough calls, and bring people and ideas together." To grow a successful business, stop looking for inspiration and start the difficult work of transforming your craft into something truly unique and definable.

RELEASING YOUR INNER WOODY ALLEN

Shake things up in your creative world by acting on a few Woody-isms, some more tongue-in-cheek others. Find your voice, define your style, and inject some Mr. Allen-inspired auterisms so you can draw a crowd of your own:

- ▶ Forget the special effects. Ignore the bells and whistles your peers make so much noise about; work simpler.
- ▶ Be self-indulgent once in a while; and if you're going to be a jackass, have a good reason—or at least be prepared to apologize.
- ▶ When working alone, act insecure and downcast so as to prove to yourself that you're not actually as lame as you could be.
- ▶ Script a monologue, or memorize a poem or song, that you can recite at parties; entertainment comes in all kinds of forms.
- ▶ Psychoanalyze yourself to the point that you know your shortcomings better than anyone, and then take a self-help course.
- ▶ Live and work in a city you love, or at least travel to one you love as often as possible to stay invigorated by the environment and setting.
- ▶ When your back is against the wall, sign yourself up for a massive undertaking, risking all your time and energy in the hopes of a big break.
- ▶ Take up the jazz clarinet.

Creating a Marketable Brand

Your brand is derived from who you are, who you want to be, and who people perceive you to be. Your brand is your promise to your customers. Your brand tells them what they can expect from you, and it differentiates your offering from your competitors'. A marketable brand is a combination of elements that create trust and trigger manageable action. A marketable brand is a springboard that inspires you to jump to the needs of potential buyers and motivates prospects to discover more about how your creativity can serve them. When buyers instill trust, they show their faith by pulling out their checkbooks.

My friend Brian R.G. McKenzie is a marketing professional with a nonprofit organization in Kelowna, British Columbia, who consults on a part-time basis to entrepreneurs of all types. He's a former agency manager who regularly takes up the call to help startups focus on making marketing problems go away so they can focus on what they do best and deliver their unique value. Brian believes in the marketing value of building trust because it identifies the business transaction with the business owner behind it. "As the ultimate authority on your brand, you get to choose what others think—about you and your brand," he says. "It's the essence of who you are and what you offer. It encompasses all of your products and services. It even drives what you talk about during meetings and who you have business lunches with and why." As you work to develop a brand, never think of it as just a logo; think of it as a full-scale scene that captures the essence of how you fit into your business.

As you've already witnessed, I believe entrepreneurs need to seek professional help whenever possible; and building your brand should be added to the docket of things you shouldn't try to create in a bubble. Regardless of your marketing prowess or design expertise, your brand is an extension of yourself, and the harsh reality is that you're too close to your business to effectively extrapolate all the ways in which your business can develop or how it would be perceived by potential buyers. Find a trusted advisor or a skilled peer to be your sounding board or to help you hammer out some of the nuances of your brand. Or hire someone you respect to help take you through the steps, either to provide you with expert approval or help fill in the gaps (or hit the reset button).

I'm not a "branding guy," but I'm exposed to the inner-workings of creative business brands on a regular basis and I can tell you that isolated branding efforts show their true colors more often than not, and sexy-looking graphics have nothing to do with it. Get backup on this one. Trust me.

Speaking of sexy—I mean backup—Luke Taylor is a Branding Specialist in Victoria, British Columbia. He started his sole proprietorship, fivE, in 2005 (@fivegraphics), and he's a service provider to a couple of my clients, so I know his work really well. This guy knows logos. His target client is a company that needs to build and design a new "brandmark." He has adopted this terminology rather than "logo" because it helps his clients understand a logo's place within the structure of their brand and their business, and he meets their needs in a very specific way. He guides clients through the process of developing a brandmark that, as one of many elements, fits into the brand strategy they're developing.

A successful brand brings together all the elements that make up a creative endeavor into one cohesive package that clarifies your reason for working and serves as a catalyst for action:

- ▶ Purpose: Who are your customers, what do they like, and why are you serving them?
- ▶ Values: What is most important to you and why does it impact your business?
- ▶ Goals: How will you know if you're successful, or if your customers are happy?
- ▶ Uniqueness: How do you differ from other providers? Is your Unique Selling Proposition (USP) clearly defined? (For more on USPs, see Chapter 2, "Planning for Success.")
- ▶ Style: What will the words convey? Are you casual, formal, conversational, friendly, urban, or action-oriented?
- ▶ Name: What is your formal commercial name? How do you want the marketplace to identify you?
- ▶ Tagline: Can you communicate your most important benefit in just a few evocative words?
- ▶ Logo: What graphical element can you create that embodies your business offering and attracts eyeballs?
- ▶ Visuals: What images, colors, styles, fonts, treatments, and aesthetics will help you earn your buyers' trust?

A WELL-CRAFTED BRAND DOESN'T PUT YOUR BUSINESS INTO THE ACTION; YOU DO.

In the everyday world—one filled with decisions, transactions, failures, and successes—a brand is an identity. It's a business name, a symbol, visual treatments, words that state an offering, and the voice and tone in which they're delivered. When these things connect with a need or want, the potential buyer initiates contact. As clever as creatives want to be with their branding efforts, the most difficult challenge is simply to stay out of the way of a potential buying decision. As you already know, your USP sets you apart from others. A solid brand removes barriers and creates opportunities that build up your creative legacy while helping buyers focus on what's most important: your creativity and your ability to make good on your promises.

BRINGING THE WOW TO YOUR BRAND

Trying to come up with a name for your start-up? Putting together a new brand or revitalizing an existing one? Consider working through the WOW Branding worksheets to help you answer the fundamental questions about your business's most strategic components.

Naming Worksheet

Your business name will be one of the most identifiable elements for the entire life of your brand. Creating the right name is a mix of creativity, meaning, impact, use, and—of course—availability. Start by getting as many ideas as possible and uncover which stream is the greatest. WOW's naming process starts by exploring possibilities in each of the following categories:

- ▶ Playful: Challenge the ordinary, irreverent, arbitrary, oxymoron
- ▶ Origin: Pay tribute to a specific inspiration, founder, location, cultural bias
- ▶ Inventive: Make up words; Kodak did it—so can you
- ▶ Descriptive: Choose deliberately clear descriptions or attributes
- ▶ Technical: Blend modern words, technical language, and specific function
- ▶ Conjoined: Combine or connect two or more ideas
- ▶ Acronym: Group letters that mean something to you
- ▶ Metaphoric: Attribute or symbolism
- ▶ Random: Roll the dice

Naming Criteria Evaluation Sheet

Got a few names you're considering? On a scale of 1 to 10, rank the names individually. This is not a comparison exercise.

- ▶ Is your first impression of the name strong?
- ▶ Does it sound/look good?
- ▶ Is it easy to read/pronounce?
- ▶ Use it in multiple sentences. Does it feel right?
- ▶ Are quick associations positive? Does it have story appeal?
- ▶ Does it relate to the primary benefit(s) of the company/service?
- ▶ Does it sound credible?
- ▶ Is it registrable and protectable?
- ▶ Is it memorable?
- ▶ How nervous does it make you?
- ▶ How well does it relate to your positioning or who you are?

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Creative at Work David Airey is graphic designer and design author from Northern Ireland. His popular book *Logo Design Love* is full of inspiring logos and real-world anecdotes that illustrate best practices for designing brand identity systems that last. He shares his experiences in working with clients, including sketches and final results of his successful designs, but also uses the work of many well-known designers to explain why well-crafted brand identity systems are important, how to create iconic logos, and how to work with clients to achieve success as a designer.

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Putting Your Brains and Your Brand into Action

The most successful way to generate demand is to proactively connect with the clients you want or the ones you have, and to do it with your brand leading the way. When you repeatedly care for, support, and over-deliver to buyers big and small, you aren't just providing a service; you're leveraging your character and charm. Nothing creates a spark more than a personal touch, and that takes some scheming. Too often, the traditional sales call or networking attempt is dry and boring, but when you can incorporate your brand into the experience, and produce a good feeling or a memorable moment, you're giving yourself the opportunity to make more than an impression.

The value of your business lies in the fact that you're in it for the long run. The long run is what true demand requires. Demand builds over time when you build trust and give people more than they expect. It shows that you're not a flash in the pan, but rather a skilled craftsman who is building a legacy, a résumé of being the go-to person for this particular creative product or service. You rely on your craft; others should feel like they can rely on your craft too. In the end, your brand is not really for you, it's for your buyers. So as your brand develops, expand your thinking around how you can put your brand into the minds, hearts, and hands of your target market. Your captivating style can't just be shared with those who are currently paying you. Let your brand be something you use beyond your website and stationery. Find unique and recognizable ways to share the big ideas and big heart behind your business. You don't want to end up with a sharp logo and no crowd to attract with it.

LOVE THE ONES YOU'RE WITH

Here's an excerpt from *Work for Money, Design for Love: Answers to the Most Frequently Asked Questions About Starting and Running a Successful Design Business*, a new book by David Airey:

Karishma Kasabia of Australia-based Kish+Co understands that marketing today needs to be savvier than traditional marketing methods, especially when it comes to keeping relationships with existing clients flourishing.

No one wants a bad flyer or an average postcard. We need more to catch our attention, and even more still to be loyal and to love a brand.

The best and often most unloved place to start is with existing clients. We're used to their attention; we're much more sugar-coated when we meet the potential new ones. That's not right.

For Valentine's Day, we had custom cupcakes made for our studio, then mapped out our existing clients, from the outer suburbs of Melbourne and all the way back into the core of the central business district.

One hundred cupcakes, with orange and brown icing based on our corporate colors, individually boxed with a Kish+Co seal were delivered. We started at 9 a.m. and finished at 6 p.m., hand-delivering to suppliers as well as clients. I drove and double-parked; my partner Agnes did the delivery.

That same day we got Tweeted and Facebooked, and received calls for new work, recovering our marketing costs for the day's effort with one single job.

The best thing is how memorable we made our brand.

You'll discover that owning a small business makes you very stringent when it comes to expenses. But as Karishma recommends, you need to measure the results of your marketing, whether it's tracking hits with a pricey placement in a marketing magazine or a creative treat costing you about \$500. It can often be the cheaper, more creative endeavors that bring the best results.

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