2025 EDITION

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Start Your Own BUSINESS

Everything you need to know to create your first company

COMPLETE GUIDE TO SETTING UP AND TRADING ONLINE

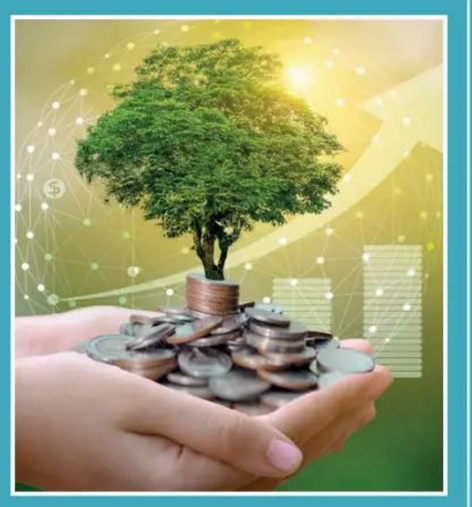
HOW TO...

SET UP FROM HOME

Start your business venture from your home office

MASTER MARKETING

Use social media to your advantage by promoting your new business



MANAGE MONEY

From raising initial funds to balancing the books

ONLINE IMPACT

Create your first website and learn useful SEO tricks

CASE STUDIES

Learn from the experiences of famous entrepreneurs

Digital Edition

FUTURE

ELEVENTH EDITION

Welcome!

...to the only guide you need to get grounded, confident and ready to start your business

The past year has been an unprecedented challenge for businesses around the world as companies, consumers and economies are still feeling the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Being flexible and adaptable is more important for businesses than ever: the ability to move online has proved vital for many companies, both big and small.

Despite the challenges of 2020, there are still opportunities for entrepreneurs to make their mark in the business world. Indeed, there are companies that have thrived during the pandemic, finding ways to take advantage of new commercial opportunities that the situation provided.

For example, the UK startup Stitch & Story – which offers knitting and crochet supplies and tutorials online – had an 800% increase in sales for March 2020 compared to the previous year, as thousands of people became interested in crafting hobbies while spending more time at home in lockdown.

If you've found a gap in the market and want to turn your business dreams into reality, then this is the place to start. We've filled this bookazine with everything you'll need, from producing your first business plan, raising funds and balancing the books, to creating your company website, mastering social media promotion and much more!

FUTURE

Start Your Own BUSINESS

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Start Your Own BUSINESS

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The stuff you need to know

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- Supply and demand
- Protecting ideas
- Work/life balance
- Getting advice
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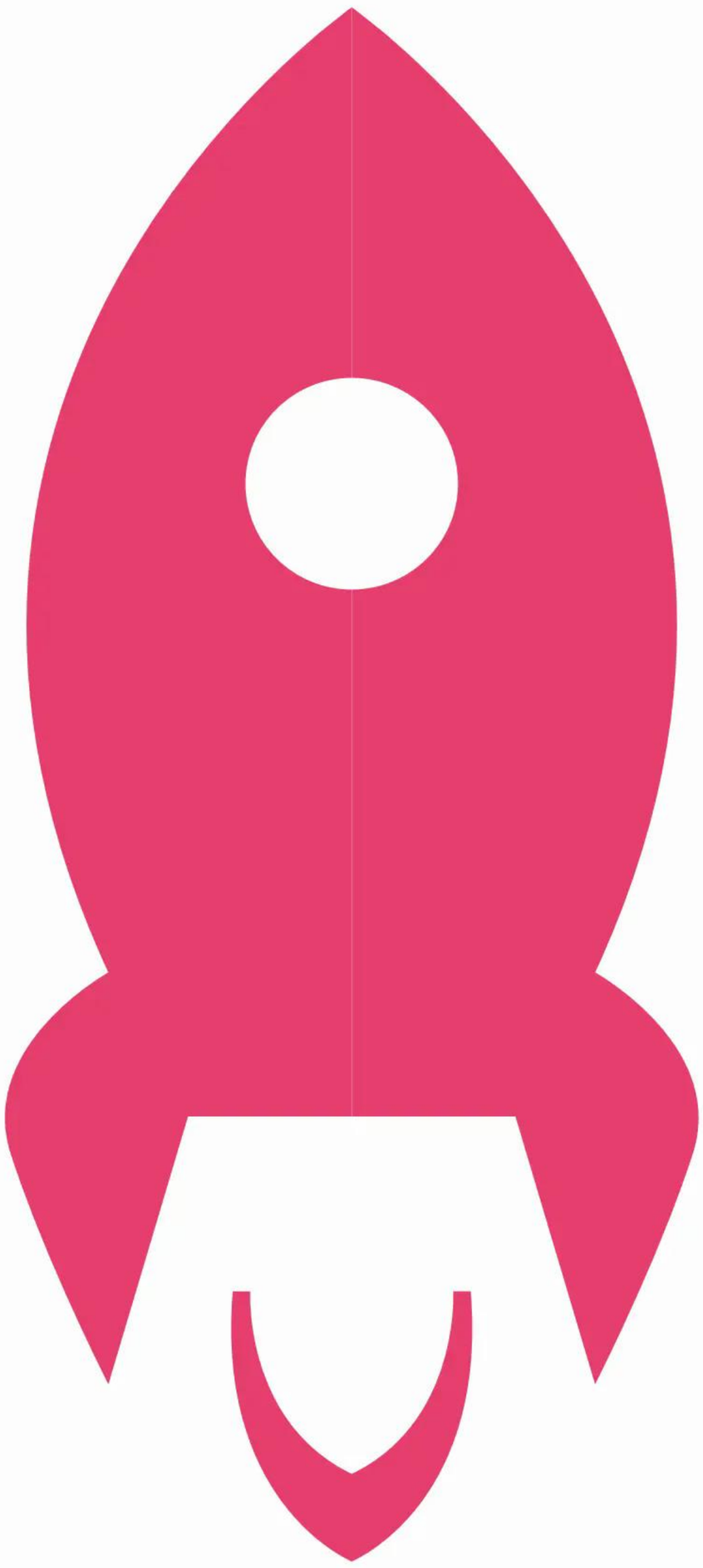
Business basics

You've got a great idea. But you need more than that to build a business. Read on to discover how to transform your concept into a solid enterprise

Starting a business has become something anybody can do. In today's changeable economy, being a small business owner is no longer the preserve of the risk-taker. All you need to start your own enterprise is a great idea and the nous to see it through. And maybe some cash. And good contacts. And a business plan. Oh, and a marketing strategy...



STARTING BLOCKS

Some of us are guilty of having serial epiphanies and mentally retiring for the next 20 years before we've actually done anything about it. But before you throw everything at your wonderful idea, it's crucial to do some research. Sometimes you can get so excited about the dream that you lose all objectivity.

The best way to stay productive is to be really clear about what you want to achieve, and put something into action immediately. Clarify your goals as soon as you can in order to get your mind focused. Put your idea down on paper to make it more manageable.

Then you need to question your idea as much as possible. Be ruthless. Do thorough research into the industry. If you don't know the industry well, engage the services of someone who does, sharpish. A Google search for similar-sounding products simply isn't enough. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that just because something's not on the internet it doesn't exist. Go to the trade associations, look in industry magazines, and attend trade shows.

Zoom in and then zoom out. Make sure you see your idea from as many different angles as possible. What does your idea look like as an insider, a consumer, an employee, a competitor, a critic? How can you make it better? Then get a second opinion.

WRITING A BUSINESS PLAN

Your research into the market and your product should form the backbone of your business plan. If you haven't got time to research and write your business plan, you haven't got time to run a business. Not only does a business plan serve as a reference document for you, for investors and for future staff, it also helps you focus your mind and strategy. It enables you to see the figures written down, too.

If you simply don't know where to start, you can download free templates from sites such as www.gov.uk.

A good business plan comprises the following...

THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Your executive summary is the first thing people read. Sometimes it's the only bit they read. So it needs to be clear, precise and jargon-free. The summary will be read by potential investors, so it's also important not to assume too much prior knowledge of the industry. The summary should feature the most important points of your business or product and should sum up the following:

- Your service or product and what its strengths are;
- Where your opportunity is in the market;
- Who your management team is and how it's structured;
- Your track record in business and what your experience in the field is;
- What your financial projections are;
- What your funding requirements are and what returns are expected.

Funders will read this bit and often make provisional

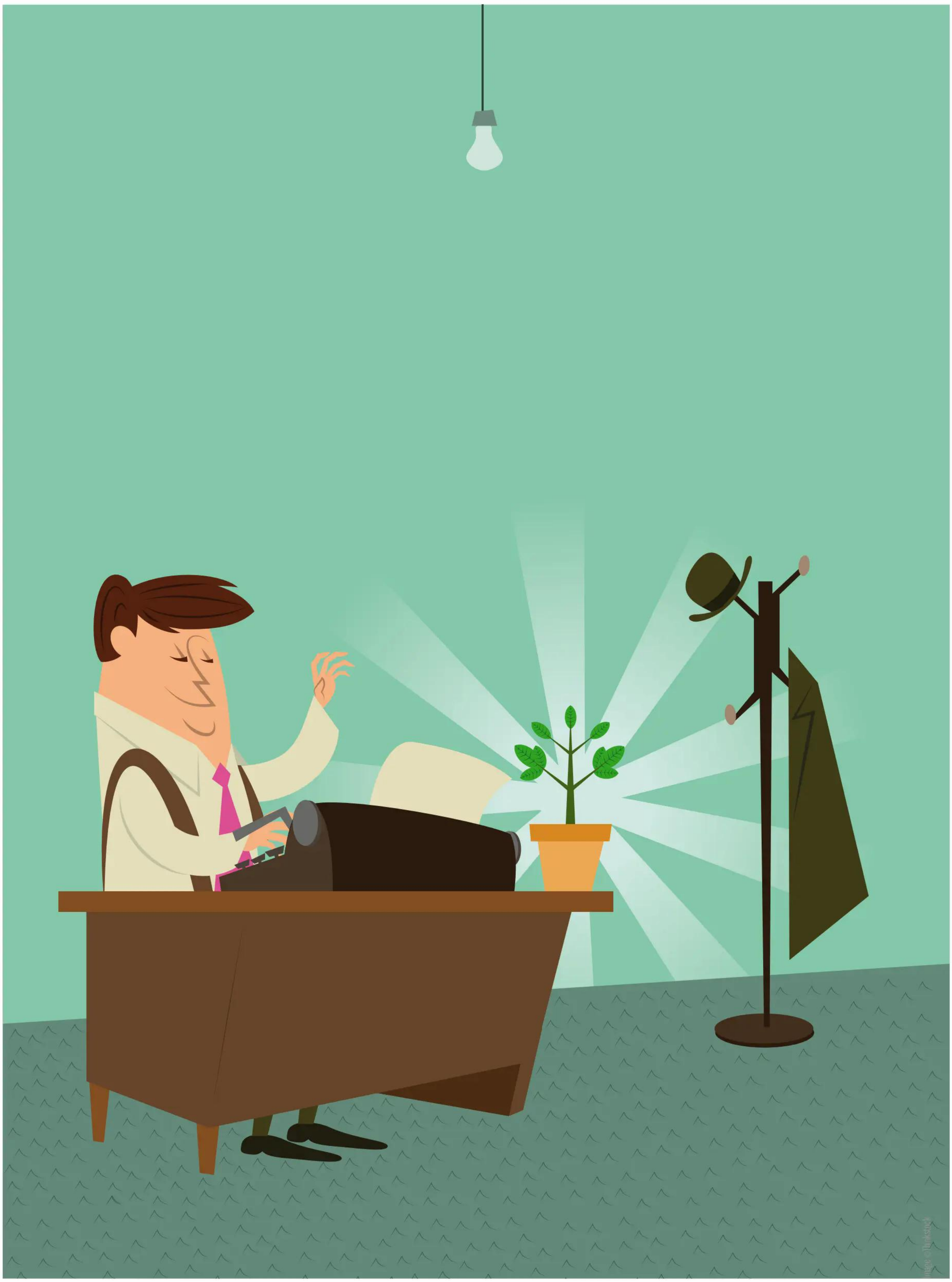
SOURCING AN OFFICE

When you're looking for a workspace, be realistic about where you think you'll be in five years' time. Consult your business plan carefully and look at your projected growth. Will the space you choose be right for the business as you see it in five or ten years' time? If not, will you be able to cope with the upheaval of a move if you're expanding?

Always get a break clause built into your contract and push for a rent-free period. Never be afraid to negotiate to get the space on the terms you want.

Is the location right for the employees you have and the employees you want? Is it going to be a turn-off for the talent you hope to attract? What's the public transport like? Is it safe? Will security cost more than anything you might save?

If you can, get a space near like-minded businesses. This could be good for your enterprise's productivity, morale and general networking.



assumptions or decisions on your company's viability. The rest of the business plan should be devoted to proving them right or wrong.

THE REST OF THE BUSINESS PLAN

The rest of the plan should comprise an extrapolation of each of the points above, and include a background to the idea, work carried out to date, experience, and the proposed ownership structure of the business.

It is really important to cover any disadvantages or weak points you feel the business may have. Being honest about these inspires confidence. Explain key features of the industry, like applicable regulations, and effective cartels.

Explain the market segments you want to target (identify the size of each segment and the direction it's heading in). Here, you should also put how many customers you have lined up and sales you've already made. Quote minimum order figures, if you can. You need to demonstrate how long you predict each sale or transaction will take. Also discuss the likelihood of repeat orders and how this works with volume. Include details of the contributions each part of your business will make. Identify where you expect to make your profits and where there might be scope to increase.

"COVER ANY WEAK POINTS YOU FEEL THE BUSINESS MAY HAVE"

The business plan is designed to attract investors, so remember to list the reasons buyers will come to you over your competitors. If you can't do this, then you might want to think about your business idea again. You also need to include a bit

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in your plan about how you expect to promote your product and what marketing plan you have in place.

Once you've finished your business plan, read it. Does it give you a comprehensive overview of your idea and business? Show it to a friend and ask them for comments.

USING PROTECTION

Once you are satisfied that your idea is a sound one, you need to protect it. There are many ways to protect a new business idea and the best approach for you will really depend on what you are doing. Some ideas can be protected by a patent, which is a form of intellectual property registration, for which it may be possible to apply where there is a new invention. This is most obviously true of physical products, although software can be patented, too, in some cases. Registration of a patent can give its owner exclusive rights for a long period, which can obviously be a great benefit. However, many good ideas do not involve an invention – for instance, a new method of doing something, which it may not be possible to protect under intellectual property law but

DEMAND YOUR SUPPLY

Get your supply chain right and your business will run a lot more smoothly. Henry Freeman, commercial director at TradeRiver, an online provider of supply-chain finance, says, "Being a cash buyer can help you to negotiate better rates with suppliers because they benefit from immediate cash-flow, the life blood of any business. Using this as leverage can save you hundreds or even thousands of pounds in purchasing and service costs. We have also found that, in the long term, relationships between companies using supply-chain finance are strengthened as suppliers like to sell to companies that can immediately settle their trades."

Use local suppliers where you can. This isn't only good for your green credentials, but it's good for quality, too. Using smaller, local suppliers can mean they are passionate about their work and put in extra effort. It's also always better to be able to meet and talk to your suppliers, and makes life easier if you have issues to iron out.

If you're going to go further afield, consider the challenges of working overseas before choosing new suppliers in far-flung climes. Be sure to think carefully about shipping costs, timing issues, supply chain complexity and cultural differences, and make sure they don't negate your labour costs.

If you are going overseas, make sure you keep up to date with localised supplier needs, rules and regulations, as well as global events, which could cause disruptions down the line. Gen up on all major festivals and holidays in the country you choose.

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simply needs to be kept quiet in the development phase. In that case, the best course of action is to reveal the confidential aspects to as few people as possible, and to do so only where the other party is trusted and has signed a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) prepared by a lawyer.

Tim Summers, partner at Temple Bright, says, "The first legal issue to consider is the fundamental one: could the business be entirely prevented, or else made impractical, by a requirement of the law?"

This is more likely to be a possibility in the context of business activities that are regulated, such as financial services. However, says Summers, "There may be laws you don't know about in other, more general contexts, and these may need to be factored into your strategic planning. So it's worth talking to a firm of solicitors early on, confidentially describing your plans and asking if there are any fundamental legal obstacles they can foresee."

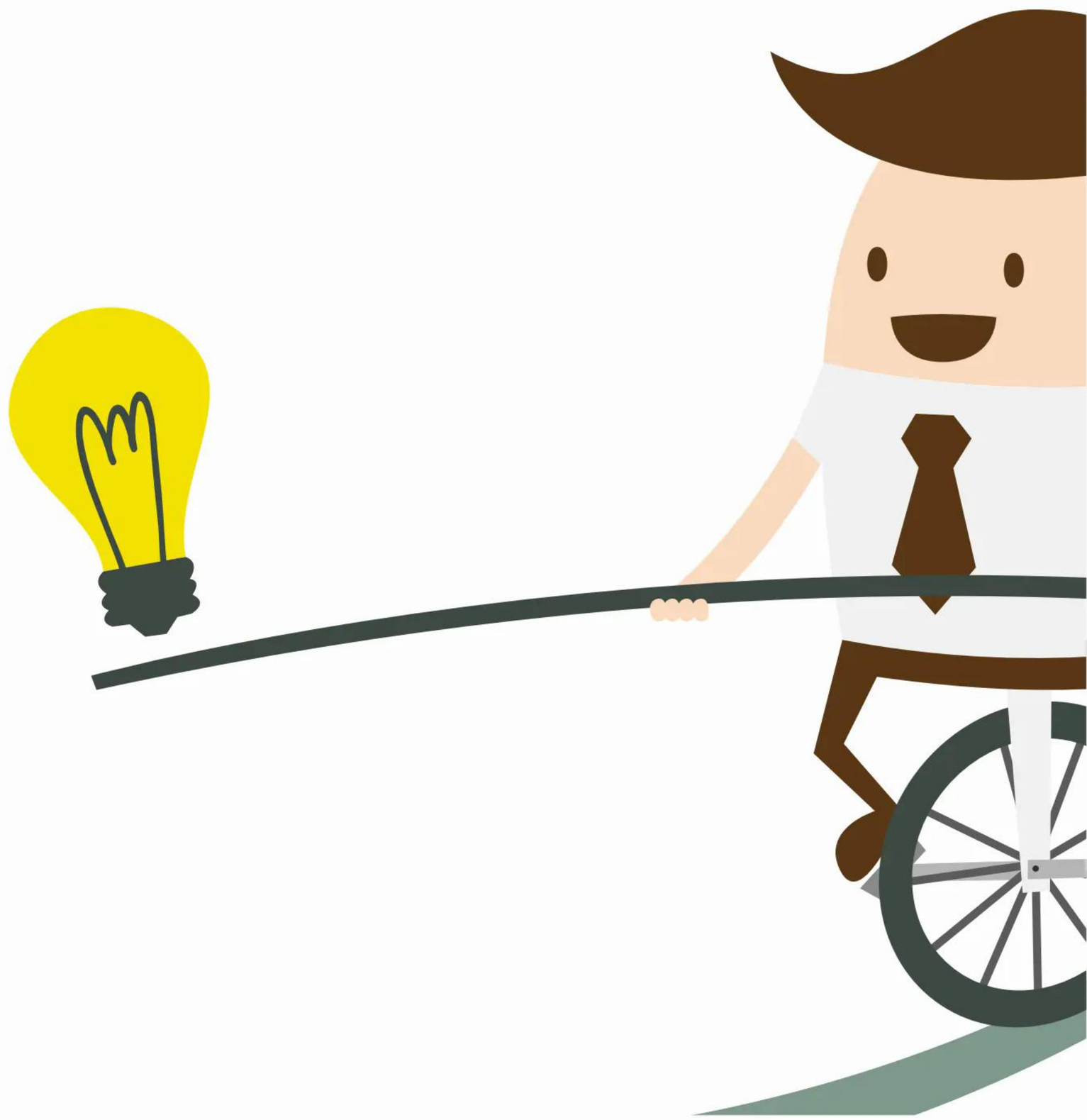
If there is nothing fundamental that requires you to rethink the business plan, the rest of the detail (for example, setting up the trading vehicle, terms and conditions, employment contracts) may be able to wait a while. However, if you have a name in mind for your business, you should ask an

> "There may be laws you don't know about, and these may need to be factored into your strategic planning. It's worth talking to solicitors early on, confidentially describing your plans and discovering any fundamental legal obstacles they can foresee."

intellectual property lawyer to run some checks and advise you whether it's a problem if someone else is using a similar name. Summers says, "If the name is available for you to use, there are ways of securing it before you start trading – for instance, setting up a company, registering a trademark and buying a domain name."

It's natural for a start-up to have legal matters a little way down the list of priorities, but, says Summers, "Having legal matters such as the small print of your customer terms in pristine form on day one may seem like a counsel of perfection, particularly given that lawyers can be expensive and start-up funds are often limited, but the big two early stage oversights are, firstly, a poor or non-existent founders' agreement, and secondly, not properly securing intellectual property used in the business – in particular, that which is created for the business by other people."

When everyone is good friends at the start, it may seem that having a founders' agreement (such as a partnership agreement or shareholders agreement) is unnecessary. But once you start building the business, you may find that this pressing and perhaps rather uncomfortable matter is deferred, so that by the time



problems start to emerge among the founders, it is too late to agree a framework for resolving them.

As for intellectual property, it's possible to have a false start with a name or logo because you have not done the checks for use by others or have not registered your own trademark. Where written text or designs have been created by others, it's all too common for a young business to appoint creative contractors informally, without realising that ownership of intellectual property may remain with the creator rather than passing to the business – even when the business is paying for it.

Should you take the chance? Says Summers, "Of course, entrepreneurship involves risk-taking. However, I'd make a distinction between the calculated commercial risks that are inherent to a new venture, and the kind of recklessness that could result in a good business being destroyed for avoidable causes. Not taking legal advice on important things early on is in the reckless category, and I hope most successful entrepreneurs would say the same."

However, if you want to keep things friendly, it's worth shopping around for a lawyer who can create legal documents which are short, user-friendly and attractive. Says Summers, "This is a much better course than relying on a combination of

"INSTRUCTING LAWYERS IS A POTENTIAL MINEFIELD"

cut-and-pastes from the internet, items passed to you by friends and nothing at all."

Instructing lawyers is in itself a potential minefield. It's worth considering price (but don't make it the only consideration). You should also consider quality and expertise, location and personal rapport, and you should talk to several firms before choosing one. The best indicators of quality and expertise will be the firm's presentation and reputation, the testimonies of others who have used it for similar work, and its answers to searching questions put by you.

"The temptation for solicitors," warns Summers, "particularly junior ones, is to present every aspect of your situation as needing urgent attention. This may result from the cautious legal temperament, the fear of being sued unless every

Image ©Thinkstock

possible risk is dealt with, or the fact that more legal work generally means more fees. However, the reality may be that there are relatively few tasks requiring immediate work. A commercial view is one that measures the real risks against the size of your budget. A good solicitor is one that gives you such a commercial view, and not simply an expensive wish list to ensure that you are 100 per cent watertight on all points, however obscure, and establish the price."

WHEN'S MY YEAR-END?

When you start, you need to pick your year-end – that is, the end of your accounting period. You don't have to choose 5 April (the standard) – you can choose any date you like – but if you do, you won't end up being double taxed.

You are legally required to register for VAT if your turnover exceeds £82,000. If you reach this without realising, you must register within 30 days. The good news is that if you're VAT-registered, you can claim back VAT on things such as car and printing expenses. However, you have to complete VAT returns quarterly, and charge your clients VAT, which can be time-consuming.

One way to help your cash

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

It can be really hard to achieve work-life balance in the early days of a start-up, especially if there's only one of you working on everything. But there are ways of making sure you don't let your business rule your personal life. Monica Parker of workplace specialist Morgan Lovell says, "Make sure you keep certain things sacrosanct, such as the school run, the ballet recital and date night. You will have your family longer than you'll have this job."

Learn early on what you can control and what you can't. "Instead, create processes," says Parker. "Schedule and time-keep the aspects of your life you can control. Then release the aspects you can't so they don't make you crazy."

Get to know your rhythm. Are you an owl or a lark? Learn this about yourself before you start, so you can tackle jobs when you know you are at your most productive.

Studies have shown that a 20-minute nap in the afternoon has a bigger impact on your energy levels than an extra 20 minutes of sleep in the morning. Learn the power of a quick kip.

Be vulnerable and share your fears and failures with those closest to you. You will spring back more easily from the lows, and your friends and family won't feel alienated from what's going on.

flow is to register for the VAT cash accounting scheme, in which you do not need to pay VAT until your customer has paid you. If your customer never pays you, you never have to pay the VAT. You can use this method if your estimated VAT taxable turnover during the next tax year is not more than £1.35m.

A PROBLEM SHARED

You might want to go it alone entirely but never underestimate the power of the right advice.

Kathleen Saxton is founder of The Lighthouse Company and chair of the advisory board Advertising Week Europe. She says, "Within any SME, investing in consultancy or external advisors is always a serious consideration. Any capital expenditure needs to have a positive impact on the business almost immediately. Whilst most businesses have a breadth of skillset within the leadership team, there will always be specialist areas or indeed blind spots that need careful consideration, so identify them early and be honest and open about where you need to seek counsel." Saxton adds, "Don't be tempted to only rely on your most immediate network. Trusting outside advisors with your deepest company issues or concerns is always daunting and sometimes exposing, but seeking, finding and engaging with the best advisors you can afford is always the smarter option."

And don't balk at the idea of going straight to the top, either. Human nature dictates that we fundamentally like to be respected and needed, says Saxton, so you will probably find that even the most senior or high profile people enjoy being consulted or asked their opinion: "Don't be daunted by stature or profile – you will be surprised how many people want to help you to succeed, paid for or otherwise."

Once you have asked for help, Saxton says it's crucial to listen to it. "Be willing and ready to take the advice you are given," she says, adding, "When we put our heart and soul into a business, it can be

DEBT MANAGEMENT

Don't get bogged down by debt. Paul Byett from Hacker Young says that one way of making sure this never happens is, "Simply, to collect your debts from people who owe you and make sure you understand your own terms and conditions. General business practice is that people are paid 30 days after the date of the invoice." Make sure you know this when you send the invoice out, and make your actions the same as your words.

If you're confident with your service, you should be able to ask for a deposit up-front from some clients. Says Byett, "Everyone else is probably being chased for payment. Why should you be embarrassed for asking for financial security?"

Don't scrimp on costs. Good cash flow isn't about saving cost, it's about having more sales and builds. Continue to do your marketing during the lean times. Work smarter and make use of downtime to promote your services.

Practise budgetary discipline. Says Byett, "If you suddenly get a large payment, bear in mind when you're next going to be paid. This large sum may just mean that you owe others money. It doesn't mean it's actually yours."

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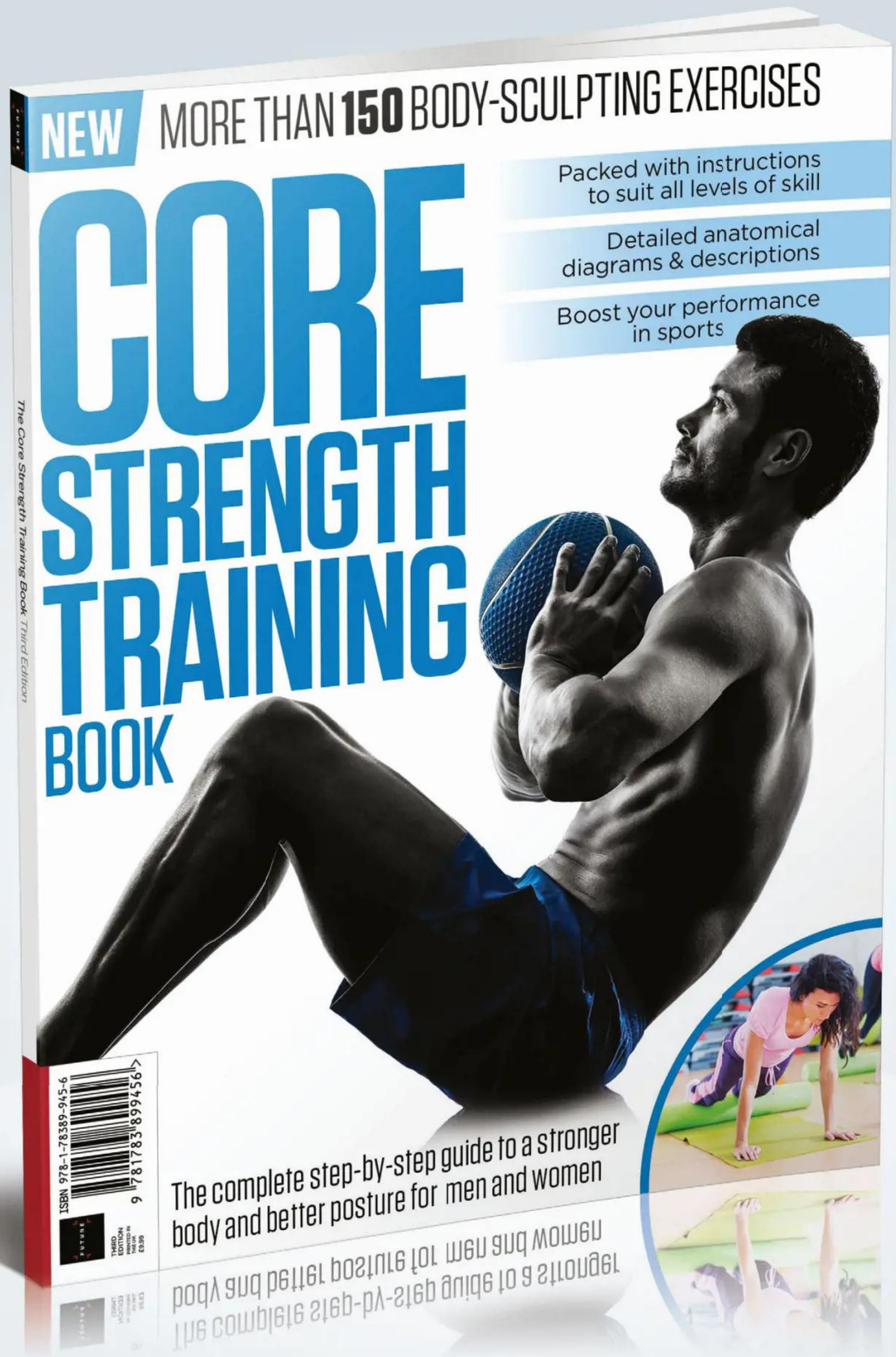

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FUTURE

> "Be willing and ready to take the advice you are given. When we put our heart and soul into a business, it can be hard to hear criticism or challenging views. Try to see those views as a gift to take your business further, faster."

hard to hear criticism or challenging views. Try to see those views as a gift to take your business further, faster."

Sometimes your customers and clients will be your best consultants. Listen to what they ask of you and feed that into your business plans. As a small business, you have the luxury of direct contact with your audience, so make sure you benefit from this as much as you can. Also, make sure you speak to other business leaders within your industry: "The spirit of camaraderie can melt the competitive boundaries," says Saxton.

If you are paying for an external consultant, be clear on the brief and how you are going to measure their impact. Don't fall prey to the creeping brief – one that gets added to and altered subtly along the way. Be absolute in your request and expectations from the start.

It could be worth creating an advisory board. Although the idea might sound very grand, it can be a smart way to attract advisors or investors. This needn't be as onerous as it seems. Saxton explains: "We have just four meetings a year, arranged in advance and with a time limit. We have been able to attract some of the finest brains in the advertising industry to sit together and impart valued wisdom, which had a very positive impact on the final event itself."

THE GREEN BACKS

The idea and the business plan are the easy bit. Getting the financial backing, not so much. If your business can manage without borrowing money, this can be a great way to proceed (though it's very much dependent on how well you will be able to start up

without, and what your overheads will be). When trying to make this decision, make sure you weigh very carefully the profits you might make against the risk that you will be taking. If you're going to be required to charge your home to the bank in order to raise the money, can you survive if it all goes down the proverbial?

It's worth doing a bit of basic research into the different types of financing available on the market. Business finance falls into two categories: debt and equity.

Debt is, in short, borrowing money that will be paid back over time with interest. Equity is finance provided by you or your investors and doesn't have to be repaid as such (though investors usually expect some sort of return).

The ratio of debt to equity is called gearing, and the terms highly geared or highly leveraged mean that the business has a higher proportion of debt compared with equity.

Banks and finance companies offer a range of debt financing, including overdrafts and loans. An overdraft is a borrowing facility linked to an existing account and is designed to help with short-term borrowing needs. It's worth being aware that a bank can demand repayment on an overdraft in full at any time (although if you're keeping up repayments and your credit rating is stable, then it's unlikely). Overdrafts are usually agreed for six to twelve months, and then renewed by negotiation. Overdrafts are also usually more cost-effective than credit cards, because the interest is only paid on the amount borrowed at a margin above the Bank of England base rate.

Most banks offer business loans – a large amount of money repayable over an agreed period. These are obviously better than overdrafts and can be more cost-effective if interest is fixed (usually on loans under £25,000). Business credit cards operate in a similar way to personal credit cards, and are a useful way to help with cash flow (if managed properly). The advantage of debt funding is that you don't have to give up a share in your business to a lender, and your obligation is only to pay back the amount borrowed, with interest, so if you become a zillionaire, you don't have to do any depressing maths about how much less you will actually be getting. Another thing to consider is that interest payments might be deductible against tax.

"IT'S STILL POSSIBLE TO GET GOVERNMENT GRANTS IN SOME AREAS"

One great finance initiative for smaller businesses is invoice finance, a way of freeing up cash from invoices raised. The amount of money available can grow automatically as sales increase. How it works is that you submit invoices to a factoring company, which advances a pre-agreed percentage of the invoice amount. The factoring company then collects the payment from the customer once it falls due, then releases the balance back to you. Similarly, invoice discounting (where you collect the payments yourself) is aimed at larger companies with a turnover in excess of £1m.

GOVERNMENT GRANTS

You will have undoubtedly heavily researched whether your sector offers grants. Believe it or not, it's still possible to get government grants in some areas. Research geographical hubs and consider whether it's worth relocating to take advantage of any cash going. You may also want to consider whether it's worth tweaking your business idea to meet the funding goal (within reason, of course).

Grants can be geographically allocated, sector-based and even given to people such as former armed services personnel, so it's really worth doing some research into what criteria you or your business might fit.

Applying for grants can be a long and time-consuming business but the money can come in incredibly useful at the start of your business, you don't have to pay it back, and being a grant recipient can also act as an excellent marketing tool.

Obviously, finance providers have different lending requirements. Banks usually look at your ability to pay back the amount borrowed as well as interest, plus any additional fees (watch out for these). Equity investors look

for good growth potential and profitability. Investors tend to concentrate on growth businesses rather than on small businesses but in order to secure decent investment, your idea or product needs to be innovative or within a niche market that is known to the investor.

It's worth remembering that businesses are typically pretty worthless when they are very small but investors can add to this value very quickly with additional capital and know-how. It's therefore important not to scare them off by insisting on keeping 90 per cent of your business. A decent stake between 26 and 49 per cent should be enough to please them.

GOING WITH THE (CASH) FLOW

Many businesses are now going down the online accounting route. Emily Coltman, FCA, chief accountant for online accounting system FreeAgent, says the spreadsheet way is becoming a thing of the past.

"If you're starting out in business on your own, it's likely that you're counting the pennies," she says, "So an ongoing expense, such as paying for a subscription to an online accounting service, may not be high on your list of priorities, especially if you think you can keep your business books free of charge on a spreadsheet. But an online accountancy solution can save you both time and accountancy fees." When you

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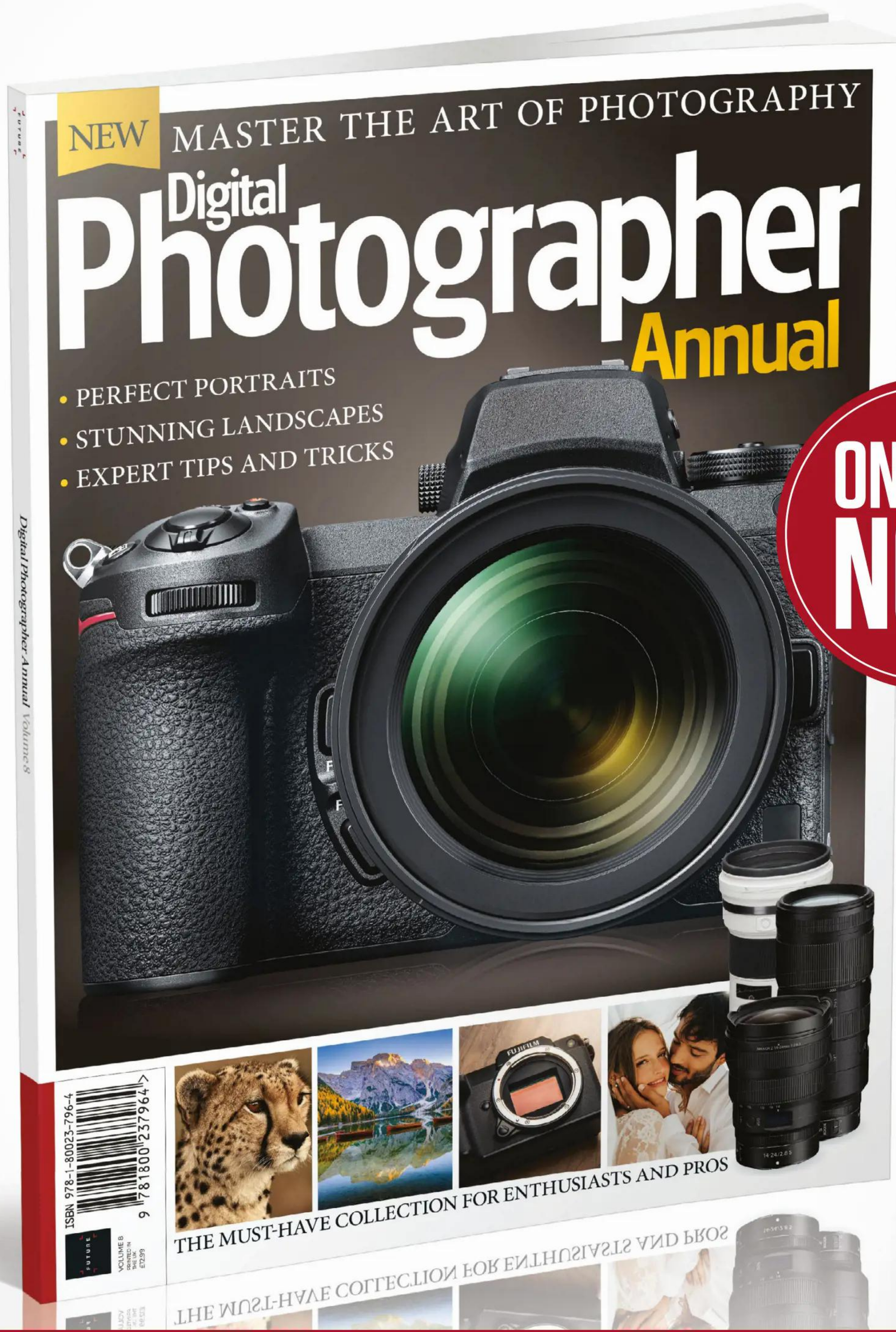

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factor in writing up your spreadsheets every week, number-crunching and dealing with an accountant, the time and cost involved quickly add up.

Says Coltman, "I had a client, in my days as an accountant in practice, who kept his records on a series of spreadsheets of his own design. It used to take me several days to just add up everything that had gone in and out of his bank account, and make sure that the amount he thought was in his bank account was what really was in his bank account, because he always put these transactions in several different workbooks. I moved him on to a nice simple piece of purpose-built accounting software designed for small businesses, and at the end of his first year, I was able to check his banking was accurate in five minutes flat. The client saved a lot of money and our relationship improved vastly."

Most online accounting products are updated automatically to reflect government tax rate changes, reducing the risk of error. Another advantage of a system like this is that your accountant can log in at any time and offer advice. A system such as FreeAgent can also generate invoices using an automatic numbering service with recurring invoices, which, as anyone who's hastily cobbled together an invoice on the train and come up with a made-up invoice number will know, makes you look much more professional.

WHAT CAN I CLAIM?

You need to know what you can and can't claim through your business. Steve Theaker is senior tax partner at UHY Hacker Young. He says, "Any expense that is incurred wholly and exclusively for the purposes of the company's trade is generally allowable. This can include equipment purchases, travel expenses and product development; in short, the necessary day-to-expenses associated with running a business."

Travel expenses are allowable for all legitimate business journeys, including travel to temporary workplaces, although there are some complicated rules around this. Theaker explains, "Subsistence payments of up to £25 a day can be paid to directors and employees without proof of expenditure, to cover the cost of breakfast, lunch and dinner where they are travelling away from their base for more than 10 hours. The costs of parking spaces near the workplace are deductible and not taxable on the employees."

Enhanced tax relief on expenditure on research and development (R&D) is becoming more and more important for a number of companies, says Theaker:

GET YOUR HEAD IN THE CLOUD

Cloud computing is where it's at. Lori Williams, general manager, Europe, at cloud services company Appirio, says, "Small businesses were among the earliest adopters of cloud technology and first to witness its business benefits." She says that cloud technology frees SMEs from the restraints of on-premise technologies. "They can purchase IT application services on demand, which helps them spend less, manage their cash flow and innovate more quickly without having to expend significant start-up costs on hardware or perpetual licences. Crucially for companies wanting to grow and differentiate themselves, the cloud enables business agility by immediate provisioning of functionality of core business needs, such as email and CRM, as well as access to cutting-edge social and mobile functionality."

COMPANY TYPES

01

LIMITED COMPANY

If you know from the start that you're likely to be making more than £20,000 of profit (not turnover), you should probably consider setting up as a limited structure, simply because it's more tax efficient. If you do run a limited company and you want to take money out, it's worth operating on a mixture of dividends and salary. You can set your own salary to whatever you want, and you don't have to comply with minimum wage. The smaller the salary you take, the less tax you pay on it. Then take the rest as dividends (effectively making you a shareholder and director).

02

SOLE TRADER

If, for whatever reason, you can't be a limited company (if you've been bankrupt recently or been disqualified as a director) or simply want to start small, you can register as a sole trader. As a sole trader, you'll pay income tax and National Insurance contributions on your respective shares of the profits and gains of your business. If you are a sole trader and you want to continue using a personal bank account, it's a good idea to keep any bank account you use for your business separate, just to make it easier for yourself. It's completely legal to use a personal bank account if you are a sole trader, but some banks won't allow you if they discover that you have a lot of trade income. However, if you are a limited company, you must use a business account by law.

03

LLP

If there's more than one of you and you're a limited company, you could also set up as an LLP (Limited Liability Partnership). This means that one partner is not responsible or liable for another partner's misconduct or negligence. Any new or existing firm of two or more people can incorporate as an LLP.

"Qualifying expenditure (and it's surprising what qualifies) is uplifted by 125 per cent for tax purposes. In other words, if your qualifying spend is £10,000 you pretend, for tax purposes, that it is £22,500."

Keeping yourself and staff up to date with training is crucial for any business. Luckily, payments for work-related training are claimable, as are wellbeing initiatives, such as sports and gym facilities for employees. Staff events can be claimed for, as long as the VAT-inclusive cost in a tax year does not exceed £150 a head. The same is also true for non-employee guests.

GOING FOR GROWTH

So it's all going swimmingly but how do you make the leap from a small business to a medium business?

Daniel Callaghan is founder of MBA & Company, which connects large and small businesses with highly skilled professionals for project work. "Expand carefully," he says. "Demand for your product or service is fantastic but there's always a danger you simply won't be about to fulfil orders, or deliver the level of service your clients expect."

If you can't meet demand, you'll lose clients and, in turn, demand will plummet. Some small businesses find they can accommodate an uplift but they can't provide a service to a high enough standard, which creates customer service issues. "Quality can really set your firm apart from the competition," says Callaghan, "So businesses need to ensure they can deliver the same quality service whether they have 5 employees or 500."

One potential problem is that most SMEs don't have concrete systems or hierarchies in place. This is, of course, fine when you have 12 members of staff, but add 12 more into the mix and suddenly you need to clarify lines of communications, and implement structure and processes. You also need someone to check people are following these processes, something that SME owners commonly overlook.

If your goal in setting up a business is simply to free up time and improve your quality of life, you shouldn't feel pressurised to go for growth. Says Callaghan, "Entrepreneurs with big ambitions work round the clock to reach the dizzy heights, so growing a business is not for the faint-hearted. Lifestyle businesses can still be lucrative."

But if you do want to expand, you will have to hand over some responsibility at some point. Says Callaghan, "Check in with your contacts regularly, to keep yourself in the loop. Your expertise won't necessarily be diluted – you'll be passing on your wisdom to

Image ©Thinkstock

Business blunders (and how to avoid them)

Errors will be made. Happy Cog's Greg Storey and Greg Hoy run through their biggest mess-ups, so you can learn from their mistakes

These days, it's relatively easy for digital practitioners to start up a business of their own. Just fill out a few government documents, buy some computers and software licenses, create a studio website, and you're off to the races. Lean back, smoke a cigar and cash those cheques.

If only it were that simple. Over time, we guarantee you'll make mistakes, even if you're super-organised. You'll be able to catch and fix some of them quickly, but others will turn into avalanches of stress, anxiety and lost revenue. Bank on it.

Whether it's an employee-related issue, the payroll company not filing the right paperwork with tax agencies, or a client holding back key information required to make your project successful, you'll have to become adept at damage control. We've been running shops collectively for almost two decades, and one thing we've learned is that watching others screw up is one of the best ways you can learn not to.

A few years ago, we started a retreat called Owner Camp (https://bureauofdigital.com/all-events) for people who own their own digital studios.

Each retreat is three days of open and honest discussion, much of which centres around lessons we've all learned the hard way.

In the spirit of those conversations, we'd like to provide a glimpse of some of the mistakes we've experienced, a few that our peers have endured, and the lessons we've all learned.

TRUSTING YOUR GUT

Many of us are creative-minded people who didn't go to business school. Concepts like cash or accrual method accounting, depreciation and billability can make our heads spin. No matter the size of your company, a good accountant or bookkeeper is vital. In the beginning, both of us ran separate shops before combining. When our offices ran independently, one of us hired a small accounting firm to handle all of the bookkeeping, financial planning and tax filings.

At first, the relationship went smoothly. Then, the firm was shaken when a partner left. Things got progressively worse as the weight of the operation overburdened the remaining partner. Rather than hiring more people or scaling back the client roster, he delivered late, apologising each time.

The final straw came when he filed tax returns with only minutes to spare. Despite having a strong suspicion that money was owed to the government, the accountant insisted that a substantial refund was on the way. Sure enough, the cheque arrived a couple of weeks later. After the firm hired a new accountant, they found "a discrepancy". Instead of receiving a $14,000 refund, $77,000 was owed. Jaw-dropping. Fortunately, contingencies were put in place to handle an outcome like this.

TOP The 'graduating class' of the first Owner Camp in Portland, Oregon

MIDDLE Owner Camp 003 in Scottsdale culminated with poolside discussion sessions at a private villa

BOTTOM Happy Owner Camp 004 graduates on Captiva Island, Florida

Photos by Rawle Anders and Alison Harshbarger

The key take-away from this experience? When you sense things going south, look for other options immediately. Go with your gut. If it feels wrong – guess what? – it's likely wrong.

KEEPING MONEY FLOWING

Managing cash flow can be the bane of a business owner's existence. Most of us start out relatively small, with a handful of employees and a workload that enables us to get by without angel investors or lines of credit. Once the business grows, things get trickier. For instance, clients might sit on your invoice for a week or more, even if you delivered it to them promptly. Before you know it, your 30-day payment arrangements have been extended. One such experience happened to Owner Camp alumnus Warren Wilansky, who owns and runs Plank (plankdesign.com), a digital design studio in Montreal:

"In year two of running Plank, we made the mistake of not planning well (or, make that: at all) for the tax bill that hit our desks one day. We didn't have enough money in the bank to pay it, and at that point we didn't even have any kind of monetary safety net or line of credit."

Thankfully Wilansky managed to find a way to make his payment and avoid further trouble.

A line of credit can be an extremely useful tool in helping to manage cash flow. Banks like to see a demonstrated history of creditworthiness, and it's worth the effort to apply ahead of time. The process can take several weeks, so don't wait until you're in dire need of cash. Plan for things to go wrong when things are not going wrong.

BEING TRANSPARENT

Transparency can be difficult to manage, whether it's with a single business partner or a hundred-person organisation. Determining what (and what not) to share with your colleagues is a decision you need to make for yourself. It can be a damned-if-you-do and damned-if-you-don't proposition.

We've found that some level of transparency is necessary to get the most out of your team members and to help them grow as leaders. If you do it right, you'll earn their respect. However, too much transparency – no matter how good your intentions – can create feelings of entitlement which can undermine your relationships with your colleagues.

We worked with an individual with whom we chose to share increasing

CHOOSE YOUR PARTNERS WISELY

by nGen Works owner and founder Carl Smith

There are key moments in your life when you get the opportunity to make a vital first impression. After hundreds of hours of work and six months without revenue, nGen Works was ready to say hello to the world in late 2003.

We sourced thousands of email addresses from business cards and old emails. We created a three-minute Flash movie showcasing our animation talents. We spent weeks crafting the perfect email. We fine-tuned our message within an inch of its life.

Then, the day before hitting 'Send', we learned there were ways to track email messages in order to gain extra insights. A quick AltaVista search led us to a company in California that looked amazing. Not only could it help us track the success of our messaging, it could help us personalise the emails – we went with them. We spent the final 24 hours before launch manually entering names into our spreadsheet so we could personalise our messages.

With great anticipation, we waited for launch time. Beers were chilled and operators were standing by. We scanned the message one final time. Then, whoosh. It was away.

Within a minute, we got our first response. "Hey, I clicked on this link and it doesn't work." We took a look. None of the links worked. It turned out, our new email partner's system was completely down.

"Some level of transparency is necessary to get the most out of your team members and to help them grow as leaders."

amounts of information. When we encountered a slow sales period, cash became scarce. We ended up taking on a workload that was more aggressive than we typically would have. For a number of reasons, we didn't feel that sharing the details of our financial situation was the right thing to do. We felt it would have created too much anxiety.

The employee questioned why we were taking on more work, and strongly objected to it. Our increasing levels of transparency had created an expectation, and we now felt obligated to share the reasons behind the difficult decisions we were making as business-owners. The employee was not aware that the two of us had not paid ourselves for two months in order to pay them, provide them with health care and keep making contributions to their retirement accounts. It was incredibly stressful.

Since then, we've been continuously evaluating how much information to share with our co-workers. We've been more forthcoming with sharing financial information, and we'll likely continue to do so. Some companies are completely transparent about salaries. We don't feel like we're there yet.

MANAGING DOWNTURNS

In 2014, Greg Hoy wrote about how tough the economy has been for digital agencies (netm.ag/economy-257). The first quarter of the year was disastrous for many. When encountering times like these, it means having to make tough decisions which can lead to crippling debt and a demoralised team.

James Archer, of Phoenix-based UX design firm Forty (forty.co), recently faced this challenge and came away with some strong advice:

"The brutal truth of business ownership is that sometimes layoffs are totally appropriate, not just for the

TOP Happy Cog VP of operations Dave DeRuchie leads a discussion at Owner Camp 006

BOTTOM Owner Camp alumni Brian Williams and Richard Banfield catch up at Owner Camp 006. All photos by Brett Harned

business itself, but for everyone involved. Nobody had ever told me that, though, so when things got rough I started digging a deep hole in our credit line, trying to keep the team together when I should have just recognised that we were overstaffed for the work we had coming in.

To make it worse, some team members eventually got nervous about the financial imbalance caused by trying to preserve their jobs, and wound up quitting anyway. In retrospect, everyone would have been better off if I'd let some of them go six months earlier.

If you're thinking about whether you need to consider layoffs, it's probably already time. Get it done, and keep your business strong for the future."

CHARGING RIGHT

When starting a studio, possibly the biggest unknown you need to face is figuring out how much to charge for your services. We're asked this question all the time. Happy Cog founder Jeffrey Zeldman used to tell us, "You'll work just as hard for a $5,000 website as you do for a $50,000 website." He was absolutely right. Clients want what they want, so get ready for it.

Aaron Quinn, co-founder of eHouse Studio (ehousestudio.

com) in Charleston, South Carolina, has a great story to illustrate this point:

"In the first year of business, we were asked to price a redesign of a large website for an organisation. It had recently launched its site, but was unhappy with it.

"At the time, the four team members of our company worked together to detail every hour and task to price the project.

"It was one of the largest projects we had taken on to date. Our expectation was that the client wouldn't be pleased with the sticker price, having just built its existing site.

"In the presentation we nervously approached the final price tag of $30,000, all we could say was, 'It's going to be around 30'. The client's reply was, '30? Thousand? I paid over three times that for the first one, where do I sign?'

"That was our first realisation that we were under-pricing what we had to offer and we could actually charge the correct value."

TACKLING EMAIL

With all of the methods we have to communicate with now, there is one that consistently causes problems: email. It's simply too easy to screw up on email if you're not paying attention.

Years ago, we were asked to participate in a pitch to redesign the website of a very prestigious organisation. After weeks of dialogue and prep work, we made it to the final selection round. On a Sunday morning, the prospective client emailed us to ask if we could answer a list of follow-up questions she provided.

As we read the email, a reply hit our inboxes from a business development person we were working with. These words, included in the email response, are tattooed on our brains: "These guys are being a pain in the ass, but they're a world class organisation and they'll look great in our portfolio." The problem? He'd hit "Reply to all". The response went to the client too. Ugh.

We spent the rest of the day carefully drafting the most thoughtful and humble apology we could muster. One person, hurriedly typing a response, had just insulted a group of people who do the work of angels. On Monday morning, we gracefully removed ourselves from consideration, wished the client well, and let the business development person go.

NOT DROPPING THE MIC

Last year, our company went through a good deal of change. In years past, we'd tackle client projects geographically – our Austin office would handle work near there, and our Philadelphia office would focus on work in the north-eastern US.

As our company grew, it became clear that this structure didn't scale well. After carefully considering a new team-based approach, one of us published a long, energetic post that outlined all of the juicy details with a new organisation chart. After clicking 'Submit' , he closed his laptop and went on a week-long vacation. Needless to say, few people were completely freaked out by such a substantial change and immediately asked questions that a few of us didn't have detailed answers for.

When the vacation was over, our management team talked about what happened. Know that if you are conveying life-changing information to your staff that they'll have questions about it. Be available for them.

"SHARING A SECRET OR TWO WON'T PUT YOU OUT OF BUSINESS"

MAKING MISTAKES

None of these situations have a one-size-fits-all solution. The one common denominator that business owners have is the fact that they own businesses. Apart from that, things can be quite different. The secret is sharing information and applying what makes sense for you.

We encourage you to talk to each other. There's plenty of work out there. Sharing a secret or two won't put you out of business, it'll make you stronger. Mistakes are a good place to start. ●

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BUSINESS

Money matters

Because cash is king

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Quick capital

Stuck for ideas or cash? Help get your business off the ground and make quick money from home with your PC

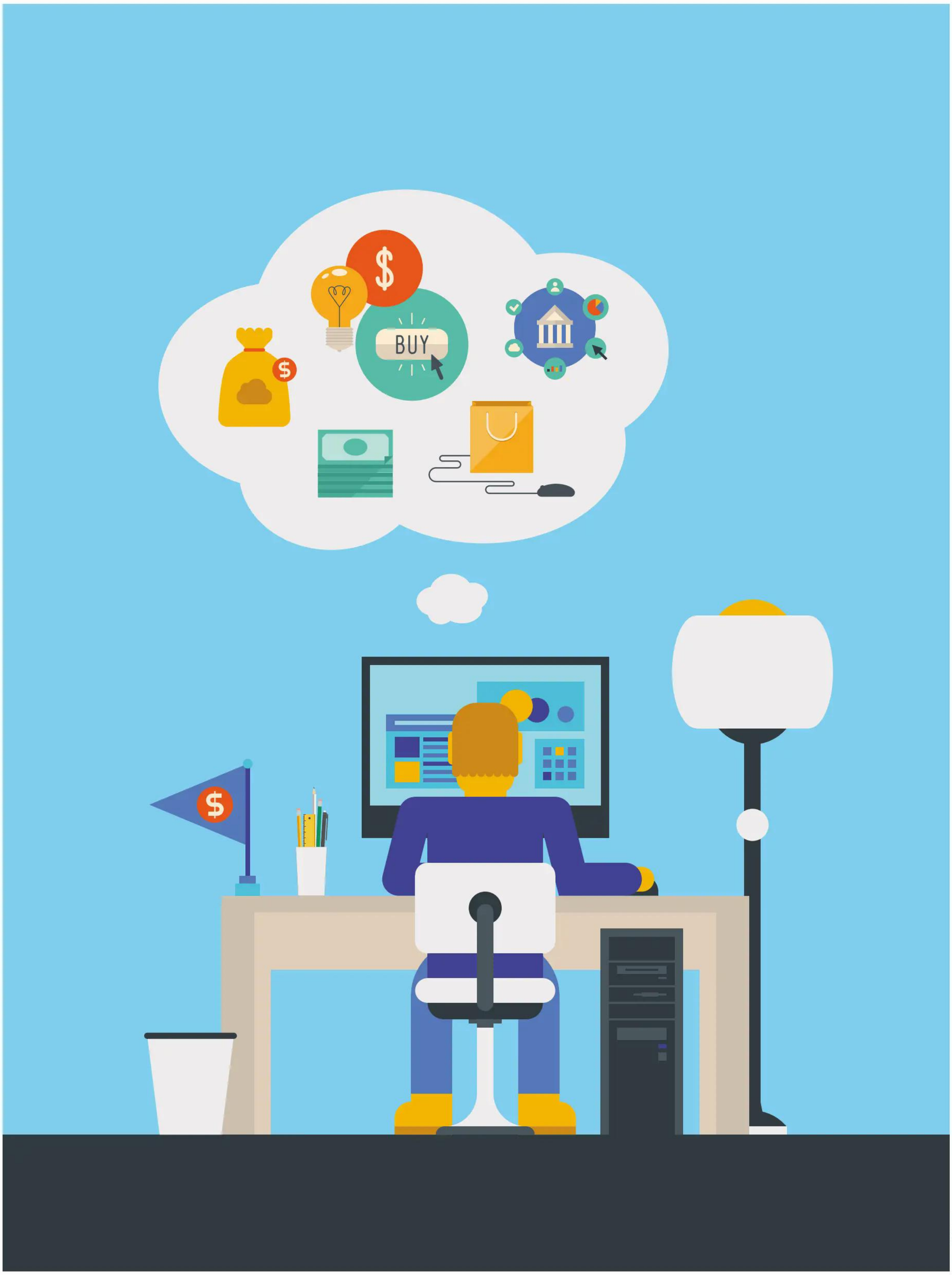
Let's be positive. Forget the credit crunch and the age of austerity – we're going to help you make some money. Don't worry if you're no Alan Sugar; thanks to the internet and your PC, all you need is a good idea. If you don't even have one of those, you can transform your spare time into cash – legally.

This isn't a guide to selling old vinyl on eBay or flogging knackered paperbacks on Amazon. We've done our homework, trawled the web and put together a list of new, exciting and innovative ways in which technology can help you make money.

We'll explore topics such as human intelligence tasks – jobs that computers and software can't do, but are essential to the functioning of an electronic business. All you need do is sign up for a service, set aside a few hours and do the jobs you're assigned. It might not be glamorous work, but if you have a PC and some time to spare, it's a great way of earning a few quid.

If you're feeling brave, we'll also explore how to start your own electronic business in a thoroughly modern way. Back in the pre-wired age, the banks held all the cards. If you wanted to start a business, you had to convince your bank manager that your great idea was profitable. Today you can forget the big four. If you have an ambition to launch an amazing venture, all you need to do is convince a community of lenders. If they're happy with your plan, the cash will turn up. The equation works the other way, too. If you have some savings and fancy being a venture capitalist, read on.

Before we get stuck into making our fortunes, a word of warning: keep your wits about you. The web is groaning with scams and scammers. We'll look at a few classic examples, but it pays to be aware of potential cons and fraud. The internet is a great place to make cash – just remember the old adage: if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. You're putting your livelihood on the line starting a new business. Either hit these schemes prepared to lose, or take a small risk.



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Peer-to-peer lending

Services such as Zopa make it possible to borrow and lend without the bankers taking a cut

Peer-to-peer lending, or social banking, uses the principle of crowdsourcing. Let's say you want to borrow a couple of grand to start an online T-shirt business. Sign up to Zopa (www.zopa.com) and you can get a loan at a very attractive rate of interest, plus a flat fee.

The money comes from a network of lenders, not a bank, and it pays to be a lender, too. At Zopa, for example, the average return at the time of writing is 5.0 per cent, which is actually a lot better than most short-term savings accounts.

What if a borrower can't pay back the money? So far, Zopa has done pretty well on that front, with a paltry 0.28 per cent default rate. But your investment doesn't go to one person – it's seeded throughout the community at no more than £10 per borrower. If one person defaults, it'll have little impact on your return as a lender. Zopa is the front-runner in this area, but other sites offer a similar service. You may get a better return from Funding Circle (www.fundingcircle.com), for example. The main difference for borrowers is that there's no flat fee. Instead, a portion of the loan is paid to the service. Funding Circle prefers business customers, while Zopa is open to anyone who has a good credit rating.

You can get a better return if you're willing to take a higher risk. That's how it works at FundingKnight (www.fundingknight.com). Borrowers post loan requests and you can choose who you want to lend money to. You put in a bid for that loan, setting your own interest rate. The return on investments averages at 10.8 per cent, but although all borrowers are screened, it's somewhat riskier than lending to the crowd. If a borrower defaults, a debt collector may called in to pursue your investment.

"THE AVERAGE RETURN IS 5 PER CENT – BETTER THAN SAVINGS

GOLD FARMING

Turn in-game currency into cash

Rather ridiculous it may be, but online gamers know in-game currency is a serious matter. It lets you unlock features, buy items and advance in the virtual world. You could work for it, or buy it from someone who's done all the work for you.

The practice is called gold farming and it's a real business, with Asia and Eastern Europe leading a market worth millions of dollars. But is it a real shortcut to cash in a more developed economy? If you assume that 10,000 units of gold in *WoW* are advertised for as little as $9 - then consider that with exploits these guys are probably making fewer than 300 units an hour - the answer is probably no.

Savvy players recommend playing the in-game market like the stock exchange, but if you're that skilled, why not dabble in real financial markets instead?

Make money for tiny tasks

Computers are becoming ever more powerful, but some jobs still need a human touch. Work at your own pace with Human Intelligence Tasks

Computers have removed lots of boring and repetitive tasks from the workplace, but they've created a fair few, too. That's where Amazon's Mechanical Turk comes in (www.mturk.com). Small tasks that can't be performed by software are farmed out to its subscribers, who turn the job around for a few cents at a time. That name? It's from an 18th century sideshow attraction. A chess-playing robot was toured around Europe, amazing audiences with its apparent skill. It was, however, controlled by a human hidden from view.

The micro-jobs that are tendered at Mechanical Turk (called HITs or human intelligence tasks) could be any quick, computer-related duty. In a typical session, a user might do a bit of data entry or fill in a questionnaire. The more HITs you complete in the allotted time, the more you earn. With many HITs offered at just a few cents a task, it requires dedication to earn a crust – but there are advantages, too. You can work from home doing as much or as little as you want, at any time of day you want. And tasks that require more thought and effort pay more.

If Mechanical Turk's rewards seem too paltry, there are similar, more specialised services to choose from. MicroWorkers (www.microworkers.com) offers higher rates, but the tasks are in the grey marketing category, with HITs requiring that you sign up for dating sites and blogs, or review items on Amazon.

Finally, there's Just Answer (www.justanswer.com). Here, you get to use your expertise to answer live queries from users. You need some qualifications in the field you choose and your credentials are displayed to users so they can see you have the relevant expertise. The system works on a bidding basis. As a provider, you scan the listings for live questions you can answer. If you can help, you set a price. It's up to the user whether they agree to pay or look for a better deal. New providers take 25 per cent of the fee, while more seasoned experts get a 50 per cent cut.

DON'T BE A MULE

Beware of money laundering jobs

We've all had the emails or seen the adverts on Craigslist, but job titles such as Money Transfer Agent disguise the fact that anyone who accepts such an offer is a mule: an unwitting party to money laundering. You'll be asked to accept transfers to and from your bank account for a percentage in commission. The crooks are using you to cover up a paper trail that leads back to them and the origin of the fraudulently obtained cash. Ignorance of the crime is no defence. You're receiving stolen goods. Be safe: report scams like this to Action Fraud https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/.

ADVERTISE ON YOUR WEBSITE

The easiest way to start serving ads from your site, and earning money, is Google's AdSense (http://adsense.google.com). A chunk of code is provided for you to paste into your site when you sign up. People browsing your site see adverts that fit its content and keywords.

The cash-per-click model means that every time a visitor clicks on a link, you get a share of the fee the advertiser paid. Google doesn't publicise the exact percentage of the pie that you'll get, but some keywords offer a bigger slice than others. Some AdSense users have seen earnings over £1,000 a month.

It's hard to track which keywords are the real winners, even though there are several blogs and websites that claim to list the highest paying AdSense keywords. Is it worth shelling out for these lists? You can use Google's own AdWords tool to suggest related keywords for free. It'll help you optimise your content for more targeted ads.

Don't click ads on your own page, and don't think asking your friends to click on them will help you either. Google considers this click fraud, and employs sophisticated tracking mechanisms to protect its revenue. You're more likely to get a swift, permanent ban than any extra income. If you want to make money with AdSense, just make good, consistent content aimed at a small audience.

For more control over ads, try affiliate linking. You either take a percentage of all the sales you refer to the service provider, or you get simple cash for clicks. Amazon Associates is a highly visible example. Sign up at http://affiliate-program.amazon.co.uk for access to tools that let you create banners, badges and text links to any item on the site – just make sure that the products you choose are relevant to the content you already carry. When someone clicks an Amazon affiliate link on your site, you'll get nine per cent of the cash they spend. Easy money.

MAKE MONEY WITH VIDEOS

Technically, it's easy for anyone to prepare a home video for publication online. You can upload video at HD resolutions on YouTube, for example – and the service takes care of the compression at various resolutions for you. YouTube also accepts video in QuickTime, MPEG, Windows Media format or as an AVI file. Keep in mind that HD resolution is 1,920 x 1,080, so there's no point going over that. Once you've clicked the 'Upload' button, it's really straightforward. The tough part isn't making videos – it's growing an audience. You'll need that audience to make money.

It's easy to see which are YouTube's most popular videos. Go to http://bit.ly/200KW37, where you can pick the most popular videos. There are several common threads. First, cuteness. Cute kids and cute animals. If it's funny as well as cute, it's YouTube gold. As of January 2021, the number one video of all time is the 'Baby Shark Dance'.

One way to hedge your bets is to ride the slipstream. For a short time, Rebecca Black parodies and mashups were nearly as popular on YouTube as the original video. Catch the next viral smash at the beginning of its ascent, then make a video that rides its coat-tails and your efforts will benefit from the reflected glory. It's tricky to time correctly but pays dividends if you do.

Instructional videos do well, too, but that subject really deserves a separate discussion because there's an entire secondary market in tutorial videos.

Get the video views and those eyeballs on your work can be translated into cash. The YouTube Partner Program (https://www.youtube.com/intl/ALL_uk/howyoutubeworks/policies/monetization-policies/) enables you to place advertising on your clips and earn money for every viewing. Be aware, though, that it's really tough to get in. What's more, YouTube doesn't reveal hard figures but it does publish testimonials.

There are alternatives to YouTube that let you earn revenue from adverts without having to build a following first. Try sites like blip.tv and vimeo.com.

SELL YOUR PHOTOS

Digital photography enjoys a brilliant synergy with PCs and the web. Millions of us enjoy uploading pictures to photo sites such as Flickr, or sharing images with friends on Facebook and Twitter.

That's not all you can do, though – with a little extra work, you could be earning cash with your camera taking stock photographs and selling them online. There are two markets in stock photography. At the high end are images produced by professionals. These include shots of news events, celebrities and difficult setups. Usage rights for these sell for hundreds of pounds.

Your entry point is through microstock – where royalty-free images are licensed for commercial use at very low prices, from which you take a percentage cut.

Like many other online enterprises, this is a volume business, with pennies per sale rather than pounds. The key is to create popular images that lots of people will want to use. Handily, several microstock sites publish guidelines revealing exactly what kinds of image they're after and what they don't want. iStockPhoto (www.istockphoto.com), for example, reveals that seasonal themes and corporate imagery are big sellers, while shots of fruit on white backgrounds are passé. However, the main requirement is that your shots should be well composed, at a sufficiently high resolution, well lit and in focus. Basic photography skills will serve you well here.

Other potential markets include Shutterpoint (www.shutterpoint.com). This is a community-orientated stock repository, with a 'stack 'em high, sell it low' ethos that works well if you can produce popular images that will sell in volume.

Another particularly good bet is Shutterstock (www.shutterstock.com), a more formal and established presence that enables you to make up to $30 for each image sold – and images can be sold for use multiple times.

If you'd rather go straight for the higher end of the market, you can sell your photography direct to users from your own site. PhotoShelter (www.photoshelter.com) offers a set of tools that enable you to do so, taking care of digital photo storage and payment systems, while you have control over what you sell. The catch is a fixed fee, from $9.99 a month.

PUBLISH AN EBOOK

Self-published ebooks are an ideal format for niche ideas. Secrets of mind reading and make-up techniques of the stars are ideal topics. Arcane expertise could net you a profit, too. Perhaps you rebuilt an old car from scratch. There are probably a few hundred other people who'd tackle the same project with your guidance.

Self-publishing with ebooks is easier than ever – especially with iTunes and Kindle publication now real options. You don't even have to create a special format for Kindle books. The Kindle Direct Publishing program (http://kdp.amazon.co.uk) accepts digital manuscripts in plain text, HTML or Microsoft Word DOC formats. That's the older Word format, by the way, not DOCX. You can use PDF, but Amazon book publishers have reported problems with formatting.

There's a form to fill in, enabling you to categorise the book, add an ISBN and add Digital Rights Management. Authors report that making changes to the submission after the fact is laborious, so make sure every detail is correct and your text has been proofread. Next you set a price and keep 70 per cent of the mark-up from every sale.

Formatting books for Apple iBooks – the free book store app for the iPad – is more involved. You need to output to the ePub protocol, supported in Apple's Pages application, Adobe InDesign. Alternatively, you can convert to ePub using the open source tool Calibre. From there, the submission system is similar to KDP.

One final service that is more than worth a mention is Smashwords (www.smashwords.com). It makes the process of publishing to multiple formats and outlets easier – and it accepts digital manuscripts in DOC format. With one submission to Smashwords, you can have that all-important ISBN number sorted out and publish your book to the Nook and Sony's eReader store, as well as the Smashwords site. It even publishes to Apple iBooks.

01

SEEDINVEST
www.startengine.com

Got a good idea but don't know how to get it off the ground? That's what SeedInvest is for. As one of the largest crowdfunding networks available today, the website helps nurture inventions from initial concept through to manufacturing and sale. Not all ideas make it through the process – but SeedInvest aims to bring in $10 billion for its companies by 2029. Your idea is mooted to a community of users, and if they think it will be successful, they help with research, design and testing. The process can be more

02

FIVERR
www.fiverr.com

What would you do for five dollars? The microworking concept is stretched to silly extremes with Fiverr, a website that allows people to post adverts that offer any service they can think of. The rule is that it should cost five dollars. You'll find folk making Kermit the Frog birthday videos, creating one-minute voiceovers – even doing dream interpretation. This is the fun side of the Mechanical Turk concept. Users can post their own requests for tasks, too. It's fascinating to see the gulf between what people are prepared to offer for $5 and what others expect to receive for that amount.

03

UPWORK
www.upwork.com

Upwork is the most prominent of a new breed of websites that enable prospective employers to find freelance workers for their creative projects. Designers, illustrators, copywriters, proofreaders, ghost writers, coders, developers and more all ply their trade here. Companies and individuals place job listings on the site, soliciting bids for the work from members of the community. Good freelancers who use the service build up a reputation on the site, using a system similar to the star ratings on eBay, so prospective employers can make an informed choice about the contractors they use.

04

ETSY
www.etsy.com

If you've never visited Etsy before, imagine a craft fair packed with stalls run by hipsters. Etsy is a virtual version of that. Sellers who sign up build their own online shops full of handmade jewellery, knitted monkeys, repurposed knick-knacks and art prints. For buyers, it's a way to find unique and quirky items. For sellers, it's a step up from marketing their wares on eBay; Etsy is a specialist outlet with its own identity and branding that extends to its users. Get on there while it's still cool, because it certainly won't be long before Etsy is trumped by the next trend in online crafts.

05

THREADLESS
www.threadless.com

For designers, Threadless is a superb showcase for their wit and skills. Again, there is a competitive edge. You submit your designs and the community votes for its favourite ones. The most popular designs are then made into T-shirts. Why put yourself through all that when there are websites such as CafePress that enable you to start your own T-shirt shop? Threadless gives you better exposure. It's like putting your video on YouTube instead of Daily Motion – you'll get more traffic, more hits, more kudos and more money. If your design is successful, you'll get a cool $2,500.

06

KICKSTARTER
www.kickstarter.com

Kickstarter is like an online equivalent of *Dragon's Den*, specialising in creative, entrepreneurial projects. It's a way to connect people who have big, potentially commercial ideas with real investment. Every project comes with its own web page, where creators can sell the benefit of their idea, whether it's an ice-cream business or a web service. Money is crowdsourced from Kickstarter's community. Successful examples include Julia Nagle, a comedian with a big YouTube following who's had nearly $60,000 pledged towards her new album release.

07

HIREWRITERS

www.hirewriters.com

There's a good chance you write. Maybe you've got a blog on the go or just a penchant for stringing words together in a creative way. Good news! You can make money writing commissioned pieces, and you don't need any experience or contacts. There is a downside, that being that you will be paid peanuts when you start out working for HireWriters, and the money doesn't get much better. The maximum is $20 when you're established with the service, so unless you're a proficient and quick writer and can handle a lot of work without your brain melting, this is unlikely to become a way to make a living.

08

LULU

www.lulu.com

Kindle, Smashwords and iBooks are brilliant for wordy projects, but we're still a while away from the viable coffee table ebook. At Lulu you can turn ebooks into real, tangible volumes made of paper. It's ideal for image-rich tomes, and you can take a cut of every copy sold after Lulu has absorbed production expenses and taken its share of profit. Using the service takes a little more savvy than Kindle publishing. You need to create a PDF with a fixed layout, but Lulu provides templates and guides for all its most popular book sizes. It's not the only bespoke publisher out there, but it's the biggest.

09

CROWDOLOGY

www.crowdology.co.uk

People want to know what you think, so much so that they will pay money to hear it. Think that sounds ludicrous? Well, it's not. There are countless services you can sign up for that will reward you for filling in sometimes long and tedious surveys. Crowdology is just one of these services, but we like it because you can use it the other way, too; if you've got a business that you're trying to get off the ground, you can arrange with Crowdology to have one of your own surveys put to its eager audience of paid info-givers. You should be prepared for a few spurious answers, though.

The art of crowdfunding

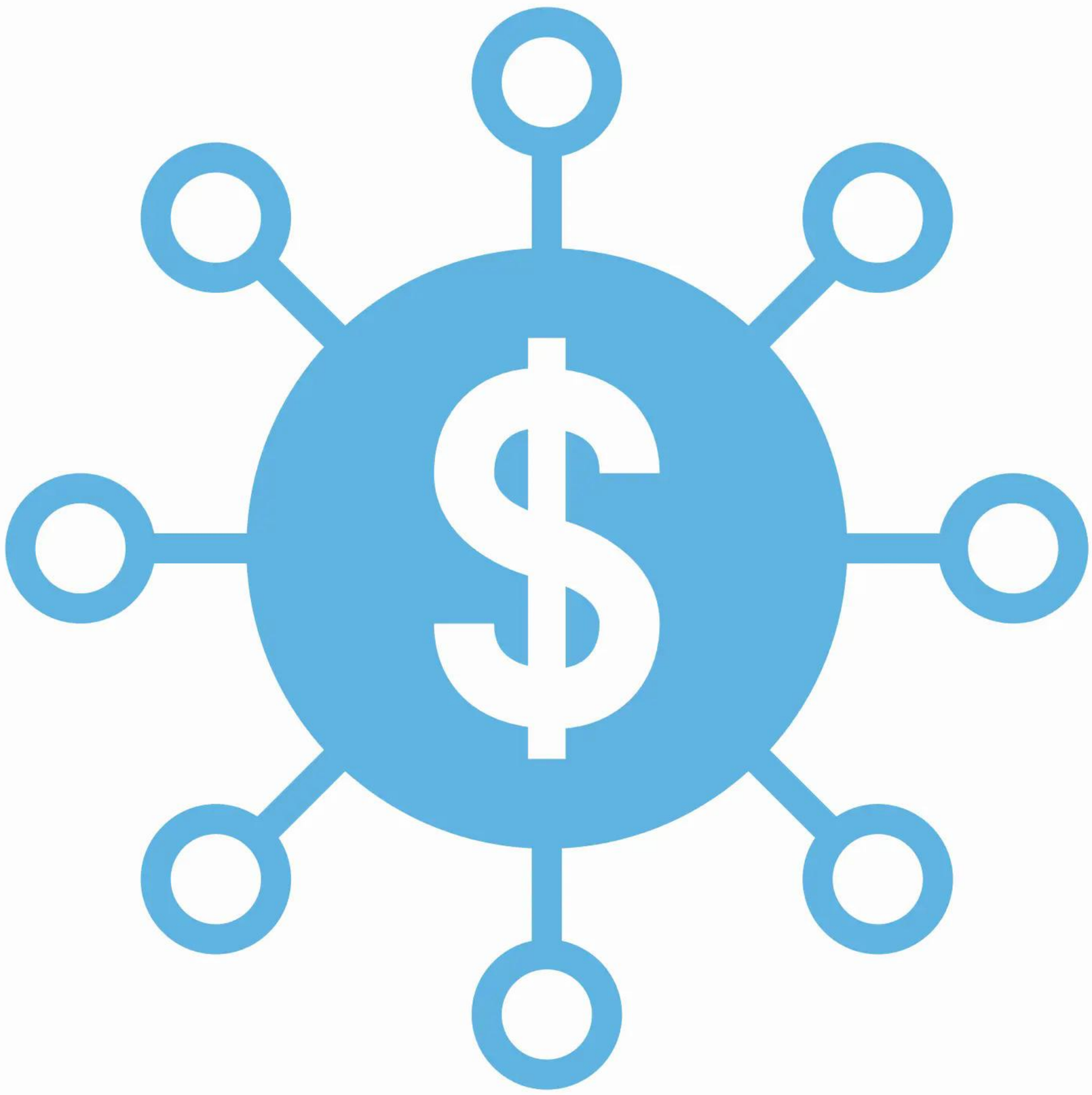
From prog rock albums to computer games and glamorous gadgets, crowdfunding is changing the way new businesses raise funds

All the best businesses begin with a brilliant idea, but many just stop there. Ideas remain ideas. This is unpleasant but understandable – moving from an epiphany in the shower to a fully-fledged product takes nerve, perseverance and plenty of cash to start the ball rolling.

Securing finance has, of course, become a lot more difficult since the credit crunch. Previously, banks would lend money with comparative abandon. Today, they're more reticent, despite government interventions and encouragement.

There is, however, another way of raising cash to fuel your business dream: crowdfunding. You've probably heard the term and maybe even explored sites such as Kickstarter (www.kickstarter.com). If not, crowdfunding enables you to present your business plan to a potentially huge audience of internet users. If they like what they see, they may help you finance your dream.

As you read on, we'll explore crowdfunding. We'll look at how and why it started, and how you can use crowdfunding in its many different forms to finance your new business. We'll explore how to access the crowd correctly and how to ensure your project makes the best possible start. We'll also look at how you can invest in other people's dreams. So, come with us as we explore the crowdfunding revolution.



THE NOT SO SILENT REVOLUTION

Crowdfunding – the business of borrowing cash from a pool or crowd of investors – is big business. In a report, crowdexpert.com claimed that the global crowdfunding industry raised $34 billion of investment capital during 2015, with $6.8 billion of that in Europe.

Globally, crowdfunding's vital statistics are simply astounding. Reliable figures are hard to come by, but Kickstarter's own metrics suggest its users had pledged $2,834,673,213 as we went to press. That's just Kickstarter; many other platforms have risen since its inception.

If you want further persuasion that crowdfunding is a sector you need to understand and watch, take the case of Elevation Lab. The company wanted to make docking stations for Apple devices. Don't imagine some kind of piano-black Apple pastiche here, though. Think manufacturing processes that would make Rolls Royce blush and products that would make Jonathan Ive cry tears of joy.

According to Massolution, Elevation's Kickstarter funding drive was the first individual campaign to reach the $1 million milestone. In all, it pulled in a total of $1,464,706 from Kickstarter investors.

A few months later – in April 2012 – Pebble Technology, maker of boutique smartwatches, drew in $1 million of investment in just 28 hours. Overall, Pebble pulled in an amazing $10,266,845 of funding.

THE HISTORY OF CROWDFUNDING

In some regards, it's easy to pass off crowdfunding as a reaction to, and a symptom of, a recession mindset. Crowdfunding is, however, much more than just a new wave of business people looking to circumvent tarnished banks, which have lost their nerve for investment.

Indeed, students of crowdfunding's history often point to the Statue of Liberty as an early example of gathering investment from the masses.

Back in 1885, funding for the statue dried up and work stopped. Determined to help, Joseph Pulitzer – a journalist and publisher – announced a drive to raise $100,000 in New York's World newspaper. Pulitzer promised to print the name of anyone who contributed money to the statue project, no matter how small their donation. Money flooded in, Pulitzer generated his $100,000 and work began once again.

Beyond tapping a crowd of people for small sums in the hope of generating a big tranche of capital, Pulitzer's initiative was prescient for another reason, too. He gave a gift to the contributors and this, as we shall see, is a cornerstone of the way crowdfunding works today.

I DID IT! THE GOCARSHARE STORY

Drummond Gilbert, founder of the London-based goCarShare car-sharing site, recounts how he worked with the funding platform Seedrs to rev up his business

Let's start easy: why don't you introduce your business goCarShare and tell us what's so special about it?

I had the idea for goCarShare when I was walking down the street close to where I live in west London. I noticed a stationary traffic jam, and nearly every car had only one person in it, and the whole situation didn't really make a huge amount of sense.

It was at the beginning of the credit crunch, and I just felt that it was an opportunity to help people travel in a more cost-effective, sustainable way. Specifically, you could help people find other people who were heading the same way and allow them to choose who they travelled with based on Facebook information, such as musical taste or shared friends.

Is there something special about your business that makes it perfect for crowdfunding?

Our business is a community and a marketplace. For it to work well, it is all about getting as many people as possible to get involved. I think it helps that goCarShare is an exciting concept – it is using Facebook and it is an online solution to solve real-world problems, such as high travel costs, congestion and carbon emissions.

With crowdfunding, we are getting lots of investors involved who will become active proponents of the business, and who will help the concept spread by word of mouth.

How was the experience?

It was an amazing feeling when we reached our target – we managed to get 145 different people to invest in the company, so it is great validation.

We've also had a lot of people tweeting about us, and the press seem very interested, which is helpful for us getting the word out.

What advice would you give to somebody with a great idea and a need for funding?

Be ready for it to take much longer than you expect; a lot of people, myself included, underestimated the amount of time it takes to fundraise.

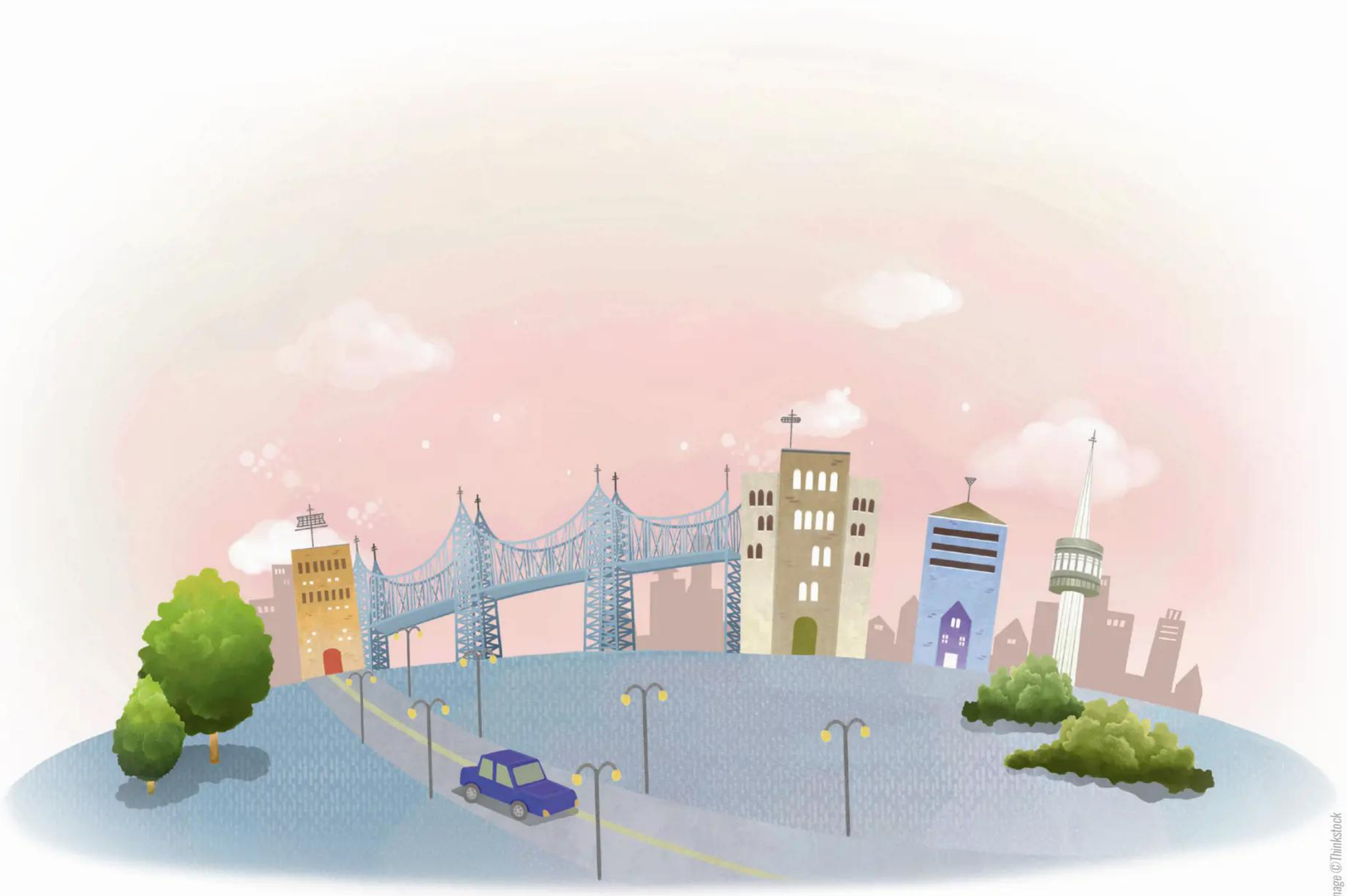
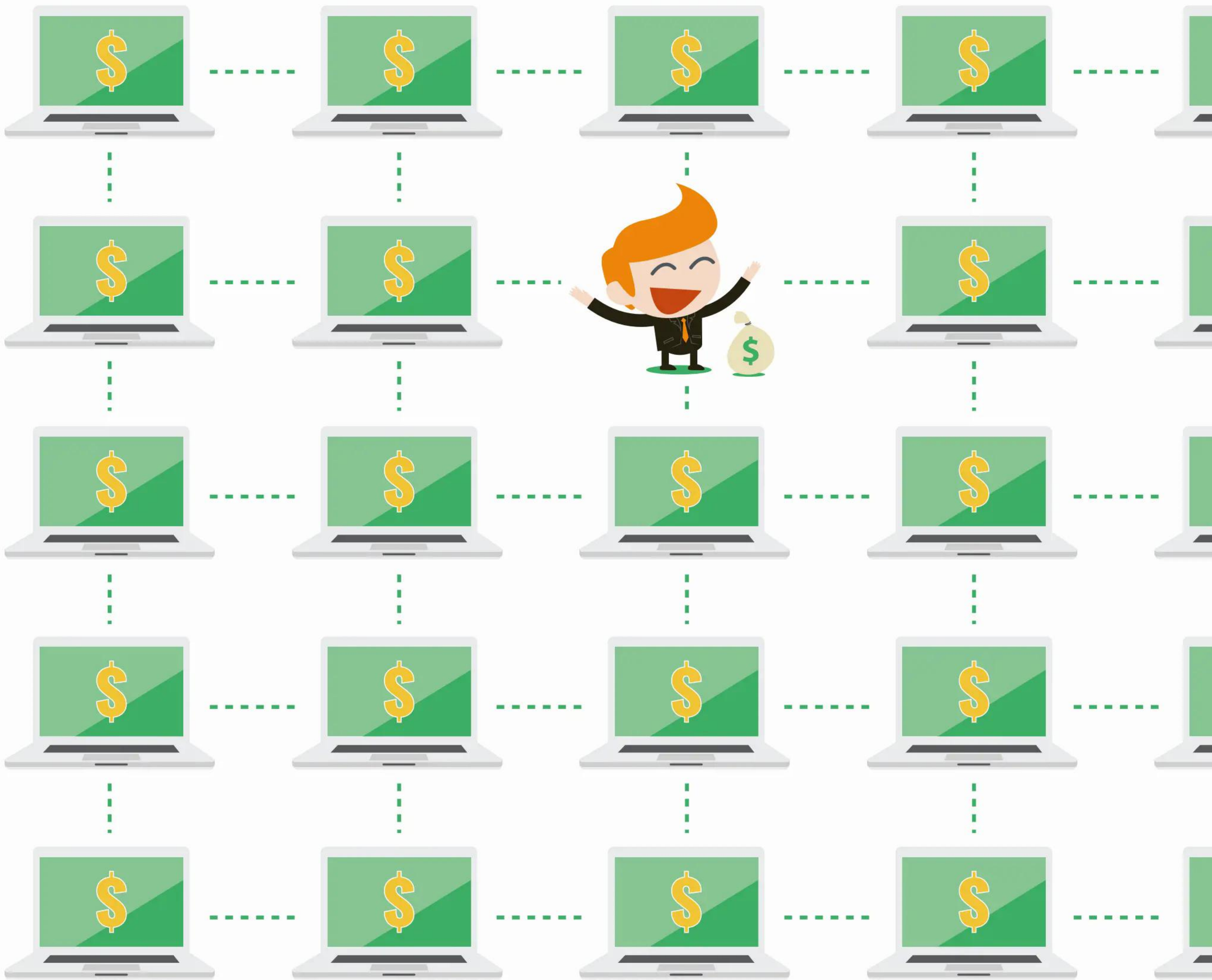


Image ©Thinkstock



It was, however, the growth of the internet that gave crowdfunding a proper jumpstart. Back in 1997 – at around the time Internet Explorer 4 arrived on the scene – fans of the prog rock group Marillion raised $60,000 so the band could record a new album. The campaign was a success, Marillion made their record and continued to tap their fans to help finance their future projects.

Fast-forward to today and crowdfunding is growing at a huge rate. To find out more about the sector, we spoke with Julia Groves, managing director of the UK Crowdfunding Association (www.ukcfa.org.uk).

"The UK Crowdfunding Association is a trade association formed in 2012 by 12 of the leading UK crowdfunding platforms," Groves explained. "Our mission is to promote crowdfunding as a viable and valuable way for UK businesses, projects and ventures to raise funds from the contributions of the people... At present, we have 24 members who are operating UK platforms, and 10 affiliated members, which are pre-operational." As we spoke, she explained that crowdfunding is very much an umbrella term for four key types of cash-generating approaches. The first, she

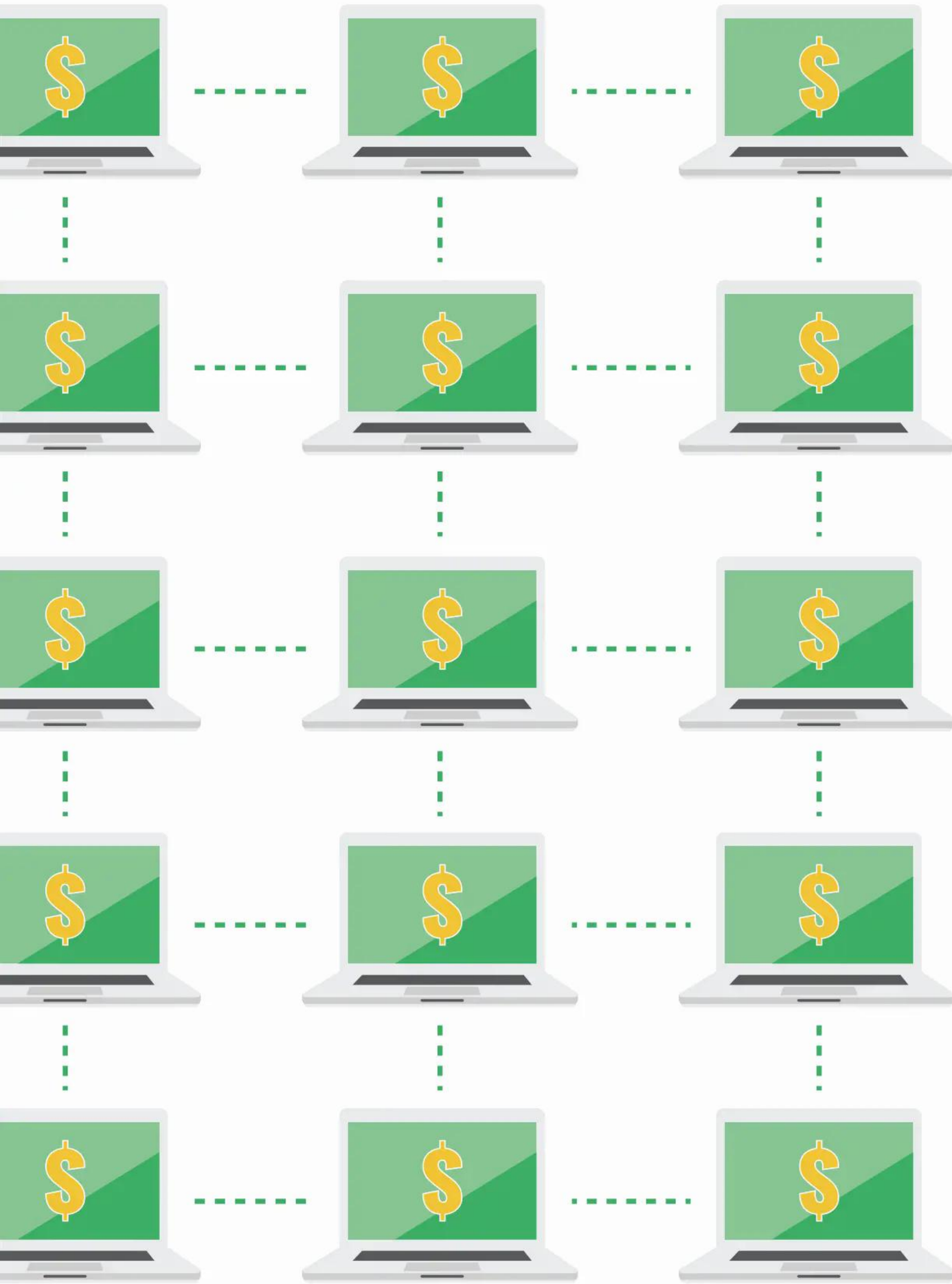


Image ©Thinkstock

told us, is referred to as the donation model. Here, supporters simply give cash to a start-up and don't have any expectation of a return. Just Giving's crowdfunding pages are a prime example of this style of working.

Next up, we have reward-based crowdfunding, where givers donate with the expectation of receiving something in return.

This style of funding was embraced by David Braben, a man famous in computer gaming circles as the co-maker of the 1980s classic space-trading game, *Elite*. In an effort to fund a remake of the game – *Elite: Dangerous* – Braben launched a Kickstarter campaign. A donation of £10 bought you a regular newsletter and updates on the project. If you gave £30, you'd receive a digital copy of the finished game. Contribute more and you'd get bigger and better

JARGON BUSTERS

EIS

The Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) is a government-backed scheme designed to help start-ups raise cash by offering tax relief to investors who buy shares in them. Visit www.hmrc.gov.uk/eis/ for more information.

EQUITY

Generally, the term 'equity' is used to mean shares or an ownership interest in a business. An equity or share in a crowdfunded company, however, is not traded on the London Stock Exchange like other shares.

EXIT

An exit is simply selling the shares you've bought in a business. You might hear this process of cashing-out being referred to as a 'liquidity event' or a 'harvest strategy'.

FCA

The Financial Compliance Authority is the UK's financial services regulator. It is endowed with rule-making, investigative and enforcement powers.

LANDING PAGE

The shop-front page that explains to prospective investors what's great and what's unique about your project.

SEIS

The Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme was designed to increase economic growth in the UK by promoting entrepreneurship and new enterprise. For more information, visit www.hmrc.gov.uk/seedeis/.

Image ©Thinkstock

returns. In all, the project pulled in over £1.5 million in donations, and *Elite: Dangerous* is now on sale, with several expansion packs available too.

If you're interested in this kind of funding, Groves pointed to Crowdfunder, Indiegogo, Zequs and Sponsorcraft (now Hubbub) as firms that you could explore.

Next up is the loan or debt model. Here a business borrows its funding and promises to repay the money with interest. Abundance Generation, Funding Circle, Funding Empire, Money&Co and Trillion Fund offer start-ups access to this kind of funding.

The fourth type of crowdfunding is equity funding. Here, Groves told us, "Support is provided in return for an equity stake [or share] in the business." Funding platforms such as Crowdcube, Seedrs, Angels Den and Syndicate Room embrace this kind of model.

PICKING THE RIGHT PLATFORM

Choosing the correct crowdfunding platform can appear daunting, particularly when you add in another type of platform: hybrid. Here a funding platform might offer a mix of donation, gift, debt and equity based deals.

So, how do you pick the right fund for your business? Groves explained: "One of the real beauties of crowdfunding is that not only can you raise money but you can galvanise an army of ambassadors who will feel connected and part of your project. If you plan to operate your business in the UK, then having such a supporter base here in the UK will probably better serve your needs than a US platform."

Beyond patriotism and convenience, there are also legal considerations to bear in mind. Groves told us: "Also, you need to be aware that in terms of equity crowdfunding, the UK is the world leader and this is largely down to supportive regulation. The US does not currently allow equity crowdfunding by ordinary investors, so you really need to consider where you intend to be based and, indeed, where your future customers will be based, who may well turn out to be your biggest investor fans."

It's also worth considering how the individual crowdfunding platforms make their cash, too. Most of them charge commission. Rates typically vary from around 3.5 to 8 per cent.

So, when looking for a funding platform, you'll need to choose between donation, gift, equity, debt and hybrid platforms. Which one is right for your business comes down to your personal ethics, ambition and the type of project you're planning.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Crowdfunding is a serious business. We talk with **Luke Scanlon**, *a technology lawyer, about your legal duties and responsibilities when accessing crowd cash*

Why don't you introduce yourself?
I'm a lawyer for Pinsent Masons and Out-Law.com, having spent most of my career looking into technology, data protection and intellectual property law issues. As the business models of more and more banks, insurers and other financial services firms become dependent on technology, I'm finding that I am spending more and more time assessing the legal implications of the intersect between technology and financial services.

Is a crowdfunding campaign something a new entrepreneur can manage themselves without specific professional legal advice?
In the UK, it is important to determine whether or not a crowdfunding platform is authorised to provide financial services in accordance with financial services regulation. Not all crowdfunding platforms necessarily need to be. For example, pure donation and rewards-based platforms may not. Other platforms can take advantage of statutory exemptions, which allow certain financial services related activities to be performed without authorisation. But if entrepreneurs use unregulated platforms, they should make sure that they are not being involved in illegal activities, such as the making of unauthorised financial promotions, failing to provide adequate risk warnings, or issuing shares or other forms of financial security without authorisation.

What are the key responsibilities a start-up has towards people who fund it through a crowd-based platform?
It depends on the type of platform. Generally, an entrepreneur must be clear about what he or she is committing to, and be prepared to honour those commitments. While it is often suggested that 50 to 70 per cent of start-ups fail, this does not mean that an entrepreneur will escape liability if he or she fails to meet commitments given. If, for instance, the entrepreneur has failed to set up a legal entity for the project, it is possible that funders could bring a claim against him or her personally.

Do responsibilities change if you've raised funds by selling equity, as opposed to soliciting donations accompanied by the promise of a gift (perhaps a free copy of the product you're trying to make)?
The nature of your commitments will be different. Equity investments result in the creation of a particular type of legal relationship to which some specific obligations attach. Essentially, though, it is best to view all obligations to investors as legal obligations, no matter what incentive you have provided for investing. Be transparent about the risks of investing in your business, the barriers and the likelihood of success. Ensure that you understand everything you have committed to in writing.

What is the best way to protect yourself if your business fails?
It is important to ensure that you have set up a legal entity that separates your personal liability from that of your business or project, and you should observe general principles of good business practice. For example, no matter what the project, it is preferable if you use a crowdfunding platform that enables investors to track their money, where it is kept and transactions that have taken place.

And, looking down the other end of the rifle, what rights do you have if you've invested in a company that fails?
Well, the risks can include a total loss of investment; the lack of a secondary market for investments means that funders could have to wait until a management buy-out, a flotation or the sale of the business takes place before getting a return. In some instances, an equity investment may be diluted. Given these risks, the Financial Conduct Authority is proposing that only certain categories of investors ('sophisticated investors', 'high net worth investors', those who have received regulated financial investment advice, and some others) be able to engage in equity crowdfunding in the future. The FCA is consulting on this matter at the moment.

Get the ball rolling

Like the sound of crowdfunding? Then read on to find out how to get started

When you've decided upon the type of funding you'd like to use, you need to find a funding website or platform that supports it. This can appear daunting, because there's an ever-expanding number of funding platforms to choose between. You can find a handy list of firms on the UK Crowdfunding Association's website – www.ukcfa.org.uk/members.

NICE TO MEET YOU

Your initial approach to a platform is then very important. We spoke to Alysia Wanczyk, Seedrs' marketing director, about what actually happens when an entrepreneur and a funding platform meet each other for the first time.

She explained, "Once a business completes their online investment campaign, it comes through to our review team. The team then goes through and initially rejects any campaigns that are patently unviable, incomplete or plain silly. Those that proceed are carefully reviewed to ensure that every statement they make is fair, clear, not-misleading and truthful."

Unlike eBay, where the process of adding sales posts or landing pages is highly automated, Seedrs' registration system is much more human.

Wanczyk continued: "This [checking process] often requires a bit of a back-and-forth email and phone exchange between us and the entrepreneur, to ensure we receive supporting evidence for every statement. Once both parties are happy with the campaign, we set it live to potential investors to review – with the peace of mind that what they're reading is reliable. From there, it is up to investors to look around, ask questions and decide for themselves if a business is worth investing in."

PASS OR FAIL?

Funding campaigns usually last for around three months, Wanczyk told us. The question is, of course, what happens if you're successful? We asked Wanczyk whether the cheque arrives the next day. She explained: "Once a campaign

has hit its funding target, we conduct a further due diligence process to ensure that all legal and structural matters are in order with the company. It is all very straightforward." What this boils down to is essentials such as registering the company with Companies House, setting up a company bank account, and completing taxation documents. And if you're not so lucky? Wanczyk told us, "If a start-up doesn't reach their target [within three months], their campaign is taken down and each of the investors is given their investment back and notified. Sometimes, a business is given feedback from investors and potential investors and they take down the campaign themselves to change it and re-submit it."

HOW TO INVEST FOR PROFIT

Let's be clear: investing in start-ups is incredibly risky. The Financial Conduct Authority suggests that 50 to 70 per cent of new enterprises fail. But with risk, of course, comes reward. And it's for this reason that crowdfunding is sometimes viewed as a goldmine by canny investors. So, if you're sitting on some cash, how can you turn a profit?

Seedrs' Alysia Wanczyk explained the rules of investing via her platform: "Adults over the age of 18 who pass our investment authorisation questionnaire or self-certify as high net worth or sophisticated can invest." Assuming you satisfy the questionnaire's requirements – a document prepared with the FCA, so not to be taken lightly – you can invest anything from £10 up via Seedrs.

Julia Groves of the UK Crowdfunding Association told us about her approach to investing: "My rules are: I have a fixed amount of money I invest each business year – money I can afford to lose." She also viewed investing in different products, to spread risk, as important.

Finally, she told us to invest in things you know about and want to support. "I can and do put as much money as I can into renewable energy, because I have been working in that sector for 10 years and I am an environmentalist."

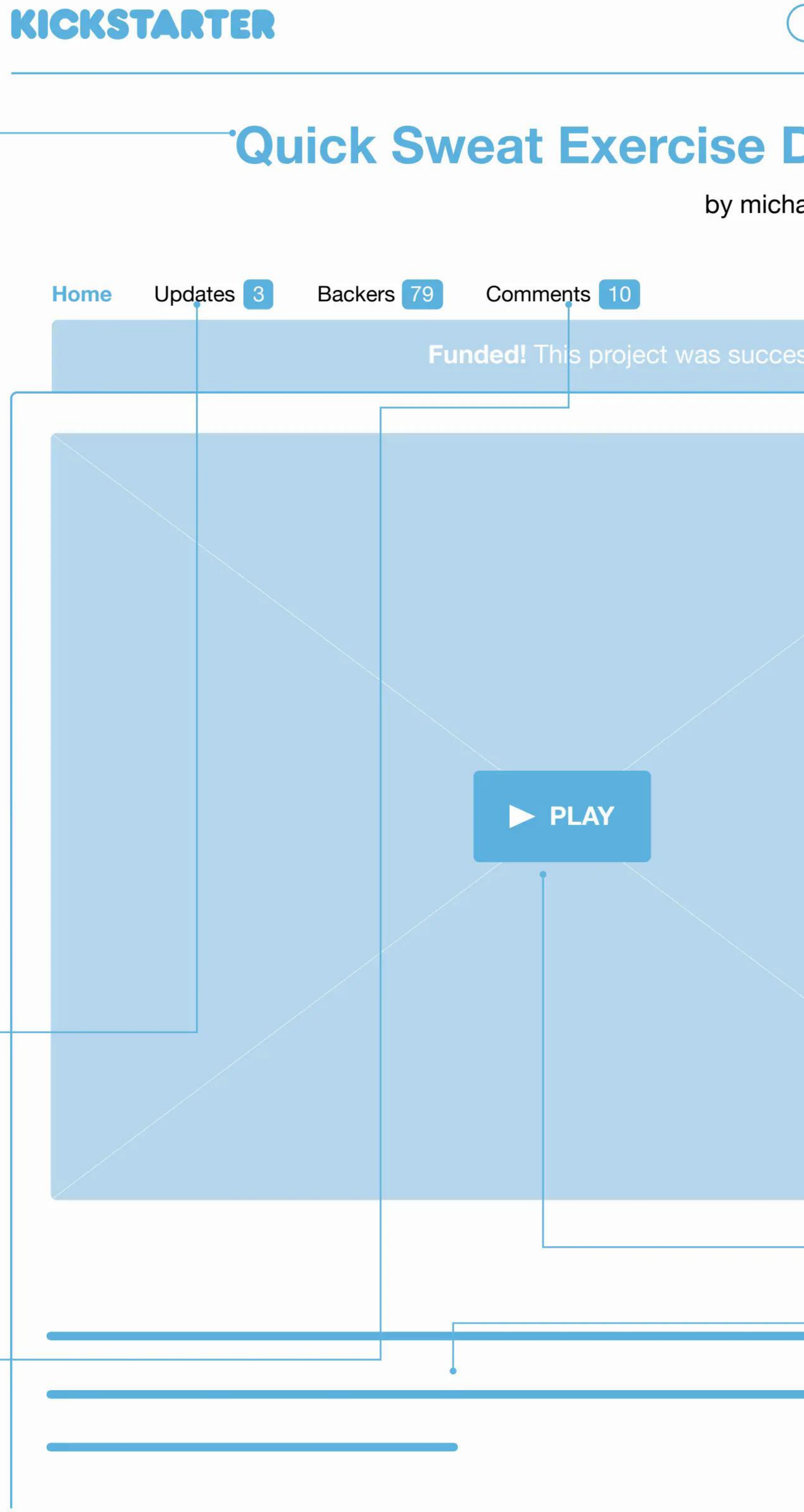
Bill Morrow from Angels Den (www.angelsden.com) also explained the importance of investing in firms who have SEIS (Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme) and EIS (Enterprise Investment Scheme) approval. He told us: "Having SEIS or EIS approval makes a business so much more investable, because it offers huge tax benefits for UK investors. Most investors will want SEIS or EIS deals to make up a significant part of their portfolio. It also means that you don't get taxed when you exit the business."

Also, consider dilution. In the first round of funding, you may buy 10 per cent of a firm. But as they grow, start-ups tend to launch other fund-raising drives. If they do, they may issue more shares, meaning you'll be left holding a reduced proportion of the whole. And with a reduction in holding comes a reduction in dividend income.

THE ANATOMY OF A LANDING PAGE

The landing page is a crowdfunding project's shop window. It's where an entrepreneur hopes to catch the eye of an investor and quickly persuade them to get their chequebook out. There are lots of different crowdfunding websites, so landing pages will all look subtly different. There are, however, some essential pieces of information that occur across nearly all the different platforms.

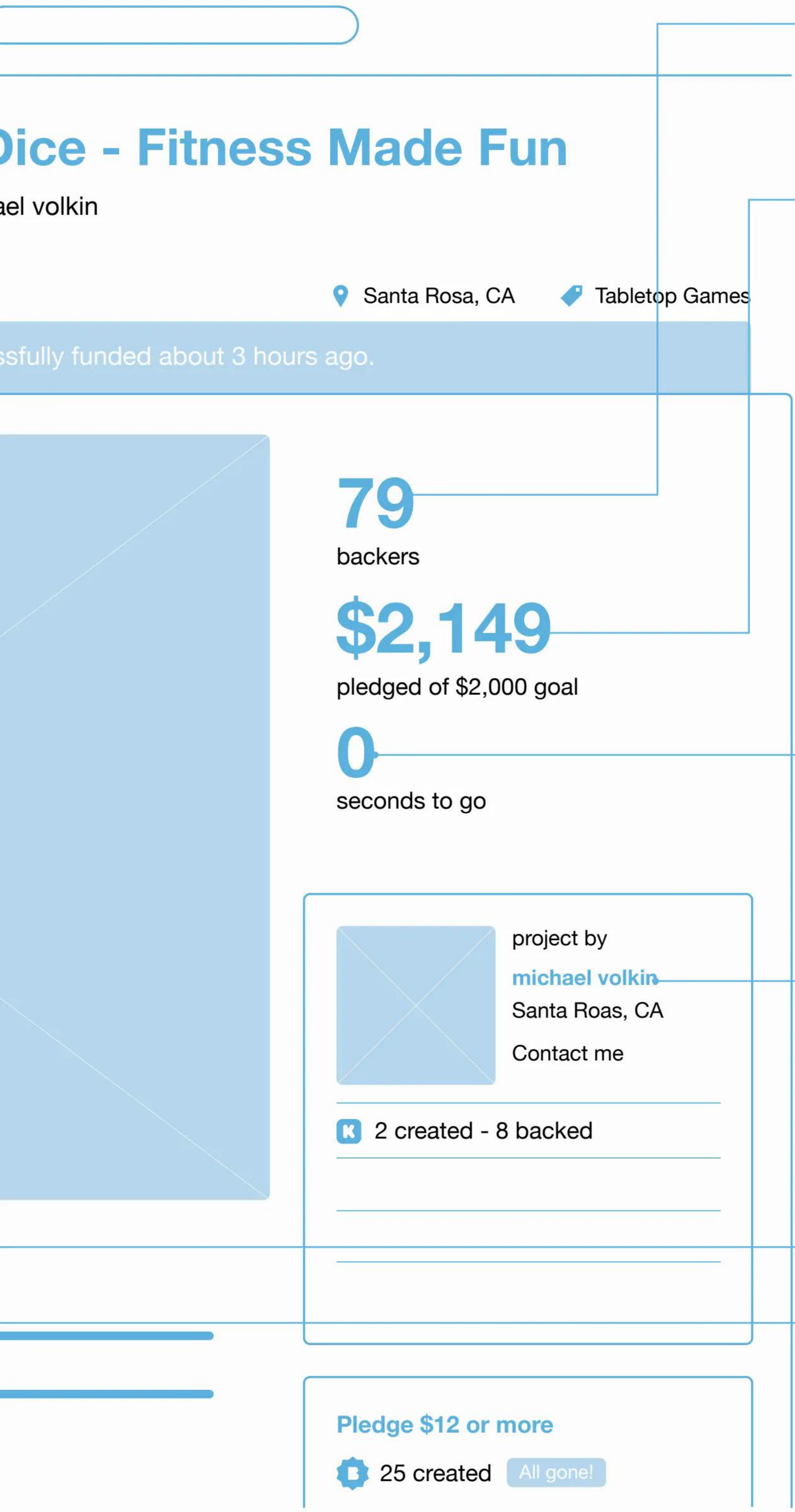
Here are the key elements that you will need to think about when building your own landing page.



01 PROJECT NAME
Give your project a pithy but immediately obvious name. Don't try to be too clever or investors might be confused.

02 UPDATES
Crowdfunding is all about building a community. As your funding drive develops, it's a good idea to post blog-style or video updates about the successes that you're having.

03 COMMENTS
It's important that entrepreneurs talk with their investors, allaying their fears and feeding their interest.



04 BACKERS
These are the people who have offered to contribute to your project.

05 PLEDGE AND GOAL
Here you'll see how much money has been promised and the funding target you need to meet. Hit your target and all the funds will be released. Miss your target and you may get nothing.

06 TIME TICKER
Most funding drives last for a few months. Your landing page will have a countdown ticker that shows how much time investors have left.

07 THE ENTREPRENEUR
Projects aren't just about products, they're about people. You need to be the face of your project and champion it at every possible opportunity.

08 THE VIDEO
There's no better way than using a video to communicate your pitch and its key points. Project videos are usually three minutes long.

09 THE PROMISE
A product pitch needs to identify a problem and explain how it will solve that problem. You need to think hard about your project's pitch and promise.

8 tips to make your campaign a success

Planning, persuasion and research are essential ingredients in a successful crowdfunding campaign

01

RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH

You need to understand the market you're planning to launch into. This means scoping out your competitors and any hurdles that might need to be overcome. In essence, think about doing a SWOT analysis of your idea (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SWOT_analysis). Going through this process is essential because you'll most definitely be quizzed about these sorts of business fundamentals as you progress from the idea stage through to funding. And don't think investors will go easy on you just because you've never been through the process before. Investors will certainly have lost money before and they'll be mustard keen to avoid doing so again.

02

GET THINKING STRAIGHT

An idea doesn't have any value, no matter how good it is. It is the execution of the idea that creates value. So, don't get hung up on your initial concept. Rather, think and talk about the business that you're building around the idea. You should also be able to explain your business succinctly, maybe in just one sentence. Be sure you can explain the problem you're looking to solve and how your business will solve it. If an investor doesn't understand your business – even if it's amazing – they'll pass it by. Your business's reasons for being – its mission statement – should be echoed consistently across all communication channels at all times.

03

PLANNING AND MILESTONES

Taking a project from an idea to a fully-fledged business can seem very daunting. For this reason, Tim Davies – investment director of Overfund (https://www.overfund.co.uk/) – writes about giving yourself a series of achievable goals. Beyond providing you with both encouragement and direction, having a solid plan also looks good to investors. You might, for example, raise capital so you can achieve phase one, and then return to the funding market and ask for cash to begin phase two. If the first chapter of your business story was a success and your investors are happy, you should find it easier to entice a second wave.

04

RAISE JUST WHAT YOU WANT

Spending other people's money is fun, but you'll have to pay it back. So, it pays to work out exactly how much money your business is going to need. This means you will have to pay less back and, also, it will serve to convince prospective investors. Anyone looking to invest their own money in a project is much more likely to trust somebody who can show that they're serious about cash management. So, get your calculator out, fire up Excel and then work out the exact sum of money your business needs to work, and – at this stage – no more.

05

MAKE A VIDEO

The most potent way to tell your business's story to prospective investors is to make a video. You don't need to make an epic – consider three minutes the maximum length of time you have to convince people. When you're planning your video, ensure you communicate your business's key pledges and the problems you're looking to solve very clearly. It also helps to have a logo at this point, too, because it conveys permanence and solidity. If you'd like more guidance about making your video, head over to Videohive (http://bit.ly/17HwfIX). There you'll find some excellent resources. (All that thinking and research you did in steps one and two should come in handy!)

06

DON'T GO LIVE JUST YET

Veeqo founder Matt Warren offers a great tip. Before you launch your funding campaign, talk with your friends and family, and persuade them to promise some small contributions. When your campaign does go live, their financial support will give your project an instant lift. This is beneficial because investors don't generally like to be the first to pledge money. Rather, they prefer to see a project that's already generating some momentum and is already going somewhere. So, don't hurry into going live as soon as you can. It pays to get some early, pre-backers primed and ready first.

07

EMBRACE SOCIAL MEDIA

When your campaign is up and running, you need to be able to create a real buzz around it. Just sending out a press release is probably not going to be enough. You need to be fanning the flames with social media. There is, of course, a huge number of platforms to choose from. If you have limited resources, you need to focus your attention on the ones that investment professionals are likely to use: LinkedIn and Twitter. Get your team involved, too. The key is to have a constant output of messages. Don't splurge and then go quiet. And don't view social media as a one-way street. Talk with people who take the time to message you.

08

DON'T FORGET OFFLINE, TOO

It's easy to rely purely on digital promotion to promote digital products. There is, however, no substitute for getting out and meeting prospective investors face to face. There are lots of meet-ups where new businesses can network with professional investors. To find out about such gatherings near you, try visiting EventBrite https://www.eventbrite.com. It's a site that chronicles a huge number of professional events that happen around the world. In many regards, it's the ultimate diary. The point is, don't just sit back and expect investors to find you – there's a dizzying array of projects vying for their attention.

Greatest triumphs and failures

There's little doubt that crowdfunding can be an incredibly effective way to raise cash, but where many succeed, others inevitably fail...

OUYA

Funding target: $950,000
Sum raised: $8,596,474

Ouya billed its device as "a new kind of video game console". The small, silver box was powered by the Android operating system and fans really bought into the idea. In all, a total of 63,416 backers helped the project rocket past its funding goal of around $1m. While product itself didn't quite live up to expectations, it did at least appear post-funding.

UBUNTU EDGE

Funding target: $32,000,000
Sum raised: $12,814,216

Ubuntu Edge was to be a smartphone that doubled as a desktop computer. Not shy of technical ambition, its makers were also brave crowdfunders. The group set out to raise $32m, which is a world record for a fixed funding campaign. In the event, over 20,000 people pledged cash totalling just shy of $13m. It seems harsh to call Ubuntu Edge a failure...

NFC RING

Funding target: £30,000
Sum raised: £241,947

The NFC Ring is proof that geeks love funding technology products that solve real-life problems. The device is a clever piece of jewellery that enables you to unlock everything from your phone to specially designed locks. Just tap them with the ring and you're in. A pledge of just £8 bought you 3D printing plans, while £18 got you a ring and the app.

MOTORCYCLE-POWERED CHARIOT

Funding target: $40,000
Sum raised: $50

Watch out Ben-Hur, or maybe not. This creative, petrol-headed entrepreneur dreamed of making a street-legal chariot that could be pulled along by a motorbike. The plan was to give the charioteer full control of the bike's steering, throttle and brakes, while the rider himself was standing in the attached chariot. Thankfully, the crowd saw sense.

PEBBLE E-PAPER WATCH

Funding target: $100,000
Sum raised: $10,266,845

The Pebble smartwatch is ground-breaking in many ways. Technically, it's the perfect companion for your smartphone. At its most basic, it manages calls. If you're adventurous, you can even develop apps for it. The Pebble is also the first funding project to smash the $1m barrier, which it did at a canter.

NEW YORK CITY OPERA

Funding target: $1,000,000
Sum raised: £301,019

The majority of large-scale crowdfunding campaigns are for technology projects. However, facing deep financial problems, the New York City Opera turned to Kickstarter in the hope of boosting its flagging fortunes. Sadly, the drive, which hoped to raise $1m, fell well short of its target, netting just over $301,000.

THE VERONICA MARS MOVIE PROJECT

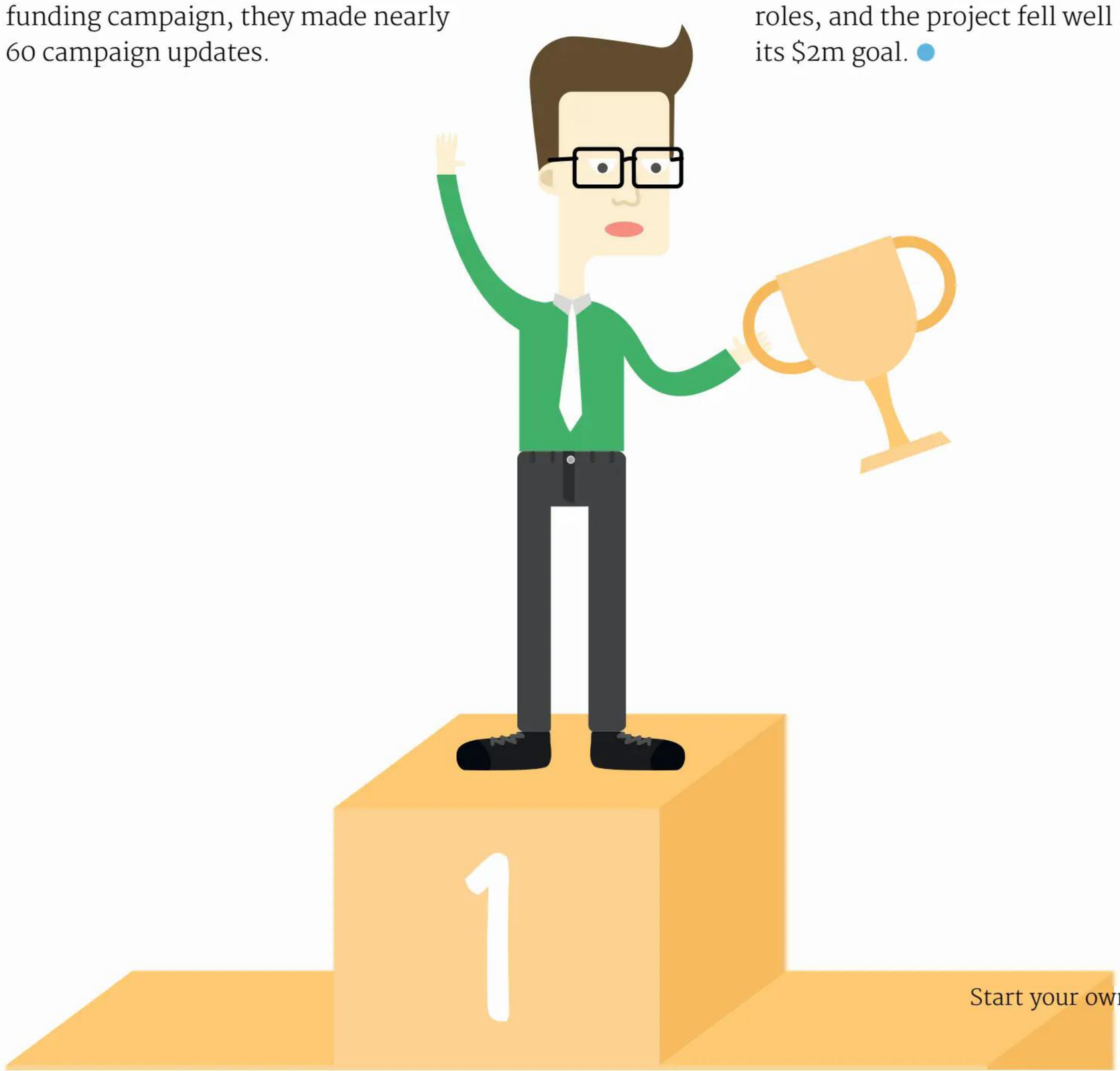
Funding target: $2,000,000
Sum raised: £5,702,153

A colossal 91,585 backers helped push this movie project well past its funding target of two million dollars. If you're looking for a blueprint for a successful funding drive, this is one to study. The team embraced the whole playbook: social networking, video and merchandising. During the life of the funding campaign, they made nearly 60 campaign updates.

DARCI'S WALK OF SHAME

Funding target: $2,000,000
Sum raised: $51,605

Melissa Joan Hart – the star of television's *Sabrina The Teenage Witch* – hoped to tap the crowd to fund her new TV series. Called *Darci's Walk Of Shame,* the show was penned as a romantic comedy. Sadly, however, Melissa's legions of fans obviously preferred seeing her in more familiar roles, and the project fell well short of its $2m goal.



Manage your cash

Money is at the heart of any business, so we'll help make sure you're clued up

The issue of money management fills many who start out on their own with dread. But there's no escaping it – the business-savvy get ahead. In between the fun, excitement and occasional terror of running your own gig, you have to face up to the reality that it's a business – and must be managed like one if it's going to succeed.

Cash flow is key. You need the right pricing structure and a few tricks of the trade to speed up the payment process. You'll also need to know what's coming in and going out at all times. So let's get cracking – from balancing the books to planning ahead, this section brings you practical business tips for managing your bottom line.

Set the right rates

A £5,000 project for one client could easily be a £20,000 job for another. So how do you know how much to charge?

One of the biggest mistakes a commissioned company can make is not to bill enough for its work. But every project is different, so what's the best way to calculate your fee?

A lot of elements come into the equation: project specification, usage and rights, your level of expertise, turnaround time, overhead costs, expenses and how much you feel the final project will be worth – not to mention how badly you want the job. Your reputation has a value, too, which will affect your billable rate. You know you're a talented business, so reflect that in your pricing structure. But first? Determine your base fee. Here's how...

PRICING THE NINE-TO-FIVE

The most basic form of billing is an hourly rate. Essentially, it's the value of your work time based on the number of hours spent on a project, inclusive of all calculable expenses. It works well for smaller companies because it factors in various overhead costs such as staff wages, premises and so on. It's also flexible for more open-ended jobs, where a client might request several revisions after the initial work is done.

CLEVER CALCULATIONS

Broadly speaking, an hourly or daily rate can be calculated by taking your annual business costs (include absolutely everything that's necessary to run your business, from your accountancy, legal and banking fees to annual insurance and travel costs, utility fees, any promotion and marketing, and also non-accountable costs, such as filing fees for tax returns), adding your desired yearly pre-tax income (be realistic) and dividing by your annual billable time, remembering to factor in both holiday and sick days.

WORK IN THE EXTRAS

While an hourly rate is sound, it can mask the true cost of work and planning, omit usage fees and doesn't necessarily take into account any extra expenses that might be incurred – the price of materials, for example. However, it does give a simple, justifiable set fee, which many businesses use as a basis on which to generate their initial quote. Any extra time or expenses incurred outside of this are scrupulously recorded and billed for in the final fee.

FLATTEN IT

Charging a flat fee for a project, based on your hourly rate multiplied by the time the job takes, can work well for regular work when you have a good idea of the time involved – a regular production of a similar item, say. But if the client suddenly demands endless rounds of time-sapping revisions, then your company is immediately out of pocket. Be very clear about what you are prepared to do when negotiating a flat fee. As with an hourly fee, make sure that you're able to adapt to any changing project demands; don't be afraid to revisit your original

estimate if the requirements of a project change – this should be written into your terms and conditions.

NAME YOUR PRICE

It isn't just about charging for time – your professional reputation hangs on your ability and prowess, so factor your unique skills into your fee. As your company's reputation or size grows, it might make more sense to move to a more ad hoc approach to billing; that is, varying it from client to client and project to project.

WHAT'S THE BUDGET?

This becomes particularly relevant once you know that the client has approached you specifically for the distinctive style of your business. In this case, you know they're willing to pay for that style, enabling you, to some extent, to name your price. Similarly, if you know your client is working with a sizeable budget, an ad hoc approach will enable you to take this into account when calculating a fee.

ROYALTIES

In any job involving royalties paid to you for use of your work - on clothing, for instance - ensure the terms are made absolutely clear. The 'normal' royalty rate is anywhere between two and ten per cent of the item's retail price, depending on the item. Rates can increase after a certain number of items have been sold, too. Negotiating royalties can be tricky, so it's always best to consult your accountant or legal advisor beforehand.

Image ©Thinkstock

Invest time in terms & conditions

Get your T&Cs sorted properly at the outset, and you should be able to cope with any eventuality

EXPLAIN PAYMENT TERMS

Include information about how and when you will deliver, and how and when you want to be paid (30 or 60 days from the date of the invoice, for instance).

ACCOUNT FOR LATE PAYMENTS

Assert your right to charge interest on late payments, and include a cancellation and rejection fee clause.

KNOW WHEN TO TERMINATE

Specify when and how you can terminate a brief with a client. Such provisions usually state that either party may terminate the agreement with a set period of notice; and detail when it can be ended immediately, such as failure to make payment.

NEGLECT YOUR RIGHTS

Make sure you have retention of title and retention of copyright clauses in your T&Cs. These mean that no rights will be transferred until you receive full payment.

WAIT UNTIL IT'S TOO LATE

To legally incorporate your T&Cs, they must be included at the point of contract. Email them to prospective clients when responding to an initial enquiry and also on accepting a brief.

FORGET SPECIAL TERMS

If a client insists an agreement is subject to its standard terms, read the contract carefully. If necessary, try to negotiate some special terms in writing that protect your business primarily. Don't put yourself at risk.

Cash flow is king

Being in control of what's flowing in and out of your bank account is vital if you want to be a success

WHAT'S IN THE BANK?

Perhaps a more important question is: what's coming out of the bank? And when is that going to happen? Even if you don't handle the day-to-day finances yourself in detail, having an overall view of your company's money matters at any given time is crucial – you are the one in charge, after all.

INVOICE IN DETAIL

When invoicing, make your payment terms very clear, both in terms of when you'll be paid and how – a direct transfer, for example, is much quicker than a cheque. Ensure the client doesn't have any unusual or lengthy payment clauses that they might have 'forgotten' to mention. For more top invoicing tips, turn the page.

Image ©Thinkstock

STAGGER PAYMENT

Whenever possible, try to negotiate an up-front payment, particularly when working on a fixed-cost project. This can help massively with your cash flow, and will be a lifesaver if anything delays the project or if you incur further expenses. But don't get into the situation of relying on these kinds of payments just to pay the bills.

SET ASIDE TAX

No, that doesn't mean ignoring it… You need to make sure that you budget monthly for your tax bill, which will be paid once or twice yearly, depending on your situation. Unpaid tax is not only a massive financial worry, it can also snowball due to penalty charges and interest on the amount due.

PAY YOUR STAFF FIRST

Your team members should take priority over any other expenses, so always pay them first, followed by any freelancers or other outsourced contractors. Pay other bills as soon as you can – you don't want your team to be homeless. As the business owner, your own wage should be the last one that comes out of the bank account.

ADD INTEREST

The Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 means that UK businesses are entitled to charge interest on late payments after a certain period of time. In the US, the law is made at state level. Consult your legal advisor about this. Clearly, though, this is something to be used as a last resort because it's unlikely to endear the client in question to you.

Get paid fast with clever invoicing

Leave nothing to chance – make sure your invoices include every last bit of relevant information

01

MAKE IT EASY

Every invoice should have a job reference, your postal address, an email address and the amount, with a tax breakdown if appropriate. If you run a limited company, you need to list the registered office – often that of your accountant – your company number and, in the UK, your VAT number.

02

VET YOUR CLIENTS

If you're concerned, research a client before taking on a job. Check with allied or similar businesses for stories of late payment. In the UK, Companies House will supply its most recent accounts for a small fee and you can also check online for any county court judgements against them.

03

AGREE TERMS

Standard payment terms are 30 or 60 days from delivery; the same applies if work is broken up into delivery stages. If you don't get a contract, send an email stating your terms and explain that late payment attracts interest. If you don't, legally speaking you'll have accepted their terms.

04

HOW WILL THEY PAY?

Find out how every new client will pay. In the UK, direct electronic BACS payment is popular; include your account name, sort code and account number on your invoice. For cheques, your business name is enough. Smaller clients might offer PayPal, but you'll lose about five per cent of the fee.

"It's good practice to ask for staged payments. If they refuse, you can be justifiably wary of their ability and willingness to honour their debts."

QUOTE

Adrian Shaughnessy, graphic designer, author and publisher, www.uniteditions.com. Quote taken from: *How to be a Graphic Designer Without Losing Your Soul*

05

STAY ON TOP

Always keep track of who owes what and when the money is due. At the very least, you need a list of projects, amounts due, invoice dates, the dates when you sent the invoices and those who've paid up. Keeping on top of your own finances is important, even if you employ an accountant.

06

CHASE LATE PAYMENT

An extra month is cheeky, but not unusual. If payment is a week late, make a call to find out why, then repeat this process every seven days. If payment is a month late, send a repeat invoice and statement of account, along with a reminder that interest is payable on any late settlements.

07

VERY LATE PAYMENT

In the UK, small companies are legally entitled to claim interest of eight per cent over the base rate for late payment, plus a fixed compensation fee and debt-recovery costs. You can find calculators online that work this out for you. Check your state laws in the US if considering this option.

08

TAKE LEGAL ACTION

After three months, send the company a repeat statement or invoice, with interest included, and threaten legal action in the local small claims court. Call again immediately afterwards. Allow a couple of weeks, call and email them one last time, then start legal proceedings.

Everyday accounting

If you intend to keep your financial affairs in-house, it pays to keep things simple

Image ©Thinkstock

Bookkeeping is a legal requirement. But from a business perspective, being able to balance the books is also fundamental for controlling your cash flow and keeping your business afloat. Fortunately, bread-and-butter bean-counting and basic financial forecasting aren't difficult – you simply need to know what's coming in and what's going out, and be prepared to make financial decisions as soon as the need arises. From managing your company's daily accounts to budgeting and planning for the future, read on for how to keep your business on track.

IN AND OUT

While your accountant can handle the broader side of your finances, you need to have a good grasp of exactly what money is coming in and what expenses are going out.

Smaller companies often find that basic bookkeeping is practical to do in-house. Whether you do this yourself or another member of the team handles it depends on your patience with accounting. Regardless, as a company director you should check the accounts regularly.

Bookkeeping involves keeping a record of what money is coming in and from whom, what is due to come in and when, and your outgoing expenses. The latter includes things such as rent, wages, software/hardware purchases, materials costs, fancy herbal tea bags… Anything and

DO

Make accounting a regular exercise. Monitor your turnover to see whether you need to pay VAT or local tax, and keep paperwork in an organised system.

DON'T

Mix personal and business expenditure in your accounts. Also, don't take money from a limited company unless it's wages.

everything related to the business should be recorded.

THE NUMBERS GAME

At the most basic, bookkeeping can be done with an accounts book, but this isn't ideal as mistakes can be made and it's not particularly flexible. A better bet is to use a spreadsheet in a program such as Excel, which has templates that you can alter if necessary. Once you get more familiar with a spreadsheet, you can start using the more sophisticated functions for financial planning.

Or you could invest in dedicated financial software. You can use a cheaper and less complex online service, paid for monthly, or invest in a full package, which keeps track of income, VAT, payroll and so on. The learning curve can be steep, but it's time well spent.

PAID WITH THANKS?

Send out invoices as soon as you've completed a job, and keep a record of when that money is due. If payment is delayed, contact the client as soon as possible. Invoices can get lost, or held up for reasons that might not have been passed back to you.

HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS

As a limited company in the UK, you're required by law to keep all paperwork, such as invoices, receipts and financial records, for the past six years (five years for a partnership). If the Inland Revenue finds these records aren't available, you could be in for a stiff penalty. Back up and archive all electronic records and paperwork.

FIND THE RIGHT ACCOUNTANT

Taxes are an integral part of your budget process but they can present a legal minefield. Unless you have an excellent grip on exactly what you're liable for, you'll need a good accountant

01

WHAT'S WHAT?

In short, UK sole traders and partnerships are charged income tax on their profits; limited companies are charged corporation tax on profits, with employees charged income tax on their income. In the UK, if your firm turns over more than £82k in a financial year, you also have to register for VAT. It's complicated but a good accountant will ensure you get it right and advise on what can be claimed.

02

ASK AROUND

Like good builders and plumbers (there are a few), accountants thrive on good word-of-mouth to gain new business. Ask other similar businesses in your local area for recommendations. Usually, people are only too pleased to share positive experiences with financial pros, just as they are more than likely to warn you off incompetent ones.

03

SEEK OFFICIAL BODIES

The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (www.icaew.co.uk), the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland (www.icas.org.uk), the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (www.aicpa.org) and the Association of International Accountants (www.aiaworldwide.com) will advise on any accountant-based queries.

04

DON'T CHOOSE ON PRICE

Always find out how much - and when - an accountant will charge. They normally bill by the hour, although some opt for annually - but many will be flexible about payment terms. Bear in mind that while a partner in a firm will cost more than a junior member, it's all about service. You need someone who will tell you the truth without being patronising or intimidating.

05

GET IT IN WRITING

Once you've appointed an accountant, make sure they send you their terms and conditions, and specify precisely what they will do for you. A good one will be in touch regularly, not just at tax time. Similarly, you should contact them as soon as possible to let them know of any problems, queries or change of circumstances. Don't be afraid to ask seemingly stupid financial questions.

06

OUTSOURCE OR NOT?

As your business grows, you might prefer to hand over more of the daily financial affairs to an accountant. Larger firms will handle everything from data input and VAT to staff payment. Alternatively, services such as Mazuma let you do your accounts online - including invoicing, expenses, payments and tax - through a web-based app for a fixed fee.

Financial planning

You don't just need to know how much money you've got – you need to plan for the future, too

As well as dealing with day-to-day finances and accounting, you also need a sound financial plan in place for the future. This is a forecast of how much you expect income to be versus how much your outgoings are. Ideally, you want the former to rise as your business develops, while keeping the latter fairly constant throughout the short term.

PLAN A SENSIBLE BUDGET

Begin with a list of overheads and admin expenses. This includes things such as rent, utilities (if not included in the rent), computers, software, office equipment (desks, chairs, printers and so on), legal and accounting expenses, staff wages, insurance and everything else that you'll be paying out on a regular basis. You'll probably also want to factor in any promotional and publicity costs for helping spread the word about your business and increasing your exposure. Next, work up projected income statements for the next month, three months, year and then the next three years. It will be tricky to judge a typical month's income during the early days but try to be as realistic as you can.

Comparing the two amounts gives you your profit – or, as will inevitably be the case for perhaps the first year of business, your loss. On a monthly basis check that these figures are roughly within your target plan and that the business is growing as you forecast it would. It's vital to constantly review in this way, and even more vital to act on the results if they're not as good as they should be.

ARE YOU ON TRACK?

If your profit is drastically lower than you anticipated, or a loss much greater, you'll need to make changes to your business plan. If it doesn't look as though you'll have enough work coming in, you might want to ramp up your PR to drum up more business, for example. Or, there might be areas where you can cut back on spending – perhaps by using fewer outsourced freelancers, or putting off a planned software upgrade. The one thing you can't afford to do is bury your head in the sand and hope for the best, even in the short term. The first three years are the most crucial to any small business, because that's when the failure rates are highest.

As with your day-to-day bookkeeping, project management software will help you stay on top of your plans by keeping track of time and money spent on existing projects, as well as making forecasts for the future. A typical package can track hours worked on a project, expenses for individuals and more, and many can tie into your day-to-day accounting software, such as Sage. There are lots of options available, so check out the list opposite for a closer look at some key options. These aren't your only choices – you could also try going free...

DO

Base current spend on current income, not future income. Consider personal financial protection, in the event that you can't work for any reason.

DON'T

Underestimate the importance of cash flow, or turn a blind eye to shortfalls in your financial predictions.

Software spotlight

No matter your budget or focus, a plethora of project management packages exist to take the edge off

ASANA
From $10/month *www.asana.com*

Asana is designed for the modern freelancer but it could also work for smaller businesses. It has workflow management functionality, a somewhat basic planner, timeline and goal tools, and tasks can be

BASECAMP
$15/month *www.basecamp.com*

Basecamp's relative simplicity and simple pricing has made it remarkably popular. It has messaging, file sharing and time tracking in spades. The price may seem high, but it includes unlimited users and projects – perfect for larger firms.

STREAMTIME
From $40/user/month *www.streamtime.net*

This project management heavyweight is good value. It includes resource planning, timesheets, a quoting tool, CRM and integration with popular accounting software.

PAPRIKA
£Individual *www.paprika-software.com*

Paprika is a business-minded set of tools with serious clout. Client management, estimating, resource scheduling, billing, timesheets, purchasing and reporting are all covered. Prices are quoted individually – contact the company for more details. ●

Start Your Own
BUSINESS

Online impact

Make your internet fortune

76 QUICK AND EASY STOREFRONT
Got a product to shift? Start selling online fast and for free

80 STRAIGHFORWARD STOREFRONT SEO
Push your product up the search rankings and get it seen

82 KEEP IT LEGAL
Don't get caught – make sure your products are yours to sell online

84 GET TO THE TOP OF GOOGLE
Advanced SEO techniques to ensure your business has pride of place

92 KEEP PEOPLE ON YOUR SITE
Page impressions mean nothing if your audience doesn't stick around

Quick and easy storefront

In the absence of a bespoke solution, you can get your site started fast by building an online shop with an off-the-shelf tool

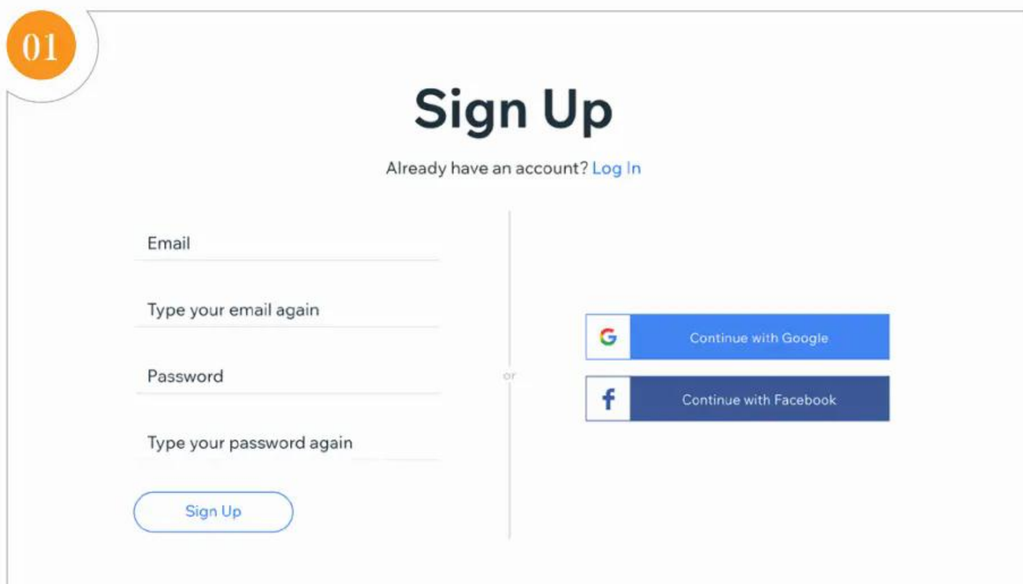
Wix (www.wix.com) is a fantastic tool that enables you to build your own website with a built-in shop, free of charge. Everything is done online, using a simple WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) interface, so there's no software to download or code to write.

Wix sites are based around templates, which you can edit to suit your preferences and business identity. You can add extra features such as blogs and YouTube videos but, of course, the heart of your site will be your shop. It's easy to add products – complete with descriptions and image galleries – and manage your stock. It's great for your customers too, as they can shop easily using a variety of payment methods, provided you have them set up.

To start with, we'll sign up for a free site. Once it's up and running, you can keep your site free (with fewer options and a Wix advert on each page) or upgrade to a paid account, featuring benefits like shorter domain names, priority customer care and more online storage space.

MAKE A STOREFRONT WITH WIX

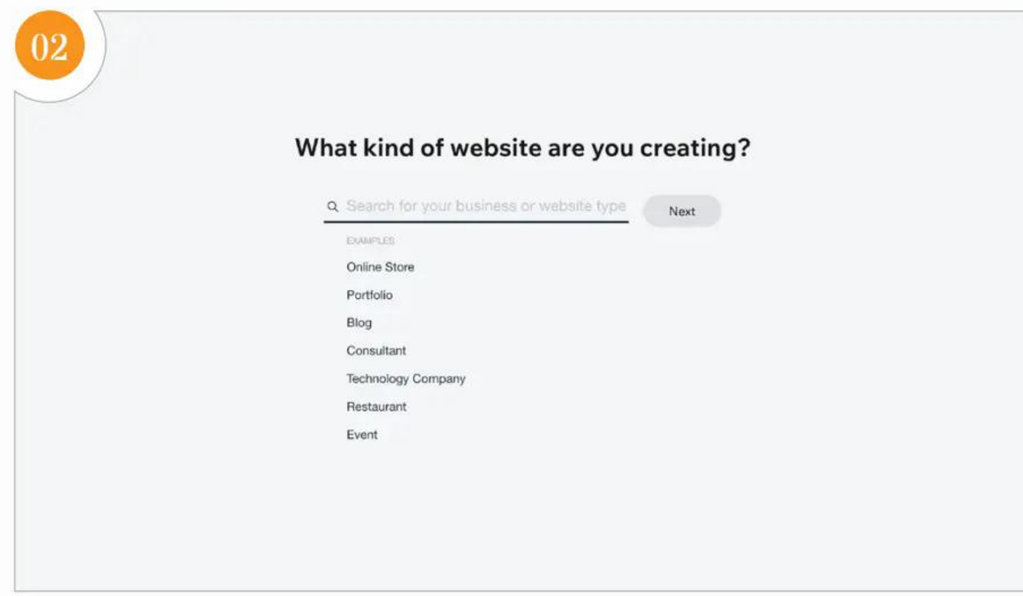
01



SIGN UP

Go to www.wix.com and click 'Get Started' in the middle of the screen. Enter your email address, plus a password (make sure it is strong by using letters and numbers) and confirm each. Click 'Sign Up' and you'll be logged in to your new account straight away.

02



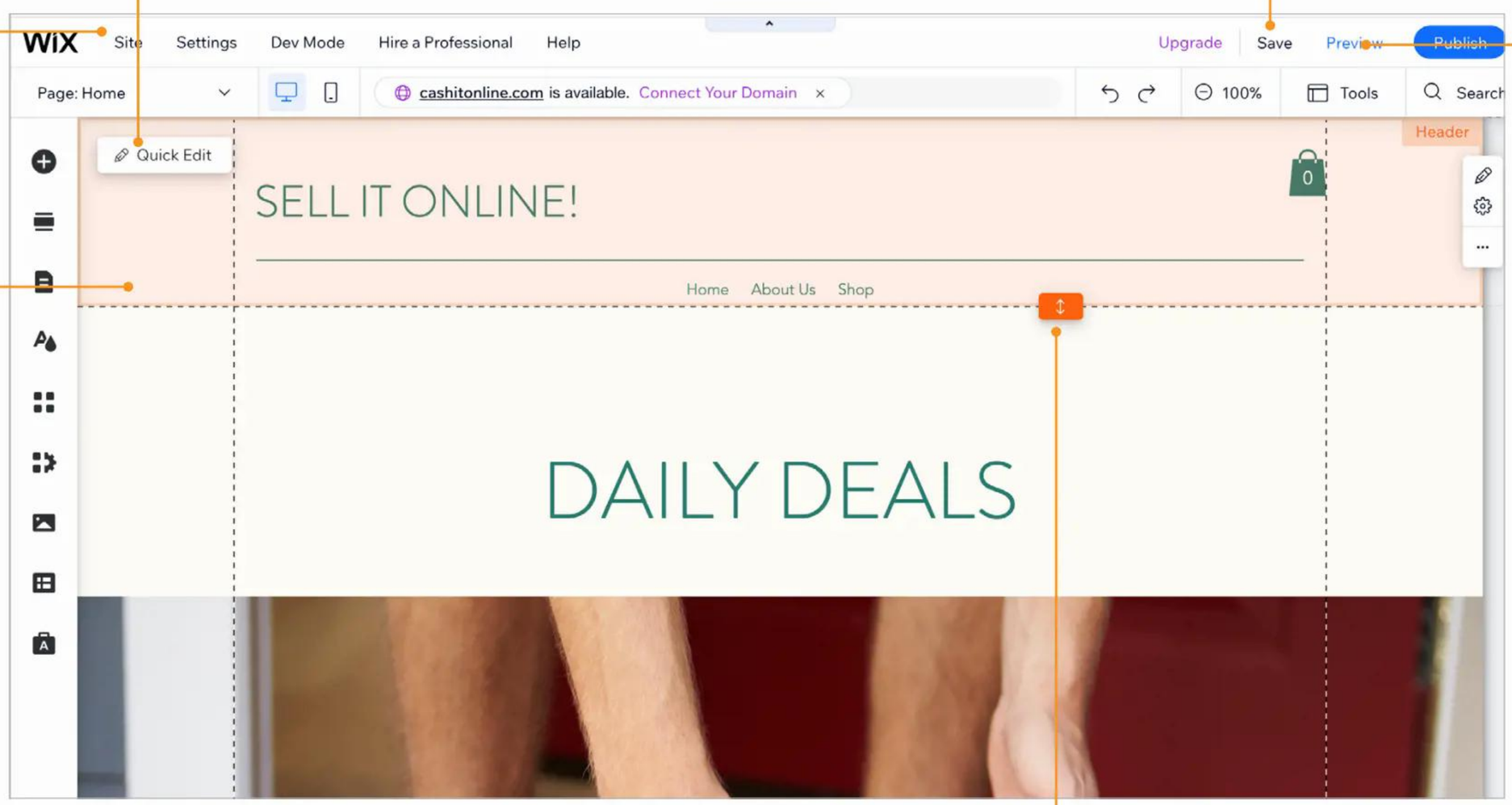
PICK A TEMPLATE

You'll see a list of site types with a search bar at the top. Find and select 'Online Store', then scroll through the templates offered to you. When you see one you like, move your mouse pointer over it and click the plus sign in the top-right corner. You can always make adjustments to them.

SHOP
This is where you manage your shop's inventory, add items, upload photos and adjust the descriptions.

EDIT
Click here to begin making changes to your site. You can edit the basic template as much or as little as you like.

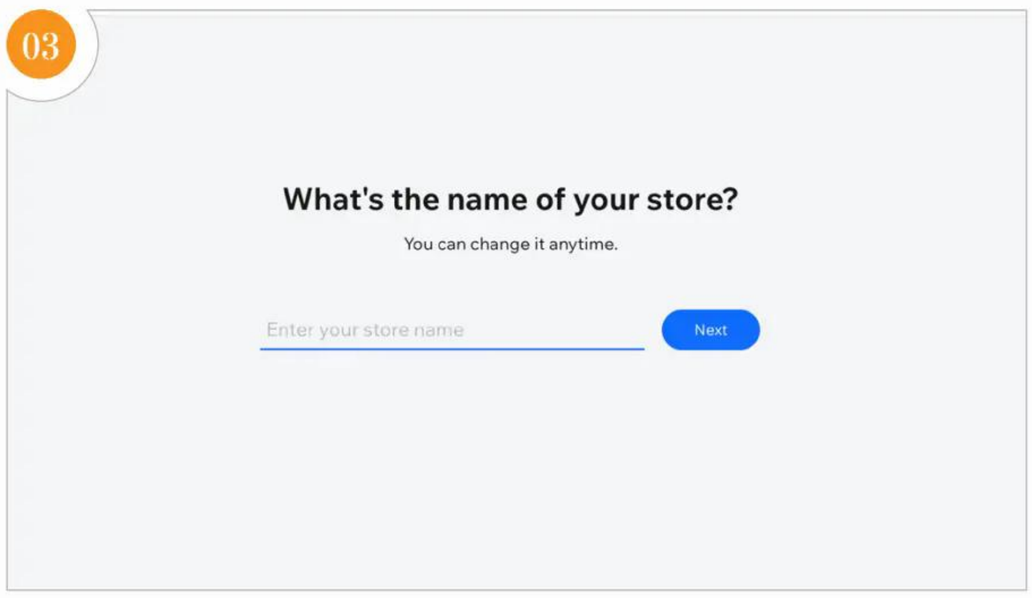
SAVE
Wix is entirely web-based, so click here regularly to ensure you don't lose your progress while editing your site.

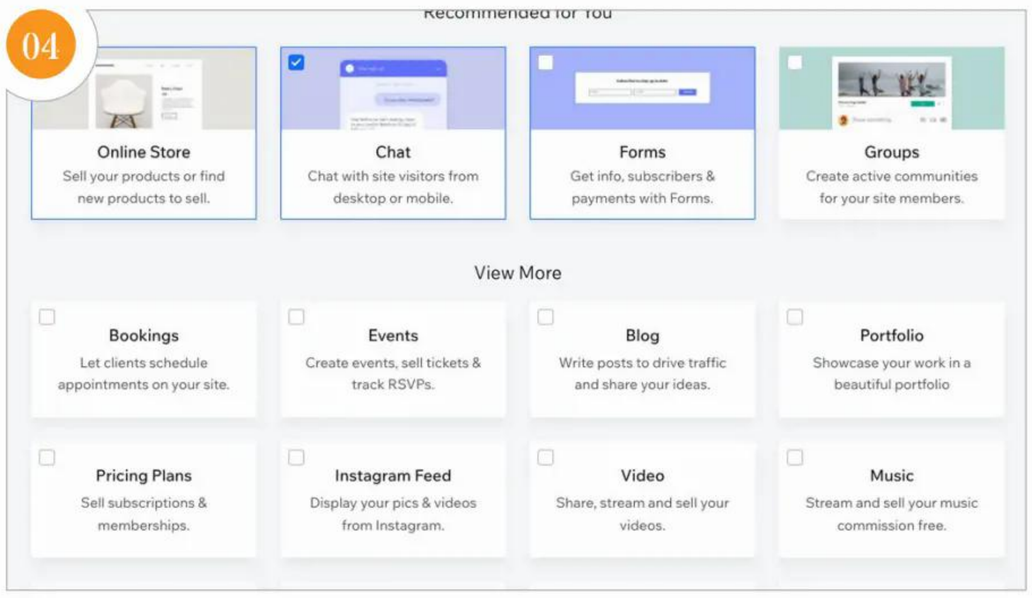


COPY AND PASTE
Wix's page editor works much like a word processor or image editor, and includes a clipboard for copying and pasting images and text.

MOVE IT
To adjust the position of any object on the page, just click and drag it. You can also resize it by clicking it, then using the handles that appear at the corners.

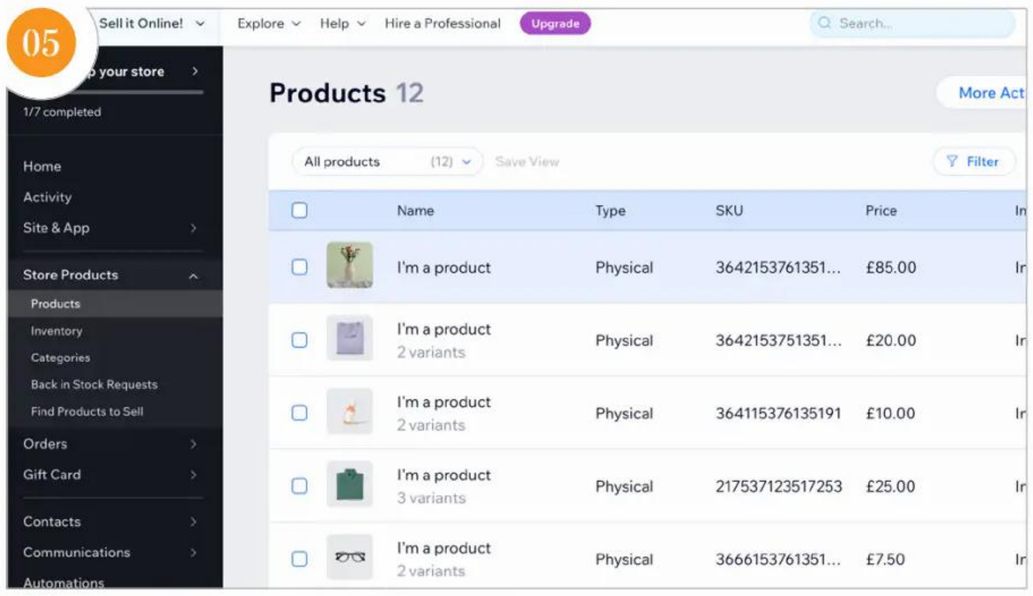
SEE IT ALL
If you want to see how your site will look when it's finished, click here for a preview. You can go back to the editor at any time to make more changes to the design.





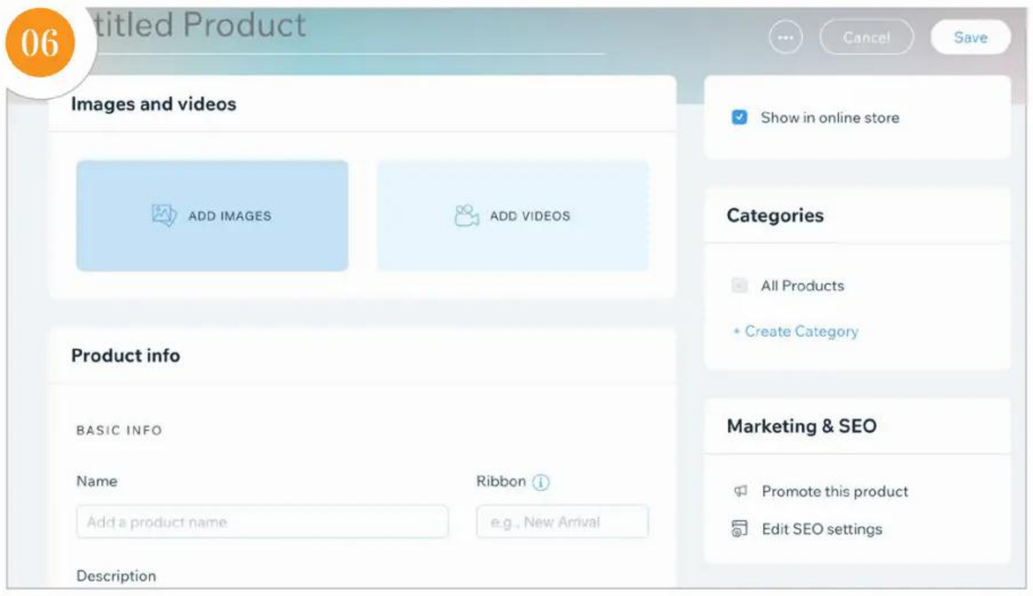
CHOOSE AN ADDRESS
Select 'Next' and enter a name for your site. The address is what people will type in to their web browser, so it needs to be memorable. All addresses include your site's name as well as your name. For example, [username].wixsite.com/[site]. You can pay to have a custom address.

GET STARTED
Wix will offer you a selection of pre-made page templates that you can add to your website. These are tailored to the type of website you chose to create. Click on the ones your want to include and click 'Next' when done. If none interest you, click on 'Skip.'



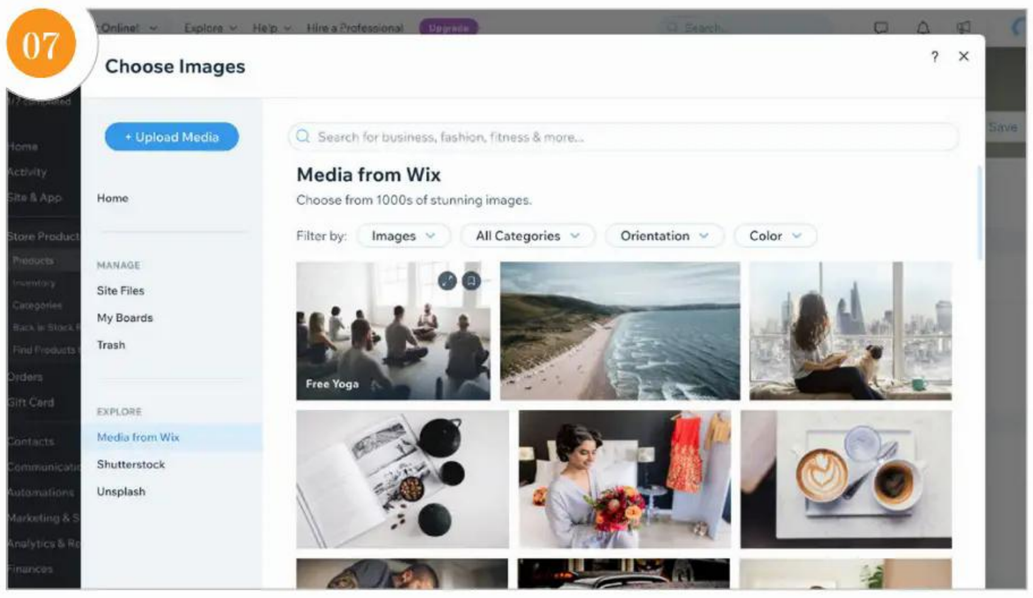
STOCK YOUR SHOP

Since we're making a shop, let's start by adding some stock. Select 'Products' from the menu at the left and you'll see a list of example products. Click 'Edit' beside one of these and change the details to suit one of your products.



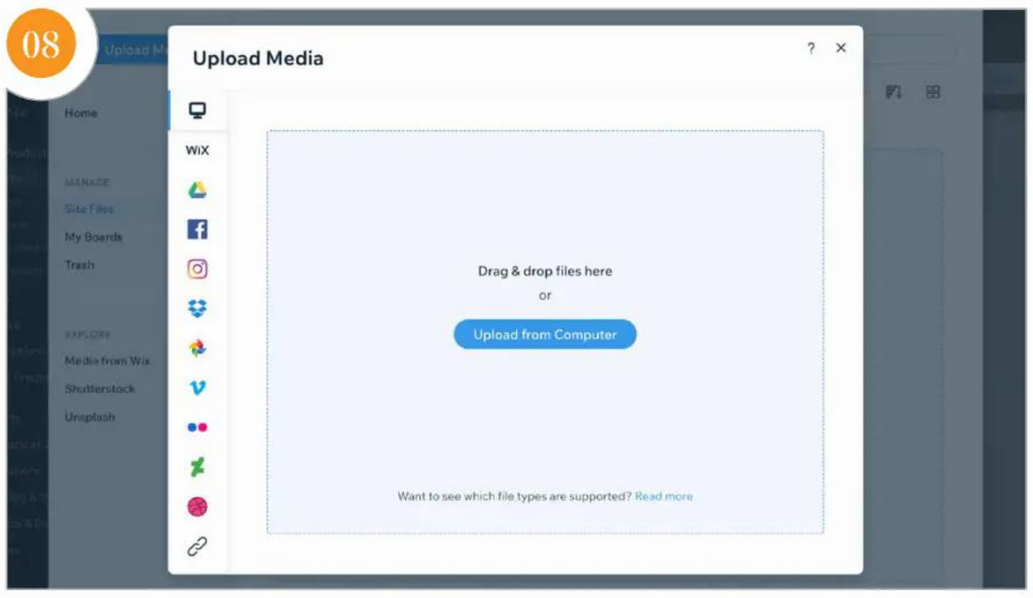
CHOOSE SOME PRODUCT SHOTS

You can upload a range of images for each of your products. It's best to use all of these slots to show your products in as much detail as possible, using a combination of full and close-up shots. Spend some time getting the best images possible.



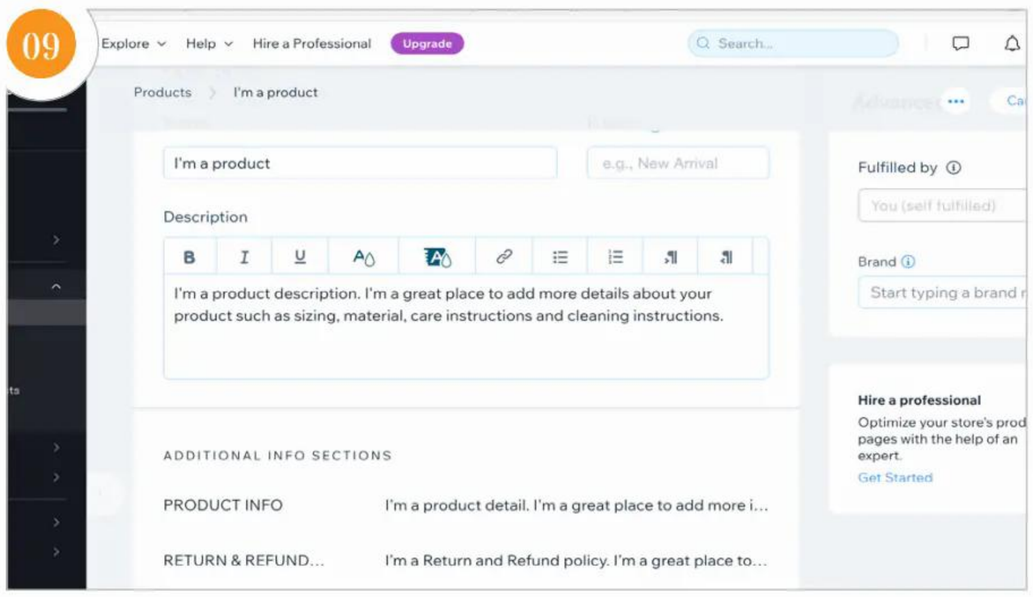
UPLOAD YOUR IMAGES

Click 'Upload Media' and you'll see a list of the pictures used on your site. It's a good idea to make a folder specifically for product photos, so select 'New folder' and give it a suitable name. Select the folder, then click 'Upload' and find the product photos on your hard drive.



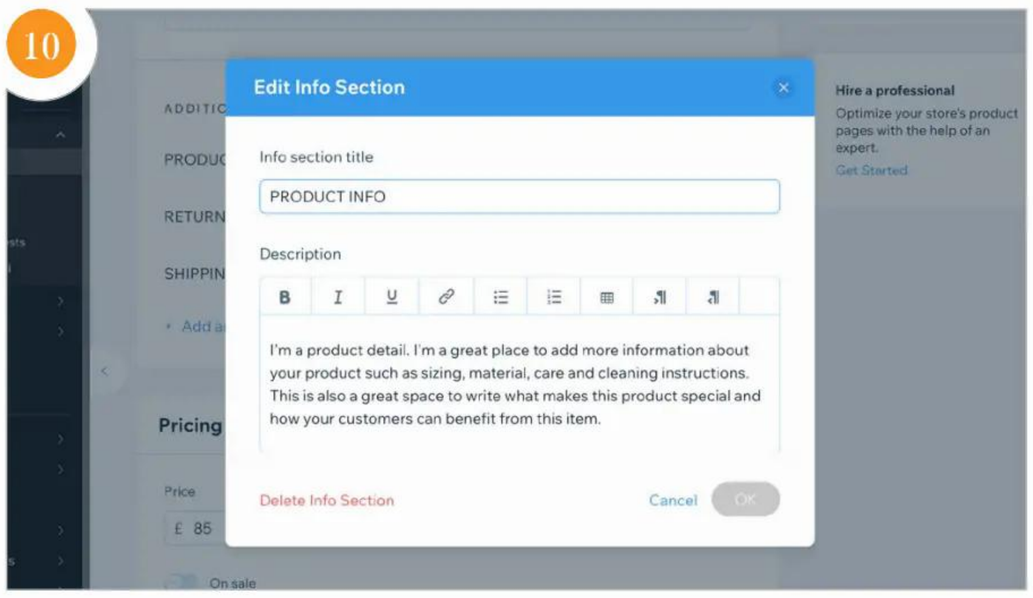
FILL YOUR IMAGE GALLERY

The images will be uploaded and processed. Be aware that your free site comes with limited storage space, and you can easily exceed it if your images are very large (paid plans offer more storage). Select a photo and click 'Add to Page' to add it to your product's image gallery.



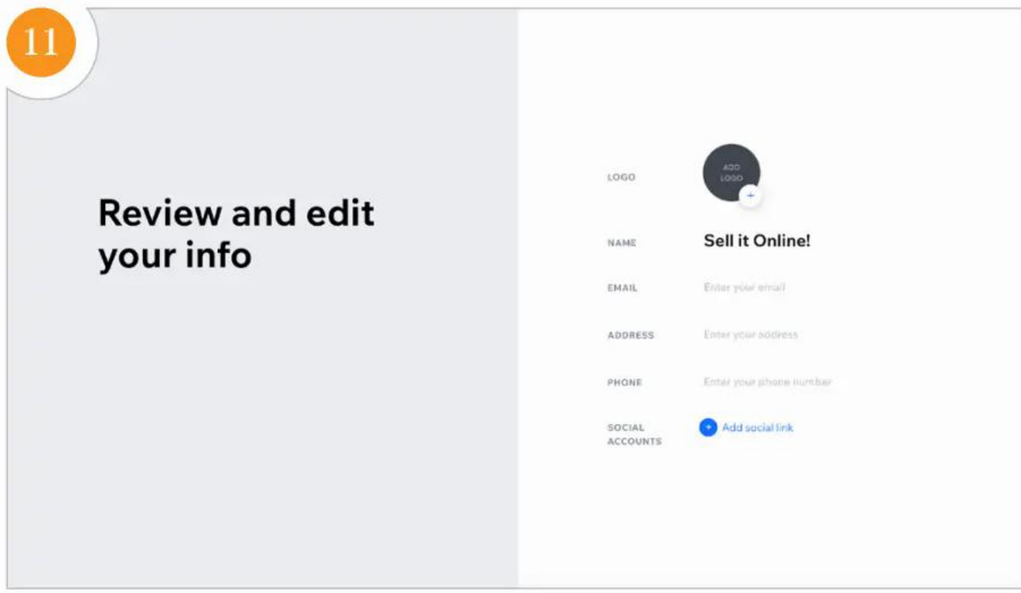
APPLY SOME KEYWORDS

The description and keywords will affect how easily people can find your item on Google – check the article on page 80 for a detailed guide to search engine optimisation (SEO). Add a Ribbon to highlight an item as being on sale or new. You can preview how these look.



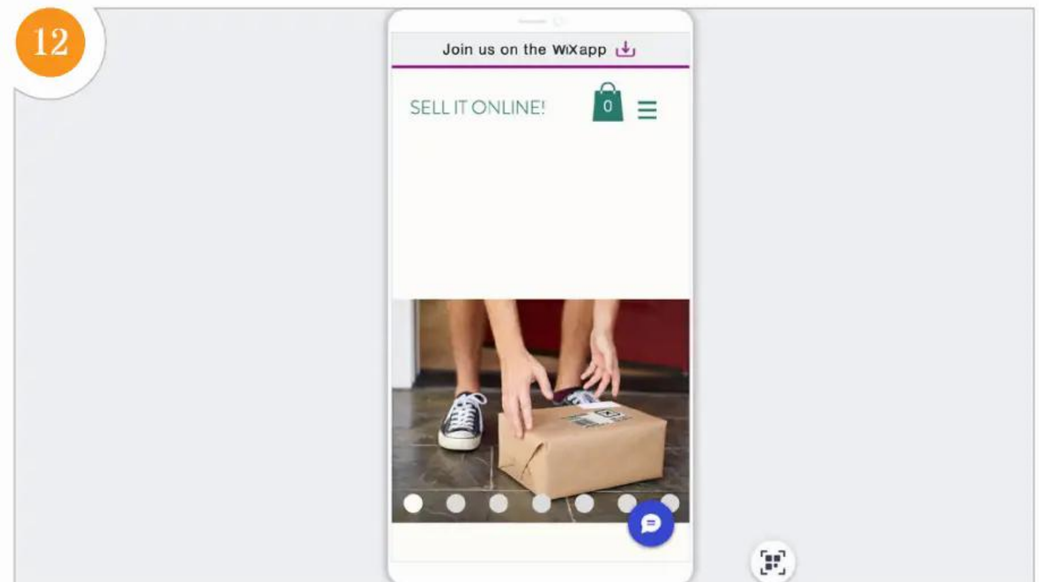
WRITE A PRODUCT SUMMARY

Use the 'Description' box on the right to provide a summary of your product for search engines, and enter some information in the boxes underneath. You can include shipping and returns information. If there are categories you're not sure about, click the 'i' for more information.



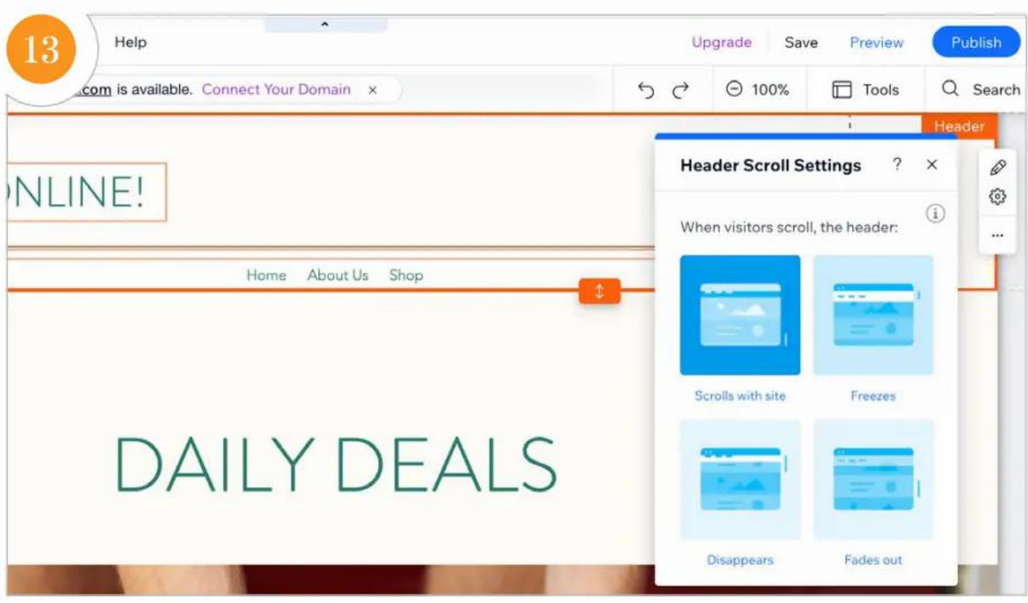
CONFIRM YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS

Once you're happy with your description, click 'Save'. You can now return to your product list and update the rest of your stock. To save time on future products, you can duplicate existing items and then edit them. To do this, click on the more icon followed by 'Duplicate.'



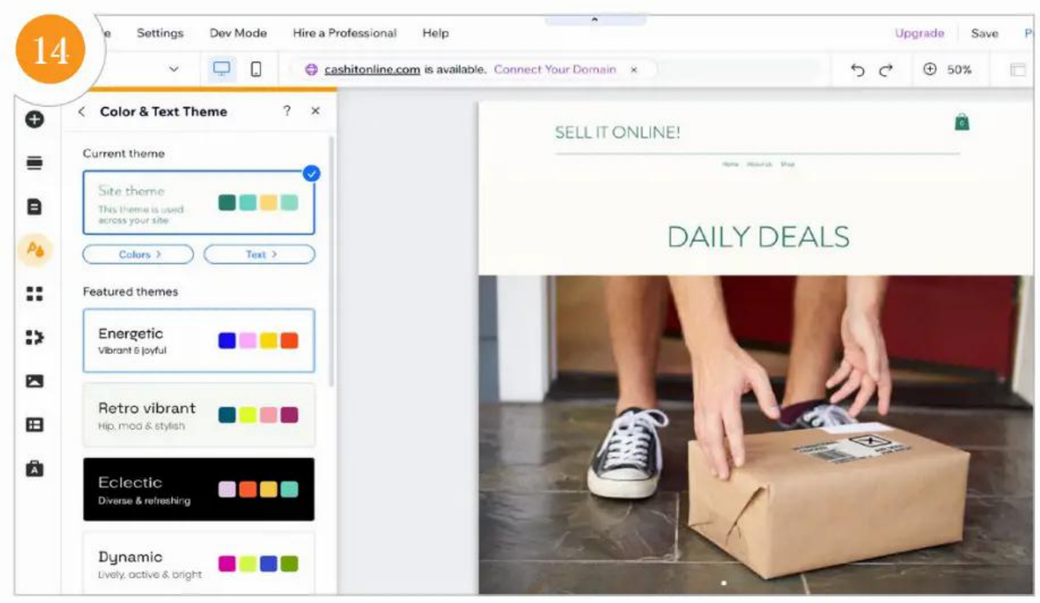
PREVIEW YOUR SITE

Once you've finished adding your products, click 'Edit Site' in the top-right to see a preview of your shop in desktop or mobile. To edit any piece of text on the page, double-click it and type away. To move something, click it and drag it to a new location.



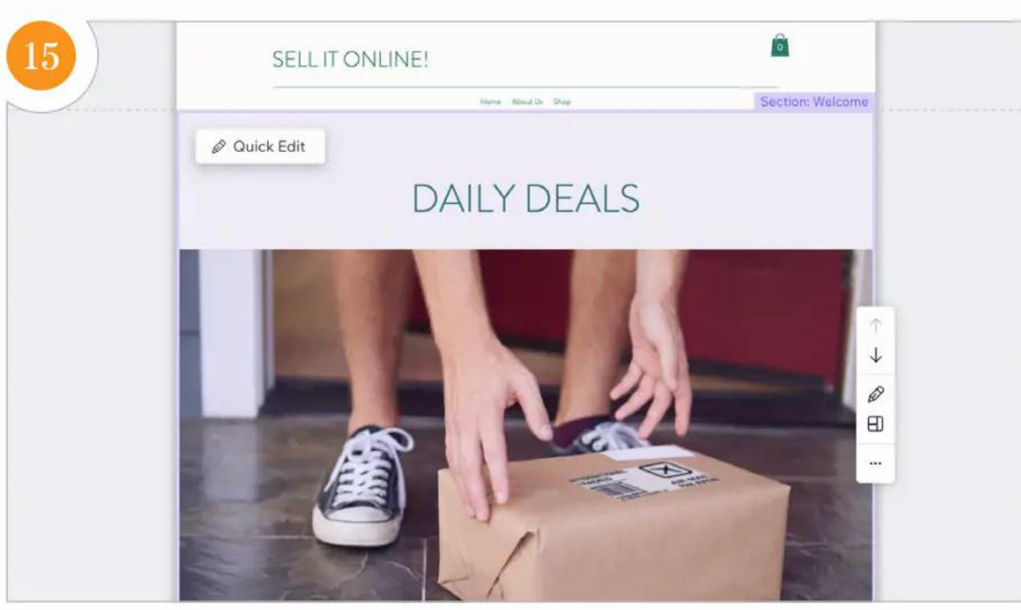
FINE-TUNE YOUR SITE

Click the Page icon on the left and you can choose any page of the website to edit. Click 'Insert' to add new pictures, text boxes, shapes and widgets such as forms and YouTube videos, which can give your site some extra zing.



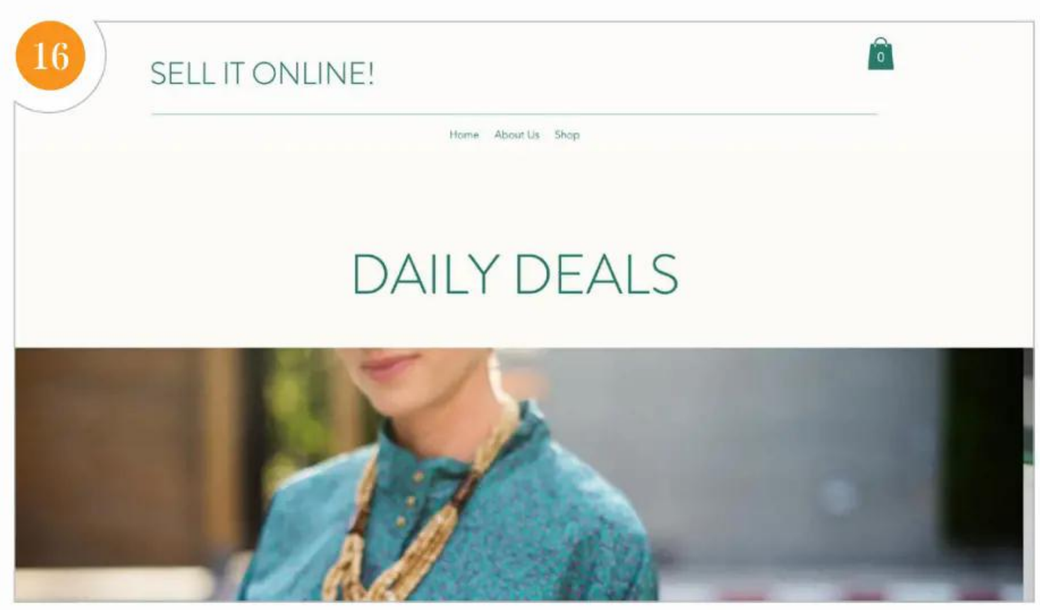
EDIT YOUR MASTER PAGES

To edit the elements that appear on every page of your website (the logo, links and description), click 'Site Design' and change them there. Once you're happy with how everything is looking, save it and click 'Preview' on the top-right to see how your finished website will look.



MAKE SOME FINAL TWEAKS

Click the links to explore and make sure everything looks and works as you expect it to. Click 'Exit preview' to return to the editor and make any tweaks you think are necessary. When you've finished, select 'Publish' at the top of the page.



GO TO YOUR NEW SITE!

You can now log out and access your site using the address you chose at the start. The site will include adverts on Wix on each page but you can remove these by subscribing to one of Wix's plans. These also include shorter domain names which can make it easier to find your site.

Straightforward storefront SEO

You've taken the plunge and created your own website to showcase and sell your goods – now you need to make sure your customers can find it!

Building your own website offers lots of advantages – you have full control over how it looks, you can add a blog if you like, and you don't need to worry about an online marketplace changing its policies unexpectedly. However, it also means you have to tackle the tricky issue of SEO (search engine optimisation) on your own to ensure that people can find your site on Google and Bing – there are no built-in tools to help. Don't be put off, though – it's not hard once you know how it works.

RESULTS EXPLAINED

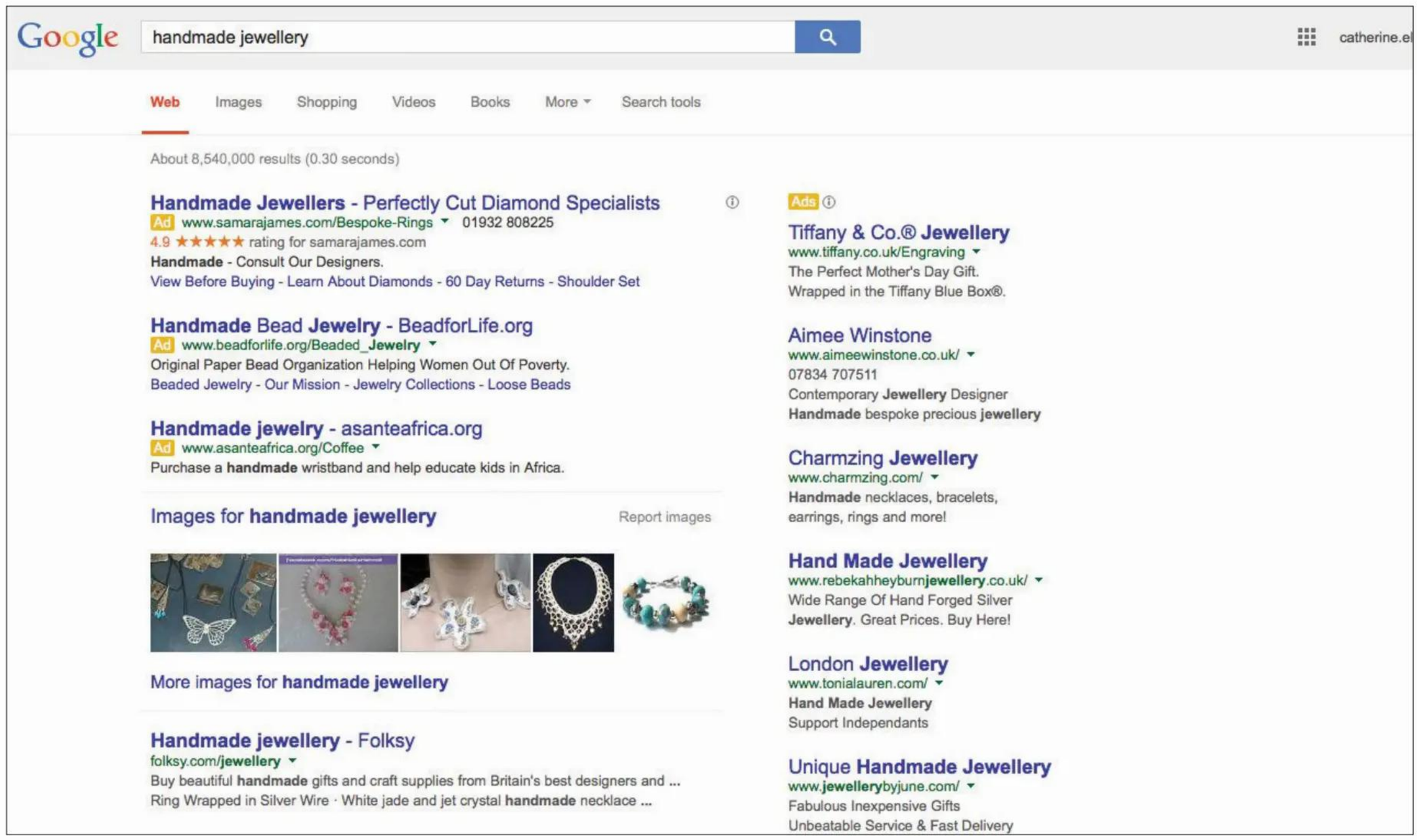
When you search for something on Google or Bing, you receive two types of results – organic and paid. Paid results are labelled with the word 'sponsored', and as the name suggests, they appear prominently because the site's owners have paid a fee. We're going to focus on organic listings, which appear underneath and are generally considered more trustworthy.

Search engines use pieces of software called 'web crawlers', which follow links in web pages and index the resulting pages. When you type a word or phrase into a search engine, it uses the index it's created to find the most relevant results. The search engine uses complex equations, known as ranking algorithms, to decide the order in which the results will appear. These algorithms take into account hundreds of different factors, but there are steps you can take to ensure the crawlers can find your site, and that the algorithms rank it highly. To get your site to appear on search engines, you can either wait for it to be found by crawlers, or submit it manually via www.google.com/submityourcontent. That's the first step taken care of!

Search engines aim to show people the most useful sites, so the most important part of SEO is having good quality content that's updated regularly. However, the crawlers aren't human, so there are some extra factors to consider. The crawlers must be able to interpret your site, so there's no point in having nothing but images or Flash content – you need to have actual text that the software can interpret.

This is also important for your users; if they can't see the images for any reason, they won't be able to use your site if there's no text.

Your website's sections



should also be named in a logical way. For example, a page showing scarves should be called scarves.html, while one showing hats should be hats.html – don't call them page1.html and page2.html. Again, this is useful for your customers, because they can immediately see which part of your site they're on. Try not to duplicate any pages or text on your site. Nobody wants to read the same thing twice.

KEYWORDS

One of the most important parts of your SEO strategy is your use of keywords. These are words and phrases that people who will be interested in your products are likely to be searching for. You should aim to use these in your site's text so these people will find you. It can be tricky to know which keywords you should use, but the best advice is to think like a customer. If you were looking for handmade bridal shoes, for example, possible search terms could include 'bridal shoes UK', 'handmade bridal shoes' and 'bridal shoes ivory'.

There are also tools that are designed to help. One of the most useful is Google AdWords Keyword Planner (https://ads.google.com/intl/en_uk/home/tools/keyword-planner/). Despite its name, this isn't just a tool for buying advertisements on Google – it can also help you find words and phrases that your customers might be searching for, and provides a guide to incorporating them into your site.

Sign in using your Google account, click the 'Tools' tab and select 'Keywords planner' to get started.

SEO TRICKS TO AVOID

Keyword stuffing

Be careful with keywords – don't just use as many as possible. Above all, your site needs to be useful to your customers. If your text sounds strange or stilted because there are too many keywords, visitors will be turned off.

Link farms

Links are important, but only if they're relevant and natural. Don't pay money for links from other sites, submit your site to big directories, or take part in lots of 'link me and I'll link you' schemes. These are not only unhelpful to your customers, but Google can penalise you for it as well.

Comment spam

Don't post comments on forums or blogs for the sole purpose of linking your site. This is annoying to other visitors who want to read opinions on the topic, and will only serve to earn you a bad reputation.

Keep it legal

Selling online? Here's how to keep your business – and the products you're putting out – on the right side of the law

WHAT IS INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY?

Intellectual property (IP) rights protect original ideas or creations, such as a brand, an invention, a design or a song. Intellectual property usually resides with the person who created those ideas, but IP can be bought and sold.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH COPYING A DESIGN I'VE SEEN ONLINE?

If you copy a design, you risk infringing the designer's IP, which could have legal consequences. However, many designers, companies and bloggers will have information on their website about how you can use their designs, and some will even permit a limited amount of copying (see question on Angel Policies). Some designers will offer you 'free designs' on their website that you may copy for personal use.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING INSPIRED AND COPYING?

This is the difference between a design being original (and so qualifying for protection as an IP right), and being identical or substantially similar to an existing design (and so infringing the rights of the owner of that existing design).

In the UK, a design may be protected as copyright and as a design right (you can read more about this at https://www.gov.uk/topic/intellectual-property/designs). For a design to be protected by copyright, it must be original ("the result of independent creative effort") and not copied. Whether or not your design is protected or capable of being protected by any of the standard design rights, the difference is often important only if you try to make commercial gain.

This means that a design can inspire you to create your own, new design that has key differences. Copying a design involves using the same or similar materials in the same or a similar way to achieve a very similar result. Designs that are for sale as books, magazines, kits or PDF downloads have been made available for copying – when you pay for them, you buy the right from the designer to copy them exactly.

Check your facts and avoid making defamatory statements, or you could find yourself in hot water.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MY DESIGNS IF I POST THEM ONLINE?

You can lodge your design as a UK registered design with the Intellectual Property Office (www.ipo.gov.uk) for a fee, provided certain criteria are met. If you do not wish to register your design, provided certain criteria are met, it will automatically be protected as an unregistered UK design right, and be protected by copyright. You don't have to apply for these rights, but there are a few things you can do to help protect your design. Mark your work, and images of it, with the © symbol, plus

your name and the year you created it. This offers other people information about the project and who to contact if they want permission to use the work, plus it demonstrates that you take protection of your design seriously.

You could also lodge your work with a bank or solicitor, or send yourself a copy of the work by special delivery post and leave the envelope unopened – this will offer proof of the date of creation.

IF I SEE A DESIGN I LIKE, CAN I SHARE IT WITH MY FRIENDS?

IP laws apply on the internet in the same way as in the 'real' world. This means if you want to distribute material that belongs to other people, you should get permission.

However, most designers are happy for you to share designs on Facebook, Twitter or your blog, as long as your comments are positive and you include a credit or link back to the designer's website. Most designers see this as good online publicity, but check the designer's website for any information or policy they may have on this.

If you run a blog, remember that it's still good etiquette to email other people if you want to mention them in a post.

CAN I REMAKE SOMEONE ELSE'S DESIGNS AND SELL THEM FOR A PROFIT?

Designs for sale online (or in books or magazines) usually have a notice that states that you may remake the designs for your own personal use, but not for profit. If you wanted to profit from these designs, you'd have to ask the designer for permission. You'll find that charity fundraising is often allowed – but, usually, profiting from someone else's intellectual property is not.

CAN I USE A COMPANY'S PRODUCTS TO CREATE DESIGNS TO SELL FOR PROFIT?

A company's products may include a statement about whether you can use them for profit or personal use. Most raw materials – such as yarn, thread, paper and fabric – are fine for creative personal use and for profit. However, some pre-designed craft products (such as rubber stamps) have restrictions (called an Angel Policy) on how you can use any designs you create with those products, if you intend to sell them for profit.

WHAT IS AN ANGEL POLICY?

An Angel Policy gives details of when and how you can use a company's products to make and sell items for profit, plus any copyright notice you might have to include regarding the artist or the manufacturer. You can usually find details of a company's Angel Policy on their website, and typical restrictions. If a company has no Angel Policy, this usually means the products are for personal use and not commercial gain.

If you want to use a company's products for personal gain or charity fundraising, it's a good idea to get their permission.

WHAT IS DEFAMATION?

Defamation is a complex legal issue, but it's a good idea to be aware of the basic principle. Put simply, defamation is when you say or write something about a person or group that gives them a negative image. A statement is defamatory if it holds the person or group up to hatred, ridicule or contempt; causes them to be shunned or avoided; disparages them in their office, profession or trade; or tends to make right-thinking people think less of that person or group. It must also be reasonably understood to refer to the person or group, and it must be communicated to other people. However, a statement will not be defamatory if it is proved to be true.

CAN I WRITE WHATEVER I WANT ONLINE?

Use common sense and a bit of etiquette when writing or saying anything on the internet. Firstly, you need to avoid breaking any of the laws described already and, secondly, you need to avoid saying anything morally offensive. A simple test for this is to ask yourself, "Would I feel OK if someone said this to me?"

PLEASE NOTE

This information is provided as an introduction to some of the rules governing your online activities in the UK – this is not a comprehensive or exhaustive guide to the legal implications involved in online activities, and you should not rely on the information provided. If in doubt, do your own research or consult a qualified solicitor.

Get to the top of Google

SEO is crucial to getting your business website recognised in a crowded market. Read on to find out how to master it

Sure, you know about search engine optimisation – increasing your site's ranking in search engines. You might not be an expert, but you have a good understanding of the basics: title tags, clean URLs, text-based design and so on.

Even if you're more of an expert than most, it's often what you don't know about SEO that will hurt you.

Many webmasters found this out the hard way in 2011, when Google's Panda update was released. Many of these same webmasters were hit again little more than a year later, when the search giant's Penguin update followed – targeting low-quality, spammy link-building tactics. Pigeon and Payday followed, again targeting spam, and in late 2015 a machine-learning AI system known as RankBrain was introduced to interpret searches and provide results that may not include the words searched for but are

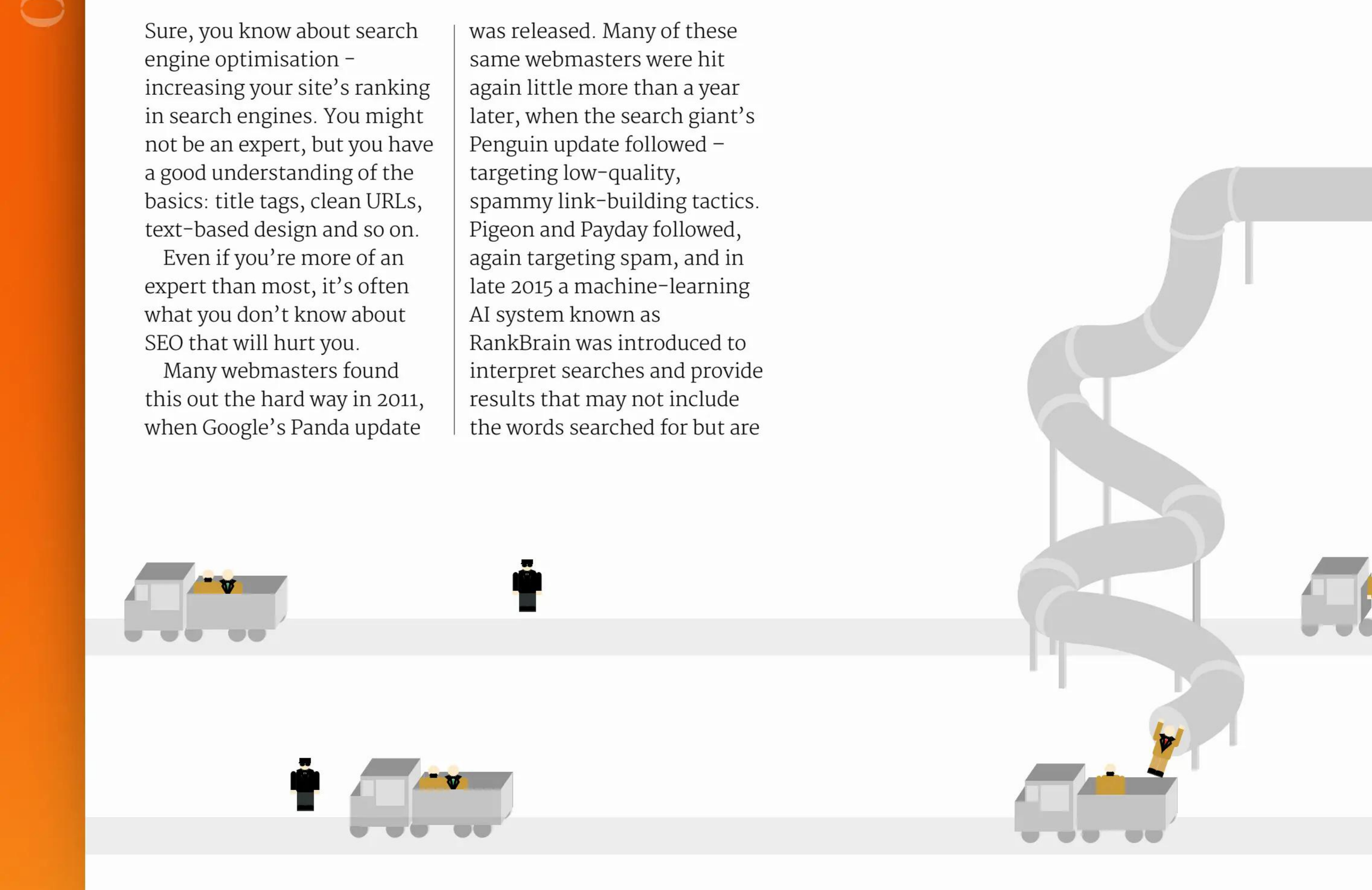


Image ©MikeBrennan

still relevant. With all these changes, many SEO techniques turned out to be less than optimal. Sites were penalised; traffic lost, and so-called 'SEO experts' fired.

Since then there's been a new tone in the SEO industry. Not all of us were creating low-quality content and links; but for those who were, these two updates were a wake-up call. And for those of us who have always been focused on high-quality, relevant content and links, it was something like redemption. Our sites soared while so many fell.

This is the new normal for SEO. Yes, there are still some who call themselves SEOs but focus on manipulative tactics with short-term revenue goals; yet there are also many who are part of a large and growing industry of specialists in a highly complex discipline that requires marketing, technical, research and communication skills.

So how big is SEO? Believe it or not, it's bigger in the minds of Google searchers than web design. Once considered a subset of web design, searches for SEO now eclipse those of web design worldwide.

The total projected value of the North American search marketing industry (SEO and paid search) in 2013 was $26.8 billion, according to industry trade organisation SEMPO, and 13 per cent of companies have SEO budgets of half a million to more than three million a year (up from 8 per cent in 2011).

As budgets increase, there's more to lose, and many companies have become more risk averse – forgoing the shady tactics they may have pursued in the past.

In cutting out the garbage, we start to see what SEO is good for (and has always been good for): connecting relevant content with relevant searchers, and making content discoverable through accessibility and marketing.

For those of you who still think of SEOs as greasy algorithm-chasers in cheap suits or parents' basements, consider the new reality.

ENGINES ARE NOT ENEMIES

Ten years ago, there were many people who were a little nervous about what we were doing. Nothing was against the Google guidelines... because there were no such guidelines in existence. At that time, there were a few books, but SEO was largely something that was spoken of covertly, and certainly never to search engines, which, it was thought, would likely think of it as manipulation.

Today we know better. Google and Bing have both published extensive webmaster guidelines, and Google has even published a guide to SEO for beginners (http://netm.ag/seostarter-238). In August 2011, Matt Cutts, Google's head of webspam, released a video statement (http://netm.ag/spam-238) saying that Google does not consider SEO by itself to be spam. This sentiment now appears in Google's definition of search engine optimisation (http://netm.ag/seodef-238), in which it says: "Many SEOs and other agencies and consultants provide useful

MULTIMEDIA SEO CASE STUDY

Background: an enterprise wanted to increase natural search traffic to its car image-sharing site.

CHALLENGE

- *The images were hidden behind JavaScript and not indexed.*
- *The images were hosted on another domain (a common CDN) making it impossible to create image sitemaps.*
- *Title tags were branded, making it difficult for the engines to understand what keywords the site was relevant for.*
- *Most common search phrases were not used in content.*
- *As a new website, there was a lack of any authority.*

STRATEGY

- *Rewrote the URLs so that they would appear to the engines to be hosted on the enterprise's own website to get more content indexed.*
- *Made images more accessible by adding noscript tags to the download page.*
- *Used sitemaps and image sitemaps to ensure that the engines were aware of the content and the structure of the site.*
- *Changed the title tags of the major pages so that they included relevant keywords, and changed the copy in these pages when necessary to include popular relevant keywords.*
- *Followed Google's image search best practices (http://netm.ag/imagesearch-238), and added structured markup to all the images to ensure that the engines had as much information about what the images were relevant for as possible.*

RESULTS

- *In the first four weeks after implementation, the number of images indexed went from 10,000 thumbnail images to 54,000 images. In six months, 403,000 images were indexed.*
- *Doubled relevant organic search traffic in four weeks, taking organic traffic from 11 per cent to 22 per cent of the total visits. Organic search was 41 per cent of visits in six months.*
- *The clickthrough rate from organic search increased 460 per cent in the first four weeks alone.*
- *Monthly organic visits grew 4,198.61 per cent from 1,083 to 46,554 in six months.*
- *In a year, the site sat on Google page one for relevant high-volume terms such as 'pictures of cars' 'pics of cars' and 'car wallpapers'.*

services for website owners."

Still, because of a few spammers who call themselves SEOs, SEOs in general have the reputation of being charlatans, and have been portrayed as such on television shows such as *The Good Wife* and *Dexter*.

"SEO has got a bad rap, and it's due to questionable SEO practitioners who perpetuate the 'snake oil' stereotype by making customers believe there's some magic 'black box' that 'tricks' the search engines," says Gord Hotchkiss, digital strategies consultant for Mediative and columnist for Search Insider. Hotchkiss, and the other experts involved in this article, explain that SEO is simply about getting relevant content indexed, and making sure it's visible to search engines.

All of the veteran SEOs who we spoke to understand why SEO still has the reputation in some circles of being snake oil. But they insist that it has, now, become much more mainstream and credible.

Rand Fishkin, founder of SEO software company Moz (www.moz.org), discusses his favourite reasons for SEO being something other than snake oil, including that, "SEOmoz has more than two million monthly visits, nearly all from web marketers looking to learn more about the practice. And our software, which bills monthly, has more than 18,000 subscribers. If SEO were just snake oil, I suspect folks would stop paying."

SEO, in its legitimate form, is now a more accepted part of the web design process, and in many organisations is finally getting a seat at the table when it comes to designing professional, search engine-friendly websites.

A PROCESS, NOT A PROJECT

In our experience, there are many instances in which the SEO team is brought in after the website has been completed, and told to magically make it search engine friendly. This is far from ideal.

The really competitive sites understand this, and integrate SEO into every stage of the planning process, from

DANNY SULLIVAN

Company: *Search Engine Land*
Role: *Founding editor*
Web: *www.searchengineland.com*

How would you convince doubters that SEO is a legitimate marketing strategy?
SEO has been around for two decades and is recommended by Google, which even provides its own guide for it. The world's largest search engine isn't going to be pushing snake oil – it has every reason not to. The fact that it does is probably the best reason beyond the many out there about why SEO is important. Ignore it, and you're ignoring what the actual search engines you want to be listed in are telling you to do to improve your chances.

Many designers see SEO as extra work and may add it at the end of the web design process if they've added it at all. Why should these people take SEO seriously?
If you build it, they don't necessarily come. Creating a shiny, wonderful new website doesn't matter if you've built it in a way to make it invisible to search engines. Designers often test to ensure their sites work well in different browsers like IE, Firefox and Chrome. Well, I've long written about search engines as being the most important browser of all, because everyone uses them to find sites. But if you've not designed your site for the unique things the search engine browser wants, people won't locate them.

A lot of software has been introduced in the past couple of years that seeks to automate aspects of the SEO process. Will SEO ever be completely automated?
Software can't automatically tell the type of content readers are interested in, the type of words they'll use to seek that content, create the quality content itself to serve them – and that's just the foundational part of SEO. Tools are nice. But we've had tools for years to build houses, yet we haven't completely automated house building. I think humans will long be involved in SEO.

What would you say are some promising trends in SEO today and why?
The use of more social data as a potential additional signal beyond looking at links to identify quality content is most promising to me. The greater use of structured data is also encouraging, as are the new possibilities opened up as people search on mobile devices and with mobile apps.

information architecture to content strategy to design, development, launch and post-launch.

A lot of web designers and developers are hesitant about integrating SEO further into the process, because doing so effectively produces extra work. But the rewards can be great, reminds Vanessa Fox, founder and CEO of Nine by Blue and author of *Marketing in the Age of Google*. "Organisations are losing 1) tremendous insight into their customers and potential customers if they don't take advantage of the free search data that's available from the millions of searches we do each day; 2) the opportunity to reach a significantly larger audience through being visible in search results."

Would you put the Mona Lisa in a closet? Would you spend hours cooking beef wellington, and as it emerges perfect from the oven throw it in the bin? Then why on earth would you build a website without considering how it will be found?

There's another reason for making SEO a priority in the web design process, advises Hotchkiss: "It forces you to create a better website! Good SEO optimisation should be baked into your information architecture. It will force you to think about common content themes. It requires you to consider how all digital assets (such as videos and user-generated content) will be integrated into the overall user experience. It helps eliminate user experience dead ends such as gratuitous Flash interfaces and, my personal pet peeve, content locked in PDFs. It extends your perception of your online footprint beyond the bounds of your website, including things like social media. It will also instil a healthy rigour when it comes to thinking about how your site links together. Good SEO practices mean a better user experience."

From our experience, more organisations than ever are learning these lessons, and are no longer thinking of SEO as a project, but as an ongoing process that ensures a website will be as visible in search as possible. This is good for web design because it gives it a larger audience, but also good for business.

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT LINKS: EMERGING SEO TRENDS

While many commentators have claimed that SEO is dead since it began around 1997, the truth is that it doesn't die; it evolves with the search engines. While SEO is constantly evolving, at the moment it seems focused on mobility, utility, the audience and automation, among other things.

One of these trends is the dissolving distinction between SEO, user experience and content strategy. In one recent Webmaster Tools YouTube video (http://netm.ag/cutts-238), Matt Cutts even suggested that those looking to change the name might consider "searcher experience optimisation" to differentiate from the 'snake oil' variety of SEO.

Some, such as Vanessa Fox, have suggested that SEO need not proceed as a separate activity from UX and content strategy: "I think that both disciplines should incorporate best practices from search rather than thinking of it as something tacked on later," she says. "Particularly, the data available from search is extremely valuable. Also, understanding that many visitors begin with a major search engine and that any page of the website can therefore become the homepage of the site can shift how we look at both page design and content."

"WHY BUILD A WEBSITE WITHOUT CONSIDERING HOW IT WILL BE FOUND?"

At the same time, Vanessa Fox – and all of the other SEOs that we spoke to – recognise that content strategy and usability, while essential for reputable SEO, need technical and other elements from SEO to be useful as a way of getting incremental search engine traffic.

"When SEO is done the right way, usability and content is a huge part of the plan," opines Eric Enge, founder and CEO of Massachusetts-based Stone Temple Consulting and co-author of *The Art of SEO*.

IMPLEMENTING OPTIMISED FACEBOOK SHARING

Facebook's Open Graph (the overarching name of the algorithm that handles third-party content on Facebook) relies on a series of meta tags, which need to be present in the <head> section of every web page to guide how content should be displayed when shared. There are specific parameters that these meta tags need to adhere to in order to be activated in search results. There are essentially four lines of code that need to be present wherever there's sharing functionality:

- **og:title** – *the title of your object as it should appear within the graph, for example 'SEO Mentioned Again on The Good Wife';*
- **og:type** – *the type of your object, such as 'article'. Depending on the type you specify, other properties may also be required. In the case of an article, additional information can be included in the graph*;*
- **og:image** – *an image URL that should represent your object within the graph. These should be consistent with the article (for instance www.brysonmeunier.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/seo-from-the-good-wife.jpg;*
- **og:url** – *the canonical URL of your object that will be used as its permanent ID in the graph, such as www.brysonmeunier.com/seo-mentioned-again-on-the-good-wife.*

**When these pieces of data are known or available publicly (note: never push information in an Open Graph tag that is not visible on the page in question – this could be flagged as a form of cloaking), include these pieces as part of the lines in the Facebook Meta Tag:*

- **article:published_time** - *datetime – when the article was first published;*
- **article:modified_time** - *datetime – when the article was last changed;*
- **article:expiration_time** - *datetime – when the article is going out of date;*
- **article:author** - *profile array – the writers of the article.*

LIVE EXAMPLE

For the example, this is what should be in the <head> section of the URL (this format should be included for all pages on the site). The content title and description should carry through to the Open Graph tags:

```
<html prefix="og: http://ogp.me/ns#">
<head profile="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml/vocab">
<meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; charset=utf-8" />
<link rel="shortcut icon" href="http://www.brysonmeunier.com/sites/all/themes/spirezen/favicon.ico" type="image/vnd.microsoft.icon" />
<meta content="SEO Mentioned Again on the Good Wife" about="/seo-mentioned-again-on-the-good-wife/" property="dc:title" />
<link rel="shortlink" href="/node/398" />
<link rel="canonical" href="/seo-mentioned-again-on-the-good-wife/" />
<title> SEO Mentioned Again on The Good Wife | BrysonMeunier.com</title>
<meta name="description" content="CBS Television show "The Good Wife" mentions SEO again in a fictional trial. Read more." />
<meta property="og:title" content=" SEOMentioned Again on The Good Wife " />
<meta property="og:description" content=" CBS Television show "The Good Wife" mentions SEO again in a fictional trial. Read more."
<meta property="og:type" content="Article" />
<meta property="og:url" content=" http://www.brysonmeunier.com/seo-mentioned-again-on-the-good-wife/" " />
<meta property="og:image" content=" http://www.brysonmeunier.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/seo-from-the-good-wife.jpg" />
<style type="text/css" media="all">@import url("http://www.brysonmeunier.com/modules/system/system.base.css?mbovli");
```

Image ©Thinkstock

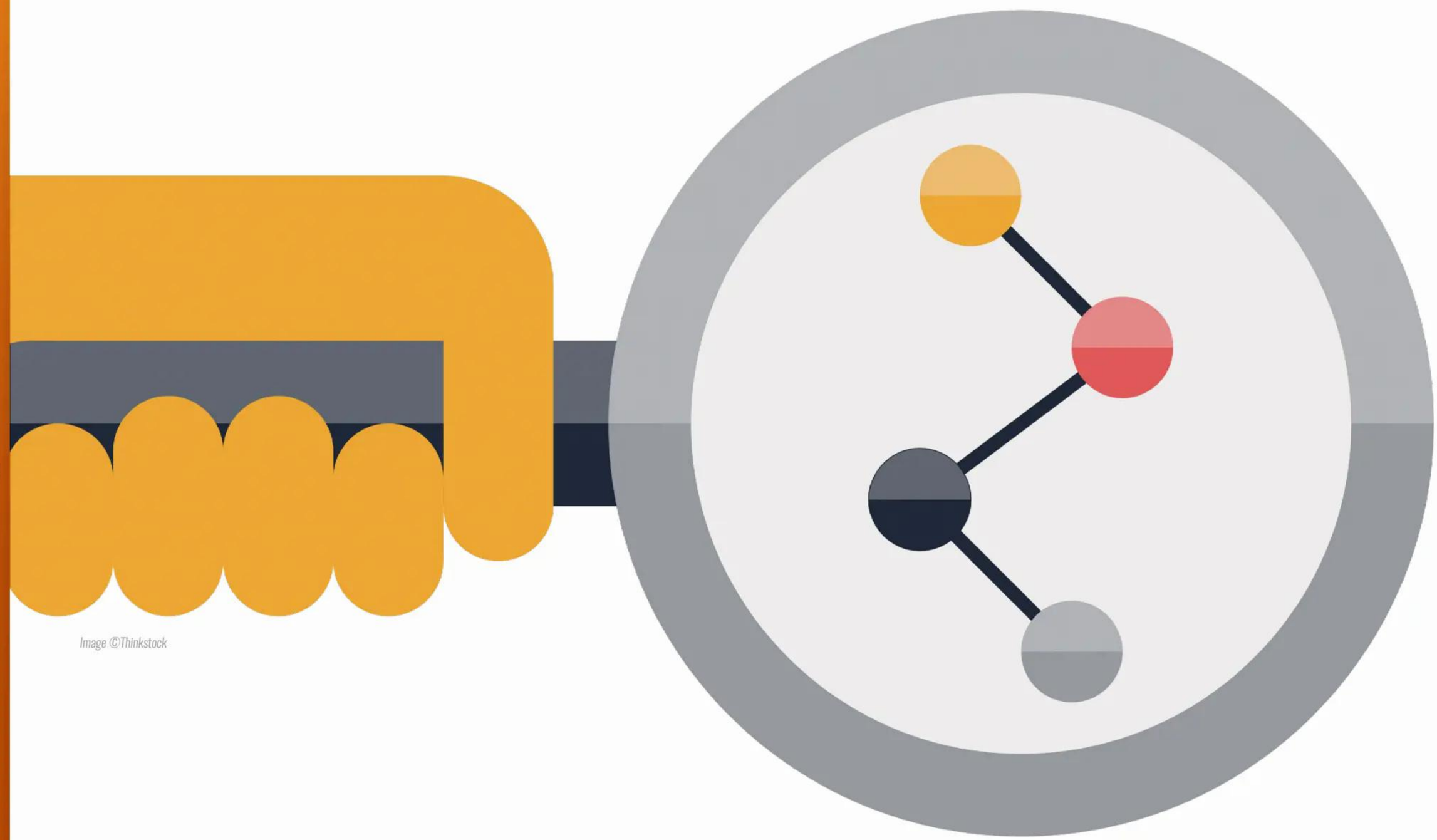


Image ©Thinkstock

"This is something that the snake-oil SEO people don't worry about. For long-term success as a web publisher, the use must come first. However, for success as a business, you need more."

With this concentration on content strategy and usability comes a focus on the audience as well. For Hotchkiss, this is a shift from word-matching to utility, and follows the search engines' own evolution. "Today, good SEO is about making sure that when a prospect uses a word (or words) to search for something, you match that as best as possible," he says. "But in the future, SEO will be about ensuring that when your prospect wants something, you deliver it. It may not be content. It may be a movie ticket, hotel booking, restaurant reservation or a downloaded TV show."

A CHANGE IN ANALYSIS

Delivering on this promise frequently requires a new type of analysis. In the past, marketers have done keyword research to uncover keywords as proxies for user intent. In *Marketing in the Age of Google,* Vanessa Fox describes the process of creating searcher personas that get beyond simple keyword matching and search volume exercises. And still others, such as Hearst's Core Audience (www.coreaudience.com), try to understand characteristics of audiences, including but not limited to the keywords they use. For some businesses, mobility will not change user intent. For example, news is not going to be rewritten for a separate platform, as Karen McGrane and other adaptive content advocates frequently point out. However, for some businesses it does; and if marketers want to get the most traffic and conversions from the mobile platform (in other words, be optimised for that) the devil is in the detail, and understanding the differences between mobile and desktop audiences is key.

There are technical considerations as well, which make a type of SEO geared towards these differences – what is commonly called mobile SEO – what it is. Many

people in the SEO world, as with their counterparts in the design world, believe that responsive design is the answer to these differences – and Google stated a preference for responsive design in June 2013. However, responsive design is not always best for the user, and Google wouldn't prefer it in those cases. If mobile and desktop search behaviour is significantly different, Google supports using dynamic serving or switchboard tags as well.

Cindy Krum, CEO of Denver-based mobile marketing agency Mobile Moxie and author of *Mobile Marketing: Finding Your Customers Wherever They Are* agrees that responsive design is one of many solutions for mobile search engine optimisation. "I have been recommending a mixed solution for most of my clients," she says, "Leveraging responsive design when it makes sense, and special mobile-only landing pages when keywords or use-cases cannot be appropriately addressed with a responsive design approach."

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Another big shift in SEO has been the introduction of more automation to the process. SEO software has been around as long as SEO has, but the sophistication and breadth of tools has increased in the last year or two.

Now there are tools to help you optimise the long-tail through semantic relevance (BloomReach – www.bloomreach.com), reporting tools (Conductor – www.conductor.com; BrightEdge – www.brightedge.com; and Moz – www.moz.com), link building tools (Ontolo – www.ontolo.com; Ahrefs – www.ahrefs.com; Moz link explorer– www.moz.com/link-explorer; Majestic SEO – www.majestic.com) and more, all geared towards automating various aspects of the search engine optimisation process.

When this happens, inevitably someone in the press will claim that the tool will allow you to fire your redundant SEO; but none of the SEO experts or software providers we've spoken to agree. "Great SEO starts with human beings who are creative, tenacious, and empathetic to the needs of searchers," says Fishkin. "No software can ever automate those processes."

There are other trends in search engine optimisation that are important as well, among them the integration of social signals into ranking algorithms, and SEO that is not just text-based, but about understanding and optimising images and videos – perhaps eventually for wearable technology purposes as that sector grows.

All in all, legitimate SEO has evolved with the search engines – and it continues to do so. As we've said, understanding and applying this new information requires a new type of SEO practitioner, and a different kind of user-focused SEO. ●

LINK BUILDING MEANS EARNING 'HARD' LINKS, NOT 'EASY' LINKS

Danny Sullivan explains the rationale behind his rant from SMX Advanced 2012, about the concept of link earning (http://netm.ag/sullivan-236).

01

GOOGLE WEBMASTERS YOUTUBE CHANNEL

Since 2009, Matt Cutts, Maile Ohye and other members of the Google Webmaster team have been posting videos aimed at helping webmasters increase the visibility of their sites. Among the 500-plus videos uploaded are mythbusting efforts ('Google does not use the keywords meta tag in web ranking'), advice ('5 common mistakes in SEO (and 6 good ideas!)') and general tutorials ('How does Google search work?'), but all of them represent essential guidance from Google in doing legitimate search engine optimisation (http://netm.ag/webmasters-238).

02

BING WEBMASTER HELP

Duane Forrester is Bing's equivalent of Matt Cutts, and the information he provides to webmasters is equally impressive. This is Bing's webmaster help centre, which includes its own webmaster guidelines (www.bing.com/webmaster/help).

03

MATT CUTTS' BLOG

Matt Cutts is the head of webspam for Google, and a key liaison between Google and webmasters, including SEOs. This is his official blog, which has been an essential resource for SEOs ever since July 2005 (www.mattcutts.com/blog).

04

SEARCH BLOGS I FOLLOW

Feed of posts from the 150 search blogs I read regularly to stay up to date on emerging trends in SEO. Contains posts from SEOMoz, Nine by Blue, Search Engine Land, Mediative, Stone Temple Consulting Blog, Mobile Moxie and more (http://searchengineland.com/searchcap).

Keep people on your site

How do you keep visitors on your site longer once they've clicked through from a search result? Here's the lowdown

We all want to get our site to the top of Google. But that's only half the story – what happens when people click through to your site?

Do they hang around and check out what you have to offer – or quickly move on to the next result? Obviously, we want the former to happen, so how can we make sure it does?

When visitors find nothing of interest on your site at first glance and leave immediately, this is known as a bounce.

A site with a high bounce rate from good quality traffic sources is an indicator that the website isn't performing up to visitors' expectations.

SOURCES OF TRAFFIC

Reducing your website's bounce rate is a great first step in improving its overall performance and conversion rate.

First you need to analyse the bounce rates of the different traffic sources. Focus your efforts on improving the bounce rates of the highest converting traffic sources, such as:

- Search engine traffic;
- Email marketing campaigns;
- Affiliate campaigns.

Ignore the bounce rate from unqualified sources, such as:

- Unknown referrer sites;
- Social networking sites;
- Random directory sites.

LANDING PAGE DESIGN

How you design your landing pages can make a difference to your bounce rate. Take the example of Real Gap (www.realgap.co.uk), which provides gap year and travelling ideas in over 35 countries for those youngsters wishing to take a year off before, during or after university.

The website uses specially-designed landing pages for its pay-per-click (PPC) accounts. The PPC page has a strong call to action, whereas the SEO page just contains general

CASE STUDY

Jamster was a website aimed primarily at a young audience, which provided them with ringtones, dial tones, mobile games, screensavers and music for mobile phones. It tried three different landing page designs: an interactive page powered by Flash, a rock-themed page and a generic landing page. Using PPC as the only source of traffic, we were able to determine that Flash interactivity was the key to a very low bounce rate and high conversion rate.

The Flash landing page used a great call to action and Flash interactivity. Providing a fun and exciting Flash widget alongside a strong call to action delivered a very high return on investment.

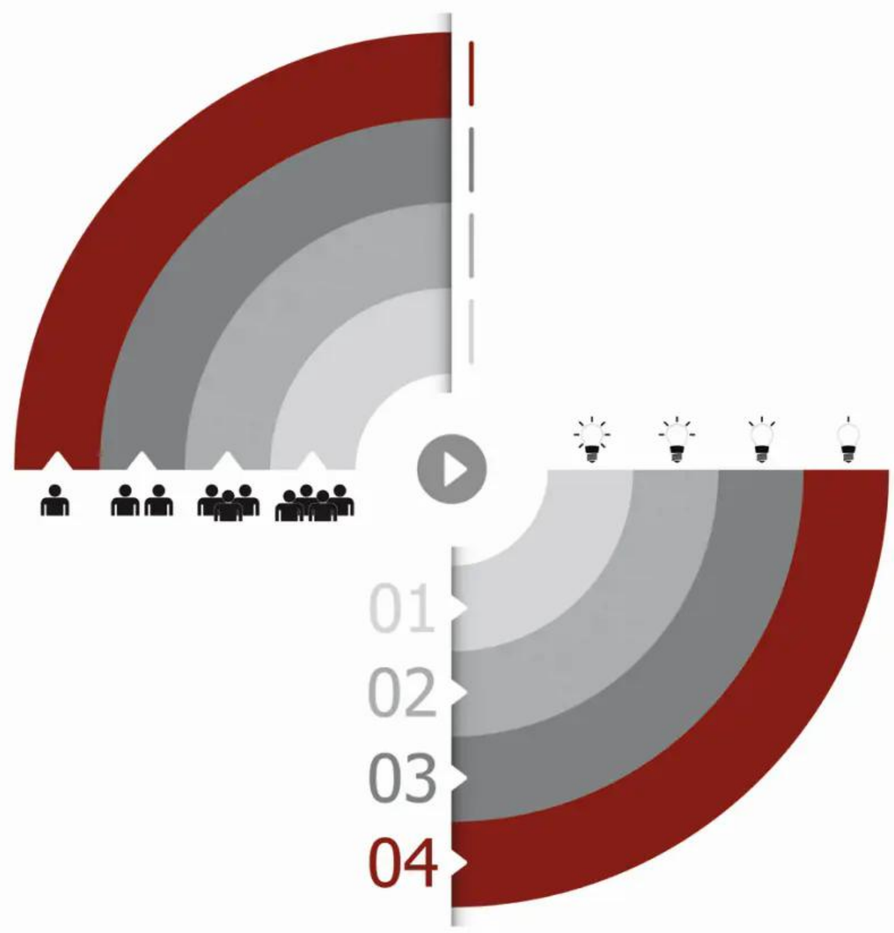
The rock-themed page not surprisingly appealed to rock fans but was a static page without Flash interactivity. The generic page was designed with no specific genres of music and it used light, friendly colours.

The results (from PPC sources) indicate that neither of these were the right approach for Jamster consumers. The Flash page had a 17.4 per cent bounce rate, compared to a bounce rate of 22.1 per cent for the rock page and one of 49.8 per cent for the generic landing page.

gap year information. Not surprisingly, the bounce rate for the PPC page is far lower than for the organic page: 18.24 per cent for the former compared with 25.44 per cent for the latter. It's a clear demonstration of how the design of the page people land on influences the bounce rate.

So what's the secret to designing a page with a low bounce rate? Here are some helpful tips.

- Make sure your headline refers directly to the place where your visitor came from or the ad copy that drove the click.
- It's vital to provide a clear call to action. Here's a good example: 'Only £99 per night at the Hilton Hotel in Paris. Book now.' Here's a bad example: 'Cheap hotels in Paris, the most romantic city in the world. Choose from 300 hotels in Paris, France.'
- You need to write clear, specific and targeted content that's geared specifically towards your visitors. Don't write content that is vague or general. Your visitors are here to read about a specific subject, so they won't thank you for wasting their time.
- Hierarchy – place the most important information at the beginning of paragraphs and bullet lists.
- Keep it simple. Remove all extraneous matter from your landing page. Ask for only enough information to complete the desired action.



TESTING

How do you know what's working and what isn't in terms of keeping visitors on your site? Answer: you don't. So assume nothing, and test everything.

Thanks to Google's Content Experiments (in Analytics), we can create, test and monitor the performance of landing pages. The purpose of testing your landing pages is to reduce bounce rates and increase conversion rates.

Setting up an A/B split test on Google Content Experiments is very easy and free. Here's a basic overview of the steps involved:

- Create a campaign to test landing pages against each other.
- Upload the URL of the original page that you're testing.
- Upload the URLs of the other landing pages you want to test against the original.
- Copy the JavaScript codes provided by Google and paste them into the relevant pages you're trying to test. (This requires access to the HTML code of the pages.)
- Send at least 500 visitors to the primary URL and Google will separate those visitors randomly for you to test the performance of the pages in a non-biased way. You can do this by using AdWords, email campaigns or even affiliates to send traffic from specific keywords through the funnel.

GOLDEN RULES

Finally, here are some golden rules to remember when you're designing and testing landing pages:

- No idea is a bad idea until you've seen it in action. If you get an idea for a landing page, try it! Try them all.
- Make a different landing page for every keyword that gets at least 500 clicks per month. This ensures your highest converting keywords get all the attention they deserve.
- Send at least 500 visitors from the same traffic source/keyword to each landing page, to accurately gauge its performance.
- Once you've tested several landing pages, try improving them by testing different versions of the best performing pages.
- The best landing pages can then be tested to varying degrees using multivariate testing. This is where you test specific elements of the page rather than entirely new pages.

Creating landing pages that encourage visitors to stay longer can sometimes be time-consuming and expensive, but it's absolutely essential to high converting, high performing websites. In the words of Samuel Beckett, "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better."

Go social

Let the public work for you

96 **WHY SOCIAL MEDIA MATTERS**
Your guide to the ever-growing online social world
- Content marketing
- The power of storytelling
- Measurable success
- Social responsibility
- Driving traffic to the right place

102 **X (TWITTER) MARKETING**
Use X's tools to create a splash in the fastest-moving social pool

106 **FACEBOOK MARKETING**
The biggest audience, with a sharing culture that makes it essential

110 **BLOG MARKETING**
Bring your audience closer to your business by revealing all

Why social media matters

Thanks to social media, the way we do business has changed forever. If you're not using social networks right now, you're missing out

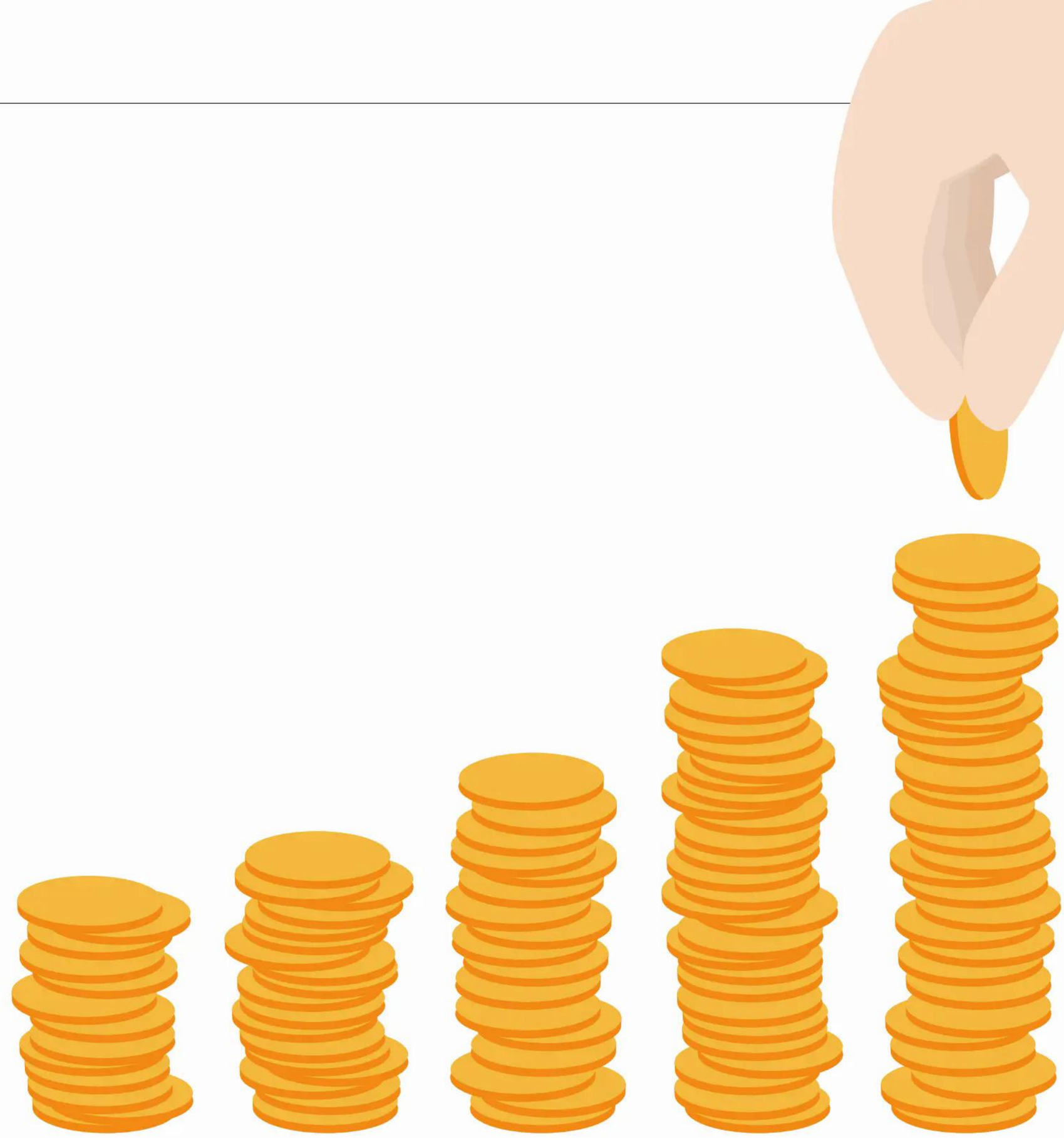
With Facebook boasting 1.79 billion active monthly users and X (Twitter) steady at around 500 million active monthly users, social media is here to stay. It has forever changed the way products are marketed. A marketing strategy that doesn't make use of social media is out of date. To take advantage of this huge pool of easily accessible and instantly available customers, you need to learn the secrets that can get your brand noticed online, which is why we've created this guide.

Whether you have a product to sell, a brand to promote or a cause to champion, this guide will show you how to leverage the power of the big social networks, such as Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram and Tumblr, to help get you noticed and spread the word. With our help you'll be producing content that has global appeal.

CONTENT MARKETING

In a nutshell, social marketing is about using the various social networks to build up a buzz about your brand or product. Content marketing is an important part of the social marketing mix. Essentially, this means taking the content you probably already produce and using it in your social marketing. There's no point shouting, no matter how loudly you do it, unless you've got something to shout about.

For example, say you're an illustrator and you've created a great series of illustrations for a client. You could share one of those illustrations on your social media accounts as a



promotional activity, along with a link to your website. If the illustration is good enough and plenty of people like it, they'll start to share it on their social media accounts, and this can create a buzz about your work.

In most cases, there's an initial spike in activity, which steadily tails off over a long period. However, in rare situations this growth can be dramatic, and at some point it becomes self-sustaining. If an image, video or campaign achieves the status of 'going viral', it can be enough to launch a whole new business.

While a viral hit can boost your product or brand into the stratosphere very quickly, it's a rare event and exceptionally hard to artificially engineer. It's impossible to predict what will go viral, and it's for this reason you shouldn't count on it as part of your social media strategy. In most cases, you need to ensure your social marketing is done as part of an organised campaign, which builds up a decent amount of interest over time, steadily growing your brand. Keep in mind that social marketing is a marathon, not a sprint.

The guide you're reading right now has everything you need to understand social marketing across the major social networks and share your content effectively, but don't underestimate how important it is to have great content in the first place. Without great content that people are proud to share with their friends, you will fail. If people see great content being shared, then chances are high that they'll want more of it, and that they will head to your website to learn more.

Of course, not everybody has an instantly accessible stream of memorable content that's reliably shareable. If the thought of content being key to your social strategy makes you nervous, it might be time to investigate the power of storytelling.

WHY STORYTELLING IS YOUR SECRET WEAPON

Simply put, people respond to stories – it's in our genes. You can imagine our distant

ancestors huddled around a fire, telling stories to their children over the dying embers. The same approach works well on social media.

For example, if you're looking for funding to start or finish a film project, make a short video to explain why this project is so important to you, and how you arrived at the point where you need more funding to finish it. Straight-up demands for cash won't impress anybody, but fundraising videos are eminently shareable, so long as they tell a story that gets underneath people's skin.

If you need inspiration, check out the fundraising video produced by Tippy Tap (http://tippytap.org), at https://youtu.be/Qdpd3roZjYw. It's a great example of a storytelling video that shows a Tippy Tap being created out of very basic materials. It's engaging because it makes you wonder what they're going to make while you watch it.

The video hooks you right to the end, at which point it delivers the stunning message that in India more than 1,000 children die every day from diarrhoea, half of which could be prevented by something as simple as handwashing with soap. It's a beautifully executed message that screams to be shared.

MEASURE YOUR SUCCESS

A great benefit of social marketing is that you can measure its success by leads and customers, rather than the more traditional web metrics, such as page views, time spent on a page, and bounce rate.

The various social networks have their own analytics to help you assess the impact of your efforts. For example, you can see immediately how many times a Facebook post has been shared, and how many times your most recent tweet has been retweeted, but you also get a much more direct feel for how successful social marketing has been by how your sales or customer contacts are doing. What you do on social media has a direct effect, and the results should be instantly apparent.

A major advantage of social marketing is that there's no charge to post on social networks, and provided your posts are interesting and they're being viewed and shared, your message is getting out there without you having to pay for it. Of course, while the medium is free, your time isn't, and you will need to invest a significant amount of it in your social marketing efforts if you want to get it right. An important part of social marketing is managing the conversation you have with your customers, and there's no more direct, or public, way of doing this than via social media.

Of course, social networks aren't averse to taking your money to display adverts or to promote your messages. Your initial reaction might be that it makes no sense paying for promotion when you can get it for free with good content, but take time to consider this option. Facebook advertising and promoted tweets can prove very cost effective in the right circumstances.

WITH GREAT POWER COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY

Also, let's not forget, the power of social media can be used for bad, as well as good. If ever there was a cautionary case that demonstrated the way social media can make or break a business or brand, it was that of The Shed café close to where this book was produced, in Bath, UK...

One of the café's customers posted a balanced three-out-of-five review on The Shed's Facebook page, accompanied by a comment that she would not be having any of the cakes by the till, as they were in danger of being breathed on by customers because they were not covered up.

Unfortunately, The Shed's Facebook page responded to the criticism by replying: "You would need to be a midget with the neck of a giraffe to be able to breathe all over them – stupid woman!" It went on to mention libel and defamation in subsequent posts. Within days, the spat had gone global, being shared all over X and Facebook. It quickly appeared in local newspaper websites, and nationally on the Mail Online website under the headline "Great Twittish cake off!"

Interestingly, there were supporters on X for both sides of the argument, but you just knew that The Shed would rather the conversation was not happening at all.

A few days later, The Shed issued an apology via its Facebook page, concluding with a direct apology to the customer who originally provided feedback. This response ended: "...in hindsight we wouldn't have posted the Facebook response we did and therefore would like to move on by offering a heartfelt apology...". This case shows that all you need is one slip up in the way you engage with your customers to damage your business.

Even big brands are not immune to social media slip-ups. MasterCard's PR company once made a total hashtag of things by asking that all journalists seeking to attend the 2014 Brit Awards make at least one tweet with mention of MasterCard, and that they include the hashtag #PricelessSurprises in it. The request instantly backfired, and journalists started to use the hashtag to criticise the request. The PR agency defended its actions, but you should consider the difficulty in shaking off negative publicity that's generated by making a social faux pas.

BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME

Social marketing has to lead somewhere. Even if it is your job is to promote your brand and to get it into as many people's minds as possible, somewhere there is a product you need to sell, and most of the time, that product is on a web page. A landing page is the place where anybody engaged with your social marketing will arrive when they click on a link to your website. It must be part of your strategy, and you need to do everything possible to make your customer's experience of your website as good as possible.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember about social marketing is that we stand on shifting sands. At the moment, Facebook is by far the largest social network, with X nipping at its heels, but the social media landscape could look very different in as little as five years from now. It's possible that an entirely new medium for social media could emerge and take over the space in the public's consciousness that is occupied by the current big players.

Photo sharing networks such as Instagram appear to have strong momentum right now, and Facebook's roughly $16 billion acquisition of the messaging app WhatsApp demonstrates that instant messaging shows signs of becoming a dominant communication medium.

Inevitably, social networks will continue to evolve, and it's those businesses and brands that correspondingly evolve their social marketing message that will succeed. ●

Master X (Twitter) marketing

X, formally Twitter, can be about more than just chatting to your friends but, crucially, using it for marketing shouldn't be all that different

At the last count, X had over 500 million monthly active users, which gives you a huge community to which you can market your products just by bashing out 280 characters; the five minutes you spend waiting for a bus can become an opportunity to market your brand from your mobile phone. It's not quite as simple as that, but the good news is that it really isn't that much more complicated either.

Assuming you're already familiar with X, the mental gear-change that's required to switch from using it for personal reasons to business marketing isn't as pronounced as you might think. Lots of people, when they start posting as a brand, get stiff and formal, and treat X like it's a one-way broadcast platform from which they can tell the world about their company. But your customers and potential customers are more likely to engage with your brand when it's warm and passionate about the type of products it makes, and its business, too.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

The most important thing is to decide what your strategy is. Why are you using X as a marketing tool, and what do you hope to get out of it? Perhaps it's specifically to drive sales, which is a valid and understandable reason, but be careful with your approach, because people dislike being hounded to buy things. Maybe it's to build up your brand's personality. You may want to be part of a community of people and brands involved with a subject. Or you might simply want to share your passion for something with others.

Your motivation is likely to be a mix of all those things and more. That's fine, but make sure you have clearly defined your goal for marketing via X. Be prepared to adapt and refine your strategy as you go. Do so in response to customer engagement with your posts, and as a reaction to broader trends on X, in your marketplace and in the macroeconomic world, but do have a strategy to begin with.

CAN BUY ME LOVE

As well as building an audience organically, X lets you reach people directly by buying ads. Just sign in with your X account at http://ads.twitter.com. Here you can run two kinds of campaigns. You either promote your account itself - the idea being you'll get more of the right kinds of followers - or you promote specific posts, so that you can spread the word about new products, sales and the like.

You decide how much you want to spend overall, and then target the sort of people you want to attract, such as by listing other X usernames (competitors, for example) whose followers you'd like to be following you as well.

Regardless, your brand needs to have a personality and a human quality, so even before you start posting about your products, make sure you are establishing that personality. Post behind-the-scenes glimpses of how your products are made, repost stuff you think is interesting or cool, or make a meme. Don't be afraid to be a little whimsical or irrelevant. Remember, not every post you create and send needs to be important or grand. Think about what sort of posts you like to see and repost, and try to replicate that sort of thing. Ultimately, people will only repost your content if they find your posts funny, useful or interesting.

It's usually a bad idea to hook up your X account to an auto-post service that will post headlines and story snippets from your blog or news site. The results almost always feel impersonal and ill-fitting for what you are trying to achieve. Post the stories, sure, but craft the posts by hand, and try to include a picture – now that http://X.com and all the official and unofficial apps display pictures, it's a great way to make posts stand out. You can use any image, but for best results make your picture 1,024×512 pixels.

ASSESS YOUR SUCCESS

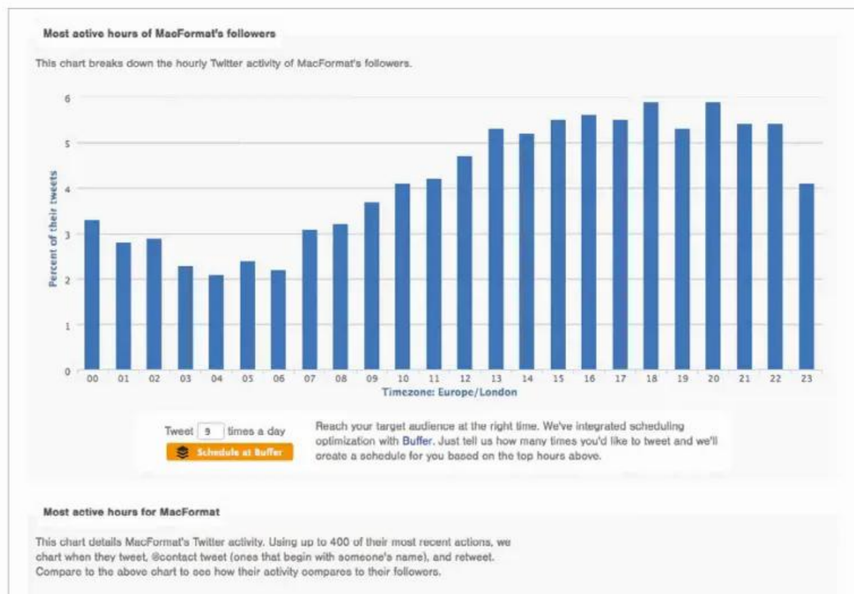
Don't obsess about how many followers you have. Although it's a useful metric, it isn't the only one. Lots of accounts that have many thousands of followers have used some slightly shady tactics to acquire them, and the good news is that most of those followers aren't actually valuable – or even real people in some cases. It's far better to have a small number of followers who engage with you and who can be persuaded to buy from your brand.

If your posts get more likes and reposts than an account with ten or a hundred times the number of followers you have, you're doing it right.

It's important to use analytics services to get a clear idea of what you're doing that works well. X provides simple analytics at http://analytics.twitter.com, which can highlight successful posts, and you don't have to buy ads to use it. Followerwonk (http://followerwonk.com) can, among other things, help you identify which followers are most influential. You might want to show them some special attention.

MEANINGFUL FOLLOWERS

If you want to attract more real followers, you can do it either by just posting stuff that people will want to share to their followers, or by more overt means. The latter often means paying to get your brand in front of followers (see 'Can buy me love' on the opposite page), or by using something like a competition. Be careful to list terms and conditions, and unless you state otherwise, be prepared to send the prize anywhere in the world. Here's an example, which would have a picture attached: "Win our three best-selling organic beers: bathbrewco.com/threefaves Follow and RT to enter; ends 12 May 10am GMT." Existing followers will repost this, exposing the competition and the brand to new people, who might become new fans. Avoid the ambiguity of digits in dates as this may cause confusion between the USA and the UK. If you mention a time, also state the timezone.



Analyse activity using services such as Followerwonk to get an idea of when your followers are most active, so you can target them efficiently.

Use the platform to talk with customers, both existing and potential. Some will use your @username in their posts, making it easy to respond to praise or criticism, but you can also keep an eye on more under-the-radar chatter by using the platform's search feature.

Simply searching for your business name can show up lots of irrelevant posts, but you can string together operators to narrow the search. See http://support.twitter.com/articles/71577 for details on how to do this. Responding to someone who is talking about but not to you might seem creepy, however, so bear that in mind when replying!

What makes a good account?

It's a good idea to follow a few successful brand accounts on X to learn their methods – but who should you follow?

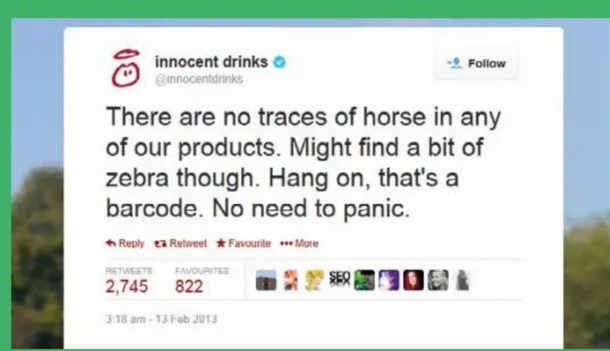
Innocent Drinks (@innocentdrinks) is one of the best examples of a brand on X. First and foremost, it has personality, and that's reflected by everything it posts.

Innocent posts about promotions and partnerships, but always with cheery character, and engaging photos, videos and illustrations. This stuff might seem irrelevant, but it's what people repost, and each appearance in a stranger's feed is marketing in the brand's tone. It's all about engendering good feeling so that people will feel they have a relationship with the brand when presented with a choice of a supermarket's own-brand orange juice or a more expensive bottle of Innocent.

What you don't see as a follower of the account, unless you also follow a person it is talking to, is how actively the team responds to customers. Innocent is fortunate to be seen as a nice company, in part due to its efforts on social media. It proactively monitors X for implicit and explicit mentions. Perhaps this is more PR than marketing, but it steers conversations and corrects what Innocent perceives to be misinformation about, say, the sugar content of its drinks.

It's important that your marketing on X is part of a broader and coherent campaign. For example, Innocent often sets up at a location to give away free smoothies, which it tells the wider world about using the social media platform, which amplifies the message through reposts.

Some of Innocent's most successful posts, such as http://bit.ly/1gAZsvG and http://bit.ly/1n4r8GM, show a relentless focus on brand personality, but note the focus on its products, too. Other non-traditional brand accounts include @betfairpoker, @wstonesoxfordst and @arenaflowers.



INNOCENT DRINKS

By mixing timeliness, brand values and humour, this post has so far been reposted over 2,400 times.
http://twitter.com/innocent

The six rules of X (Twitter)

Follow these six simple rules when you're marketing your business using X, to give your social media campaigns the best chance of success!

BE AUTHENTIC

If you remember nothing else from this section, remember this: we used to idolise 'brands' but now we're suspicious of them, so don't use corporate-speak. Be passionate, excited and friendly. In many cases, it's better to be cheery and interested in the world around you than trying to appear professional – or, to put it another way, stuffy.

ENGAGE!

A common mistake with any social media network is to treat it as a broadcast medium. That is, people have stuff they want to tell the world about, so they just blast messages out. This may work in a very few cases, but most companies need to engage on a more personal level on X. Reply to mentions of your brand, follow interesting people, and don't forget to talk to them as well.

X'S SIMPLE ANALYTICS

You've likely got very good instincts about what your audience will be interested in, what time of day people are most active, and so on, but don't rely solely on intuition. Analytics platforms such as Buffer, Favstar and even X simple analytics at http://analytics.twitter.com can help you understand what is successful, so you can do more of it.

IT CAN'T SOLELY BE A MARKETING CHANNEL

If the only thing your X account is used for is to post news about your company, any real followers you manage to attract are likely to tire quickly and leave you. Post stuff that's valuable and engaging for your audience, such as tips, funny stuff and, yes, even news from competitor brands. If they can trust you to bring them everything, they will stay.

AVOID NEGATIVITY

If you get into a slanging match in real life, few people will hear about it, and fewer still will see it for themselves. But on X, any bitchiness or negativity can be reposted in an instant, and if it's juicy, people will share and talk about it. Your bad posts can be redistributed just as easily as good ones, and the spread will take on a life of its own in very little time. The PR fallout can be disastrous.

DON'T REPOST PRAISE (TOO MUCH)

We all like to be told that we're doing a good job, and reposting the occasional bit of praise into your followers' feeds can be helpful to remind them you're a good brand, especially if it aligns with your strategic goals. However, think about this from the perspective of your followers. They didn't follow you to hear how great you are.

Free marketing on Facebook

Do you want to increase online sales, build brand awareness and promote your products? Read on...

From leading brands that boost TV campaigns with Facebook engagement, to growing businesses that host creative online offers to keep fans excited, any business – big or small – can use Facebook as a marketing tool.

Social media platforms such as Facebook bridge the gap between businesses and consumers, improving communication between them and leaving brands with a better understanding of their audience. Whether you're a freelance illustrator, successful independent restaurant or a globally-recognised brand, Facebook should be at the top of your marketing strategy.

HOW TO GET MORE FACEBOOK LIKES

Engaging fans to spread the word through shareable content will put you on the fast track to acquiring new Likes. The most noticeable change in Likes will come from content you create, so share eye-catching images, be relevant, be authentic and update your page frequently. Keep your page worth a visit by starting conversations and adding exclusive Facebook content to your audience's news feeds, such as competitions and offers. Use Facebook Insights to understand your audience's reactions to individual posts and do more of what works best.

FACEBOOK GROUPS AND PAGES

Facebook groups and pages each have their own strengths. Groups are ideal for intimate communication in communities – to discuss a topic, and to share ideas and opinions – while pages are designed to help businesses, organisations and professionals create an authentic presence online to represent their values. Therefore, creating a Facebook page for your brand or business is the first step towards getting yourself noticed on the social network.

KEY STEPS TO PROMOTING YOURSELF, YOUR BUSINESS OR A BRAND ON FACEBOOK

Suggesting your page to friends, putting up signs in your bricks-and-mortar store, adding a Like button to your website, and including links to your page wherever possible will all contribute to page growth. However, the most noticeable change in Likes will be as a result of the content you post on your page.

Let's look at ways to optimise your Facebook marketing effort by identifying your audience, creating compelling content, and analysing your strategy.

01 IDENTIFYING YOUR AUDIENCE

Having a clear understanding of your audience will help you tailor your Facebook posts to suit its interests. Most brands have customer profiles outlined through authorised data collection, but as a growing business or

freelancer, taking time to identify your ideal customer will help you to find more of them.

HOW TO IDENTIFY YOUR AUDIENCE:

- Create a description of your ideal customer. Decide on age, gender, personality, occupation, hobbies, spending habits, likes and dislikes.
- Locate your online audience. Which websites interest them? What are they reading? What are they likely to search for online?
- Determine their end goals. What is it about your product or service that they like?
- Write a more detailed outline of each identifiable customer. Give them each a name and backstory. Write a short day-in-the-life-of paragraph about each one that you can refer to.

These are just a few questions to get you started. There are hundreds of customer profiling templates online that can help you build a more comprehensive portrait. Piecing together a clear picture of who you're 'talking' to online will help determine the tone for each post and what customers are likely to respond to.

02 CREATE YOUR FACEBOOK CONTENT STRATEGY

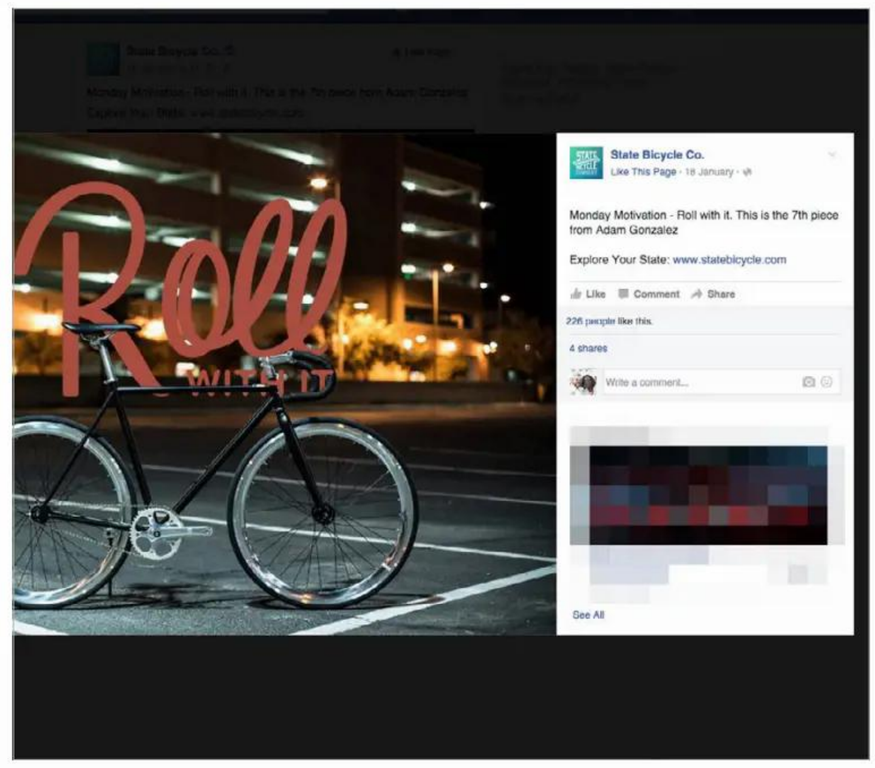
A Facebook content strategy is a daily outline of page updates scheduled for the week or month ahead which include things you want to promote or share. For example, you know next week you'll publish a blog post about an offer available on your website's shop, which will start on Saturday and end on the following Monday. For your Facebook strategy you could schedule the following: an announcement of the upcoming offer the Thursday before, share a link to the blog post on Saturday, and post a product image on Sunday evening as a reminder to those who haven't already taken advantage.

Map out your Facebook strategy by determining your weekly or monthly goals and devising daily content around it. Remember to look at your customer profile to find ways of working in content that would interest them. Your goals may be to drive traffic to your online store, to increase your reach and Page Likes, or to build brand awareness. They may be all of these things, so a strategy is central to creating posts that get attention and get results.

BEST POST EVER

According to Posting Best Practices (http://on.fb.me/1z1c0Bi), rich photography and captivating videos, asking questions, and Facebook Offers (a paid-for service) – or offers of your own – receive the best response. If you think about your personal use of Facebook, are these the same things that catch your eye?

Arizona-based State Bicycle Co. has been featured on Facebook's Success Stories page. Each week it shares a stunning image of a bike with an inspiring quote dropped over the top. This generates a lot of shares and plenty more comments and likes. The company calls it Motivational Monday. Not only is it the perfect day for inspirational posts that banish Monday blues, the content is visually striking. Most importantly, it's shareable, which extends the reach of the page and potentially leads to new fans.



State Bicycle Company creates content that inspires and motivates while building awareness of its limited edition bikes.

03 ANALYSE YOUR PROGRESS WITH FACEBOOK INSIGHTS

With your page in place and content being published regularly, you can measure your success using Facebook Insights. Facebook's easy-to-use analytics service helps you evaluate different aspects of your page. Tools such as Engagement, Page Likes and Post Reach help with tracking your best-performing content by discovering who's engaging with you, and at what time. Use these tools to find out what's working well, write your own best practice, then replicate it. These steps are simple, but it takes an active page to make discoveries that lead to growth.

Tatty marketing on Facebook

Tatty Devine is an independent British jeweller whose studios are located in London and Kent. It specialises in expressive, standout jewellery with hints of retro fashion. The brand used Facebook to bring the products from its British studios to a global audience. Its aim: to turn Facebook Likes into online purchases, shop visits and brand awareness.

A quick scan over the brand's Facebook page makes it clear that Tatty Devine knows its audience. Its page is kept fresh by varying post types from anything between new collections, sneak peeks and discounted item announcements, all of which are accompanied by gorgeous images and enthusiastic copy.

In spring/summer 2013, Tatty Devine launched the successful Wishing Tree campaign. It encouraged fans to leave comments on its Facebook page with their springtime wishes. These comments would be written out and pinned to an in-store wishing tree, photos of which were uploaded soon after. This simple idea worked to bring a community of fans together by getting them to engage around a theme that wasn't about a new offer or competition, but which resulted in increased online sales and improved store footfall.

Tatty Devine's sample sales have fans in screeches of sheer excitement. To promote the event, it created a public Facebook event and invited fans to visit its London store. It soon had more than 400 guests attending. Other posts about the event included an announcement that newsletter subscribers would receive early access to buy 'Lucky Dip' boxes online, and an invitation to fans to submit song requests for the Sunday sample sale through comments.

Many happy customers shared images of their Lucky Dips, and those wishing they'd got something else were given a means to swap items with other Tatty Devine shoppers through a one-month-only Swap Shop event.

Through both the Wishing Tree and Sample Sale campaigns, Tatty Devine created great excitement around its products using Facebook as the medium between it and its audience. It uses Facebook as the channel for driving online sales through good posting strategies and learning what its audience responds best to.

TATTY DEVINE
Tatty Devine is a UK-based designer and manufacturer of jewellery.
www.facebook.com/tattydevinefanpage

Top 6 Facebook tips

Six simple rules for promoting your Facebook page

CREATE SHAREABLE CONTENT

Shareable content is a post that directly benefits your audience. When a fan shares your post, it appears on their timeline and their friends' news feeds, so creating shareable content is important for page exposure and acquiring new Likes. People respond to a business or brand with a 'human side', so don't be afraid to add your own flair. Combine your (clean) humour with content that helps your fans express their own identity. Now more than ever it's important to put yourself in their shoes.

MEASURE AND ADJUST

Once 30 people have liked your page, you'll be able to see your Page Insights, which tell you all about how your audience is responding to your content. Page Likes, Post Reach and Engagement tools are just some of the things you can use to track your best-performing posts.

BE AVAILABLE

People love an authentic presence online, so be conversational and share what you're genuinely interested in – it's about quality, not quantity. Respond to both good and bad feedback. Experiment with post types and times. You can schedule posts on Facebook, which is a godsend for businesses with little digital resource.

FORGET FORMALITY

Say goodbye to formalities and loosen up already! People on Facebook are there primarily to catch up with friends, so if you want their attention, you have to talk with them as though you're just another pal to encourage interaction, rather than sounding like a marketer. This is not to say that you shouldn't be professional, but have a little fun with your status – what *have* you been up to?

REFERENCE

Do not take credit for any content that does not belong to you! This is not to say that you can't share an image you think your audience would love to see on your page, even if you didn't take it yourself. It simply means that you should, at all times, give credit where credit is due. Adding a link to the original source builds credibility and trust with your audience.

DON'T IRRITATE

Facebook likes an active page but people are quick to hit the Unlike button. The aim is to be consistent and to post regularly to counter this, but don't overdo it. Ask yourself, "Would my audience share this?", "Would they find it interesting?", "Would they like to see this in their news feed?" – if the answer is yes (honestly), then go ahead.

Marketing with a blog

Your website is about more than displaying your products. Adding an active blog establishes you want a deeper dialogue with customers

Developing a new website? Then make sure you don't forget to build a blog into your marketing plan. It's a powerful way to help visitors discover your website, it's great at helping to build trust, and it makes keeping in touch with customers much easier.

Getting found on Google is a top marketing priority. Blogging brings a number of SEO benefits and plays an essential part in the drive to get high search engine rankings. New blog posts being placed on your website make Google happy in its quest to find fresh content. The blog content tends to stick to a central theme, which means there is going to be topical keyword density and relevance.

Blogs also tend to acquire links from other blogging websites, whether in the form of explicit links from other sites, trackbacks or links from blog directories. Of course, RSS feeds can ping Google the moment new content is published, triggering rapid-fire indexing of the content.

One key benefit to a blog is the ability to keep in touch

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETERS' BLOGGING ACTIVITIES

- Blogs remain a strong area of focus for companies, with 81% considering their blogs "useful," "important," or "critical".
- Companies that blog have 97% more inbound links.
- 78% of CMOs think custom content is the future of marketing.
- Small businesses that blog get 126% more lead growth than those that do not.
- Once you write 21 blog posts, blog traffic generation can increase by up to 30%.

- Blogging: 38%
- Visual: 37%
- Video: 21%
- Podcasting: 2%
- Live video: 2%

Sources: www.activeblogs.com/blogging-facts-stats and www.socialmediaexaminer.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/SocialMediaMarketingIndustryReport2016.pdf

with your customers. Blog comments are a great two-way communication channel. And unlike other forms of social media, you can moderate and edit comments before they go live, which appeals to many businesses worried about negative or libellous comments.

Do you want to ensure that your content can reach customers' iPads? Then the Flipboard iPad app provides a fantastic interface to blog content just by providing the app with the address of your blog's RSS feed.

There is a new marketing trick up the collective sleeve of the blogger: the principle of authorship. Photographs of authors appearing in search results alongside the articles they have written creates a more prominent and trustworthy search result. Google looks for good content from great authors, and it knows there is lots of that in blogs. By linking your Google+ profile to your blog, you can gain the additional benefit of being highly visible in search results.

A blog hosted on your own domain gives all of the key SEO benefits: content on your domain, inbound links to your blog posts, and a customer experience where visitors are right in the mix of your own site's marketing messages.

An externally-hosted blog loses that SEO power and gives visitors a less strong experience of your brand. Other development activities you should consider include integration with email marketing systems, with LinkedIn profiles for your staff, and connections to other social platforms.

MATT DAVIES

Company: Fifteen Design
Role: Creative director (2018)
Web: www.fifteendesign.co.uk

What's your top priority when creating a new blog?
Each element of text needs to be styled in a legible way, which is easy on the eye and clearly differentiates each area of text. Think about using fonts, line spacing, sizes and colours effectively.

How should developers work with designers to build a blog?
My number one tip is for developers and designers to go through a wireframe process together before any designing or coding begins. After wireframes are in place, the designer can get creative on styling the elements and the developer can sit back and be content to know that what the designer comes back with will be possible.

What's the future for blog design?
Technology is moving us onwards into live microblogging, which is like Twitter but through blogs, with users exchanging small snippets of information quickly. This new technology will mean that layouts will probably become more conversation-like as opposed to walls of text, which is the norm at the moment.

Start Your Own
BUSINESS

Happy Business

Take the chore out of work

114 THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT
Keep your employees happy and you'll keep them around

116 FINDING STAFF ONLINE
If you're running a digital business you'll want a digital-savvy team

118 BUILD THE PERFECT TEAM
Assemble the people who are going to help you make your fortune

128 BE MORE EFFICIENT
It's not all about staff: change the way you work to find success

The right environment

Don't let valued employees get away! Give them the work environment they deserve and they'll love coming to work every day

Losing a valued employee can have an adverse effect on a business, especially those in specialist, niche areas, where it's hard to find skilled employees. Not only does it mean that you have to put the business on hold while you recruit, but there's also the time lost to you while you recruit, and there's the cost of running recruitment adverts. According to a 2012 survey by the British Chambers of Commerce, over 40 per cent of companies estimate the cost of recruiting a new employee is more than £2,000, and in more than half (53 per cent) of the businesses surveyed, the business owner is responsible for recruitment.

The simple way to reduce the effect of losing staff is to keep staff for longer. It's not quite that simple, but that should be your primary aim. You stand to save a lot of time and money, and you'll also be creating a loyal and happy workforce. If you do it right, you'll produce better work as well as better workers.

THERE'S NO I IN TEAM

An important skill worth developing is team work. Business owners are used to doing things and making decisions on their own; for many business owners, the ability to do what you want, when you want, was one of the main driving forces behind starting a business. Creating teams, however, is one way of reinforcing loyalty. If an employee works as part of a team that they feel happy with, the decision to move will be harder to make than if they work on their own.

Additionally, people like working in teams and believe they're more effective in them. A Vodafone survey from 2012 showed that employees were clear about the negative impacts of not working effectively as a team. The most serious of these were delayed decision-making (named by 31 per cent), unhappy customers through poor response (29 per cent), missing targets because of lack of timely input from colleagues (28 per cent), and making the wrong decisions because of lack of access to the right people and information (28 per cent). Creating teams involves understanding the different personalities in the team, and helping them work together. It also involves working in close proximity to your staff. You can't create teams if you sit in a separate office all day. You need to get out and about, and be part of the team.

CREATING STAFF INCENTIVES

Although they may carry a financial cost, staff initiative schemes can also be highly effective. A well thought-out system of incentives and perks – discounts at stores,

health benefits, and the like – can help to retain staff. They can also be used to recognise good work and initiative, and encourage staff and teams to compete for the prize.

Perks often carry tax breaks for the business. These include occupational pensions, health insurance, season tickets and social events. Subsidies for training might also be available, as well as membership of social clubs or a gym. All of these can help staff feel valued, while giving them a more enjoyable working experience.

Rewards can also take other forms. For example, there are many award schemes for best business teams and best employees. Why not enter your teams or your best employee for an award? Even if they don't win, it still shows that you care enough to regard them as valuable, both to you and the business.

FLEXIBLE WORKING

Being able to work flexibly is one of the key things that new employees are looking for. According to a 2010 study by PricewaterhouseCoopers, flexible working was more than twice as important to staff than more traditional benefits such as performance-related bonuses. In the survey, flexible working was rated as the most important benefit by 47 per cent of respondents, while bonuses came in second with 19 per cent. That's a significant figure, and it doesn't take into account those employees who might have rated it second most important. Basically, everybody likes to work around their personal lives, rather than the other way around. You don't have to make work completely optional, of course – just give your employees a little freedom when they need it.

Just because you offer flexible working doesn't mean you're losing staff or work time; there are plenty of technologies such as laptops, tablets, smartphones, cloud technologies, remote email and the like that enable staff to work from home or on the move, and there's plenty of data to show that staff working from home are more effective because there are fewer interruptions and it's easier to concentrate away from the office. Be sensible, though; if an employee with young children is asking to work from home on a regular basis, a restructuring of working hours may be a more realistic option for their productivity. Work with your employees to find the balance.

MAKE IT A HOME FROM HOME

Finally, getting the working environment right can really help, particularly if employees are going to spend long hours in the office. An attractive office, kitchen and rest area improve morale massively. Features that can help here include colourful and leafy plants, beautiful paintings and interesting lighting. Even desks make a difference, because it's where your employees are likely to spend most of their days. A rickety old flat-pack table isn't going to have the same impact as a stylish professional design. Invest in good office chairs, too, because ergonomics can make the difference between a healthy employee and a hunched-over one.

You may also want to create a business culture where people work hard and play hard. If this is the case, it could be worth investing in a decent pool table or a games console and flat-screen, or a relaxing area with beanbags and sofas. Give staff the freedom to work where they want. Put desks on wheels. Make work fun and your staff will never want to go home.

DELEGATE AND LISTEN

Too many business owners refuse to pass on responsibilities and this can have a negative effect on your employees. Delegation is one way of building trust in the workforce. Don't micro-manage your employees; instead, allow them to use their own initiative and they in turn will feel empowered to make decisions and meet their goals. Micro-management can lead to frustration and resentment, particularly if it looks as though you, as a manager, are not doing your part.

Tactfully listening to and encouraging people, while giving positive credit where it's due, are also key elements of good communication. This includes avoiding excessive criticism or blame – even if you might be handing it out in your own head – but finding out what the root problem is and addressing it, and perhaps introducing training as required. Training staff and investing in expanding and improving their skills may be expensive, but it helps them to understand that you value them and that you want them to be the best at what they do. Investing in professional training courses can help with this; don't be concerned that staff with training will leave – if they're happy and valued, they'll stay.

Finding staff online

Looking for digital employees you can depend upon? Cast your eye online to find the very best in digital-savvy workers, quickly and easily

You buy goods online, you work online, you get your news online, so why not get new employees online as well? We look at some of the key places to advertise on the internet and offer basic advice on recruitment on the web – and the good news is that many of the places to advertise are free.

The traditional way of attracting new talent to your business was through the local press; however, while that may still provide some good candidates, it won't get you the best. It may not even get you in front of all the ideal candidates in your area. Ask yourself whether you ever read the local press. If you don't, how do you expect to attract the right staff through a local advert? By using the internet, you widen your scope to be able to recruit candidates from all around the country and even the rest of the world, and it doesn't need to be complicated or expensive either.

ADVERTISE ON YOUR WEBSITE

One of the most effective places for recruiting is your own website. Your customers are a really good pool to recruit from – they already know your business and like your products, and the only cost involved is the time it takes to add a jobs section to your site. You can advertise your post for as long as you like, and put a lot of effort into making it look really attractive, something you won't get the chance to do with other job sites.

If your business also has its own Facebook page or LinkedIn group, you should also advertise the job position there, because many of your potential candidates may only ever view your Facebook and LinkedIn pages and never actually pay a visit to your main website.

ADVERTISE ON LINKEDIN

LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) is one of the largest business networks online and is a great place to find new staff for your business. There are several ways to recruit on LinkedIn. Firstly, you can go through the jobs part of the website and post a job online. Alternatively, you can use your own networks to widen your scope and find potential candidates by using other people's contacts, and then approach your potential employees directly.

Your network is the best place to begin raising awareness about your jobs – that's where you'll find your strongest referrals. Your connections might be interested in the job themselves, or they may know some good candidates. Use LinkedIn status updates to tell your network about open positions, and add a link to the post itself. As well as your

own pages, LinkedIn interest groups are a good place to advertise. Look at the professional groups that cater for your industry, as well as the groups that cater for the particular sector you're interested in. For example, if you're looking for a sales person for your publishing business, look at both the sales groups and any publishing related groups.

Be careful that you don't jump into every relevant group to put up a job advert. That will be viewed as spam and will do nothing for your business reputation, and it could even be enough to get you banned from some groups. So make sure that the group is appropriate, and that you follow any guidelines on recruiting on that group – most are happy to allow job adverts, but others only want jobs in certain parts of the group or on specific job boards. If in doubt, contact the group owner.

ADVERTISE JOBS ON TWITTER

Twitter is a quick way to get your message out to all your followers and on to the wider world. Unfortunately, most jobs can't be described in the 280 characters available on Twitter, so try to get as many details in as you can and add a short link through something such as Is.gd (http://is.gd), Owly (http://ow.ly) or Bitly (https://bitly.com/) to the full job description on your site.

To widen the scope of your job tweet, use appropriate hashtags. For example, the tweet "Wanted office temp for business in Leeds area £18k http://is.gd/TRBC1" will be more effective on Twitter if you add a few hashtags and change the wording slightly. "#recruiting office temp for business in #Leeds area £18k http://is.gd/TRBC1" has a much wider reach, so it's worth experimenting with what you write. This last tweet will be seen by people following either of the words 'recruiting' or 'Leeds', and will get your advert out to a much wider audience.

Typical hashtags for job listings include #jobs, #recruiting, #jobposting, but to narrow it down, use more specific hashtags, such as or #prjobs or #salesjobs. These are only really effective if your target is actually searching for them, but you can be sure people are.

Don't make the tweet too long because ideally you'll want people to retweet it to their friends, so try to make the whole ad no more than 120 characters, and don't over-tag a single tweet. Twitter recommends using no more than two hashtags per tweet.

PUT YOUR JOB ON A JOB SITE

Sites such as Jobsite (www.jobsite.co.uk), Monster (www.monster.co.uk), or Total Jobs (www.totaljobs.com) replace the traditional role of a job agency, or a national or local newspaper. You can post job opportunities as you would in a paper, or you can match your job requirements to CVs posted by people already looking for jobs.

They also offer a whole raft of free tools that can help you decide what salary to offer for the role. Total Jobs, for example, has a jobs barometer service that enables you to see how popular a particular job sector is in a particular location, while Monster has a Salary Calculator tool to tell you whether you're offering the right sort of salary for your area.

As well as the big national job boards, there are also numerous sites aimed at specific niches that are worth looking at – for example, you could use Simply Sales Jobs (www.simplysalesjobs.co.uk) for sales roles. Wherever you look, the job market is in a difficult place at the moment; be prepared to wade through a swathe of applications, many of which will be from candidates who don't fit your company. It's up to you to find the right person for the right job. Make your interview process fit your style and ambition! ●

USING NEWSLETTERS

If you produce an email newsletter or send regular emails to your customers, you've got the perfect outlet for people specifically interested in your brand or product. And maybe they're the sort of people you'd like to work with. Next time you produce a newsletter, add in a link to the job. A prospective candidate may read your newsletters but might not have enough time to visit your website regularly. Make sure you use the language and style that your company traditionally employs, but remember that you're in a non-formal environment; you could afford to make your job opening look exciting and fun, more so than you might in a standard job ad.

Build the perfect team

A business is only as good as the people who work for it, but how do you find and keep the best employees?

Staffing is a dark and mysterious art. Anyone can recruit, but nurturing your team, inspiring them and managing them in order to get the best out of them is a rare skill set. Bringing staff into your business is about strong, compassionate leadership. It's also about sympathetic and intelligent people-management, and knowing how to build and keep a happy, productive team.

There comes a point when every company must decide whether or not to expand. In this feature, we explore exactly what the best ways of staffing, managing and keeping a crack team of professionals involve.

Expanding your team

Growing your crack squad doesn't just mean adding more people for more of the same work. It's important to evolve your capabilities as you expand

You'd think it would be easy to recognise when more staff are required for your business. It's when you have more work than your existing team can handle, right? Not so. Growing a team has only a little to do with capacity and everything to do with capability.

Success hinges on finding the right people. You don't simply want more of the same skills; you want to be able to expand the amount of work you can handle, while at the same time developing the type of work you do – and the way to achieve that is through smart management and team building.

STRATEGY GAME

Age, energy and experience are relevant, but someone who has a strong grasp of strategy is a dream find, and that should always be your number one employment credential. If someone can articulate why their approach is better than an existing option, what they can deliver and where they can take a project, they are really worth employing. What you don't need are more hands. You need different hands and better hands.

THINK VARIETY

The first few people you hire should offer the skills your current setup lacks; not just more hands. If you and your existing team have the creative design skills nailed, for example, bring in someone to handle things such as new business development and client relationships, leaving you free to work.

FREELANCE FLEXIBILITY

If your need is purely capacity-based and you need more people to do the same work, then consider hiring freelance staff. More hands means freeing up the creative directors in your team, enabling them to focus on bigger ideas. But...

KEEP THE GOOD ONES

Hang on to those who make themselves indispensable. Freelancers might cost more to get in full-time, but if they bring the necessary skills, complement your team's existing skill sets and fit with the general vibe, try to get them on a contract. It's far cheaper than recruiting.

THINK AHEAD

Staff hiring tends to be an accounting decision, based upon previous years' financial performance and the next year's financial forecast. Your

decision to hire should be based on these metrics (boring as that sounds) because, ultimately, hiring more staff is an expansion of your business.

COMPLEMENTARY CHARACTERS

Always look for a good personality mix among your staff, particularly within departments. You don't want two strong leaders in the accounts department, or a team of autoworkers who can't take a decision. Identify what's missing, then make sure you hire accordingly.

DON'T BE SEDUCED BY A CV

Talent spotting isn't as easy as it seems, and a CV ultimately proves little more than blagging ability. Assess character and look out for people who display the three

INTERVIEWING MADE SIMPLE

Finding candidates and carrying out interviews can be stressful on both sides of the table, but turn it into a rewarding process and your whole company will benefit

01

WRITE A JOB DESCRIPTION

Describing the role, the key challenges involved, the knowledge and skills required and the employee's position in the business is hugely important to a successful interview. This will weed out anyone vastly unsuitable, as well as making sure the candidate knows what they're letting themselves in for.

02

ASK YOUR CONTACTS

Word of mouth recommendations are a very important way of bringing in good staff. People often pass on tips about skilled workers, and Twitter or LinkedIn can winkle out applicants, too. It might also be worth attending graduate shows to find emerging talent before anyone else does.

03

FREELANCERS

You may already have freelancers working with you. If they're doing a great job, why not look into making them permanent so they don't take their knowledge and experience with them when they leave? Freelancers often enjoy the freelance way of working, but they might be flattered that you value them so much you want to keep them around.

04

CV REVIEW

Looking at a portfolio or CV can only teach you about an applicant's skills in self promotion, but a discussion about it will provide insight. Getting them to prepare a presentation of their work and talk through their past roles will enable you to gauge their passion for your area of business, and how they could fit into your company.

05

WORK EXERCISE

A work exercise can be a valuable part of any interview but many candidates baulk at the idea, seeing it as working for free or worrying about the legal implications if they are under exclusive contract. However, getting a candidate to narrate their process gives a strong idea of their working methods.

06

LET THEM ASK QUESTIONS

Asking the right questions is helpful, but deliberately leaving out important points so the interviewee can bring them up can be effective, and will help establish whether you're both on the same wavelength. Be prepared to jump in rather than allow important points to go unaddressed, though. Nervous candidates can easily clam up in interview situations.

Image ©Thinkstock

Es: education, energy and a degree of eclecticism. No environment will be stale with a good mix of people.

AIM HIGH

Always employ people who are better than you and your existing team. Why? Because they will share their skills, bring others up to their own level, benefit the entire company culture and drive your enterprise forward. It seems obvious, but you'd be surprised how many employers allow their superiority complex to prevent this happening.

BE OPEN-MINDED

Don't ignore word of mouth recommendations or even unsolicited CVs and portfolios. Keep an open mind when recruiting, particularly when it comes to transferable skills. Just because someone has no directly relevant experience it doesn't mean that they won't be the perfect candidate for your business.

WATCH OUT FOR EGOS

They might be hard to spot in an interview scenario, but be sure to avoid hiring the type of person who will look to dominate your existing team, or throw their toys out of the pram at the drop of a hat. It's an unworkable relationship.

Keep it legit when employing

It might be tempting to place cash in hand or avoid the rigmarole of filling in employment paperwork, but it's a bad idea. Follow these tips

REGISTER AS AN EMPLOYER

In the UK you need to tell the HMRC and set up a PAYE scheme; in the US you'll need an employment identification number (EIN) from the US Internal Revenue Service.

PAY THE RIGHT TAXES

You're responsible for taking out your employees' taxes with each salary payment and ensuring the government gets its share. Do not neglect your tax and reporting duties.

GET INSURANCE

As soon as you become an employer, you need employers' liability insurance – or workers' compensation insurance in the US. Make sure you know your country's specific legal requirements.

EMPLOY SOMEONE ILLEGALLY

You'll face a crushing fine if you fail to carry out employment checks to ensure new staff are legally entitled to work in the country your business is based in. Keep copies of passports or proof of citizenship on file.

FOOL YOURSELF

What constitutes an employee isn't as straightforward as you might think. There are criteria such as level of control and how they're paid – check the HMRC's employment status checker.

FORGET HEALTH AND SAFETY

Make sure you carry out a full risk assessment and fill out the relevant legal paperwork. In the UK, for instance, that's form OSR1.

Keep your team healthy and happy

There are many aspects to consider when structuring a business. Ensure your team gets what it deserves by considering the key areas of staff wellbeing

If you've decided to recruit new staff, you'll need to be up to scratch with employment law. Sickness, maternity leave, redundancy and more – you need to have policies in place to deal with typical situations that could arise before they do. Your team members have rights, but it's also about seeing the bigger picture – happy employees are more productive. So what do you need to consider? Here are some issues to start with...

SICK LEAVE

Illness is a fact of life, so set out a comprehensive absence policy and make sure your team has access to it. You need to monitor all sick leave – not just long-term. Make sure you know who is absent, when and why. This helps if you need to address frequent absentees and can also flag up any problems in your business; you have a duty of care to ensure workload is acceptable and the environment is healthy. Sites like www.bit.ly/XhnuQT (UK) and https://bit.ly/38aXuBe (US) provide a wealth of info.

GRIEVANCES

As with sick leave, you need clear policies in place to deal with any grievances that may arise and could result in a disciplinary procedure. Make sure your staff are aware of what is and isn't acceptable in terms of performance and behaviour. If an employee comes to you with a grievance, an informal discussion is often the best way to resolve the situation – make notes, in case the matter escalates.

DISCIPLINE

With good performance management, disciplinary action should usually be avoidable. The government provides good advice at https://www.gov.uk/taking-disciplinary-action, as does the Labour Relations Agency at www.bit.ly/LRA-PDF.

REDUNDANCY

It's tough, but sometimes you might need to make a member of staff redundant. If this is the case, there are strict guidelines to follow (see www.gov.uk/staff-redundant). For example, you need to show there is a legitimate reason for redundancy (it's not legitimate to get rid of people just because they aren't performing well). Make sure that you document everything and communicate the process thoroughly at all stages – there's nothing worse than employees being kept in the dark about the future of their employment.

FLEXIBLE WORKING

Your employees have the right to request flexible working – and you can choose whether or not to accept their request. It may be necessary for your employees to start or finish

SPECIALIST HELP

Specific legal requirements vary depending on the country in which your company is based, so it's a good idea to consult a lawyer or HR specialist for help in drawing up your policies. You'll have to pay for this, but investing in the wellbeing of your employees – and making sure you're covered for all eventualities – is money well spent. In the UK, free advice is provided by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (www.acas.org.uk).

work later, for example. You have a legal duty to accept flexible working requests from any member of staff who you've employed for at least 26 weeks – not just those with children. However, how you deal with this is really dependent on your company, the requirements of your output, and your management style. In America, more than a quarter of employees work to flexible schedules.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Write an equal opportunities policy, and make sure that you are completely up on the definition of bullying and harassment. You need to make sure that your job adverts and recruitment processes don't discriminate.

MATERNITY LEAVE

This a complex area, so make sure you're aware of your legal obligations – services such as ACAS can help (www.acas.org.uk). In the UK, you must offer statutory or enhanced maternity pay and all pregnant employees are entitled to maternity leave.

KEEPING YOUR TEAM

Any employee who is any good will be offered opportunities and reasons to leave and work for someone else. But there are ways to reduce the risk of losing key people

01

OFFER BETTER SALARIES

Financial reward is the number one reason for staff members becoming disillusioned and looking for other opportunities. If you're not paying the market rate, you won't be able to keep good employees, so review your salary bands at regular intervals throughout the year with your finance team.

02

TREAT PEOPLE FAIRLY

Be transparent with your salary banding as well. That means paying similar salaries to those undertaking similar roles. If you have two account managers, for example, with varying income levels, chances are you'll lose one very quickly. Be honest and open about how you pay your staff.

03

INVEST IN YOUR TEAM

Show commitment to staff through training and development. That means conducting appraisals and salary reviews, and encouraging people to progress professionally. Offer at least one paid-for training opportunity a year. Remember that if you invest in the skill sets of your staff, it's your business that benefits in the short term.

04

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Hold open forum discussions with your staff at regular intervals, and keep them abreast of business news. Make all your employees feel involved with the managerial aspects of the company and offer a place for them to air their concerns with senior management, either publicly or anonymously.

05

CREATIVE OUTLETS

Foster free time for your staff to take on creative challenges and become a sponsor. These could be local events, self-initiated projects, or work for community or charity projects. Encourage your team members to conduct their own projects and give them adequate time to work on them.

06

DON'T FORGET THE FUN AND GAMES

Make sure your company is talked about as a fun and rewarding place to work. Take your staff for away days, Christmas excursions and summer holidays. Invite in guest speakers and interesting guests to inspire them. Make competing businesses envy your reputation for having a fun, creative and competitive culture.

Thinking of taking on an intern?

Internships are a great way to foster new and exciting talent. But don't be fooled – bringing an intern into your business isn't straightforward

UNDERSTAND INTERNSHIPS

They're always paid and must involve on-the-job training in some capacity. Cheap labour it is not.

THINK IT'S WORK EXPERIENCE

Work experience tends to be a shorter engagement and generally involves a wider range of tasks.

KNOW THE LAW

In the UK, interns with set hours or a schedule of work will likely be classed as workers. You'll face a hefty fine if you don't make the right contributions.

AGREE RESPONSIBILITIES

Treat your intern as part of your core team – discuss working hours and objectives – and a good intern will act the part.

THINK LONG TERM

An internship should be seen as a trial to a full-time position, so treat it as such.

ASSUME IT'S UNPAID

Unless you're very specific, interns are likely to be classed as workers and entitled to minimum wage.

BE UNAVAILABLE

Interns want experience and nurturing – don't expect them to hit the ground running. Ensure someone is available and suitable to mentor them.

THINK CHEAP LABOUR

An internship is a charitable, benevolent position aimed at helping a young worker gain experience.

The benefits of a good manager

It's a role that shouldn't be underestimated. We talk to designer and writer Adrian Shaughnessy

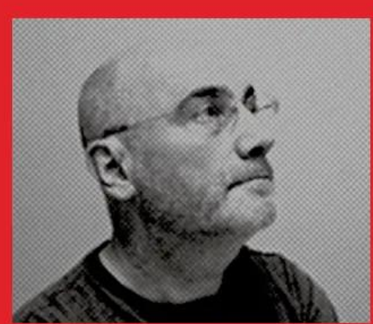
Don't think of project management as an irksome in-house overhead. Think of it as a key factor in the way you look after your clients and produce top quality output. Viewed like this, project management becomes a way of boosting your income – so it pays to employ someone in this role.

"A project manager needs production and project management skills, sophisticated and sympathetic communication skills, and ruthless efficiency backed up by 360-degree vision," says designer, writer and industry commentator Adrian Shaughnessy. "Their remit includes the following: scheduling; budgeting; profitability reporting; invoicing; IT; booking freelancers; managing timesheets and, most important, keeping accurate records.

"However, no project manager is worth employing if he or she can't combine an internal co-ordination role with an ability to deal with outsiders – clients, suppliers and freelancers all need to be treated with tact and professionalism. If a project manager has poor communication skills, your clients will speak to one of the other workers instead, reducing the value of a dedicated manager.

"It's also imperative project managers know how to cost a job, supply a quote, negotiate a fee, alert clients to extra charges, prepare invoices, monitor costs, alert you to problems and work with suppliers.

"Once when my studio was working on a large print project and the task was near completion, our client mentioned they hadn't yet organised distribution. Our project manager said: 'Would you like me to get you a quote for this?' A few days later, our client asked us to undertake the UK distribution and sent us a purchase order for £87,000. Now that's what I call good management." ●



ADRIAN SHAUGHNESSY
Co-founder of progressive publishing venture Unit Editions
www.uniteditions.com

Be more efficient

Every business could benefit from improving its efficiency – you just need to know how

Time is money, as all business owners know. Workflow, time management and internal administration – if you can make these processes more efficient, not only will you boost your bottom line, but it will also free up your time to focus more on the creative side of business life. Even if you've already added a project manager to the team, as head of your company you need to nail the basics of good organisation. So take a step back and set some processes in place – your clients, bank balance and sanity will all thank you. Read on for efficiency enlightenment.

Nail your workflow

Your business needs a platform for creativity while still ensuring the work gets done

Perfect project management – the idea might put a damper on your enthusiasm, but being organised is the key to turning out great work, on time, every time. Your business needs to be on top of deadlines and demands, budgets and billing, files and feedback – not to mention any staff you might bring in along the way. So what's the secret? Whether they're manual or digital, you need some efficient systems and processes in place that will ensure your projects are approached logically.

Plan your projects with precision

If you undertake work for external clients, you need to keep on top of jobs or risk being swamped by your workload

ANALYSE THE BRIEF

Once you've won a project, analyse the brief and work out what you need to do to get it done. How much research do you need to do into the market your client operates in, its brand, business, competitors and so forth? Plan time for research and inspiration, sketching out ideas and refining them.

GET THE DETAILS RIGHT

Be as specific as possible with establishing the brief and what you're offering for the fee. This can take time but often saves a lot of pain in the long run. The more you can open up about your processes, the more the client will see the value in what you do.

LOG THE CONVERSATION

Make notes while talking to clients and keep a document logging feedback. After you've had a meeting or phone call, send an email outlining what you agreed. If anything has been misunderstood, the client can clarify it.

SHARE THE LOAD

If you're running a business with other people, split the project management workload. Each of you could take ownership of one project at a time and see it through to completion. Agree an overall system, though. If each person's system is different, it leads to confusion.

GET OTHER PEOPLE GOING FIRST

If you need to assign parts of your project to others, brief them and get them started before you sit down to work yourself. You won't feel there's something hanging over you, and it also prevents bottlenecks and last minute 'why isn't this done?' bedlam.

TIMESHEETS

Record how many hours your business spends on each job with weekly timesheets, and use this data to calculate if you're working efficiently and charging the right amount.

GIVE CLIENTS DEADLINES

Sometimes your client has to meet deadlines, too, or you won't be able to deliver. If you require any information or components from your client, communicate with your contact very early on about what you need and agree deadlines regarding when you'll receive it all.

TIME FOR FEEDBACK

Don't estimate how long each stage is going to take based solely on how long you think it would take you personally. Build in time for you and your employees to discuss and develop the work, and for client feedback. Amendments take longer than expected.

A LITTLE PESSIMISM

What can go wrong will go wrong isn't always true, but anticipating problems is crucial. Listen to what clients, staff and suppliers tell you. If they say 'yes' to a deadline but add that they're very busy, it's worth asking questions to find out if they're being realistic.

LONG-TERM PLANNING

Anyone who's completed two major projects in the same week knows that clashing deadlines can be a killer. If possible, develop a cycle so that your major projects conclude every two weeks or so. That way, your attention isn't divided, and you can give the best to each client.

Essential time management tips

You'll face conflicting demands on your time, so a bit of forward-planning will pay dividends

Image ©Thinkstock

FIRST THE WORST

Many people find that tackling the jobs they don't like first thing gets them out of the way. Know when you're most productive and slam-dunk the tedious, tricky or more taxing tasks while you're at your peak.

STICK TO THE LIST

Effective project management begins and ends with managing your own time. Make a to-do list every day, and stick to it. Include back-up entries – things you can get to if something on your list is delayed or falls through.

LEARN TO PRIORITISE

Tasks will vary from day to day but some will be more important than others, so when you draw up your to-do list, mark the jobs that really must be done that day.

BRING IN A PROJECT MANAGER

Bringing in a decent project manager is the fastest way to improve efficiency in your business if you find it tricky.

WORK IN FLEXIBILITY

Some days things won't go as planned, so allow flexibility to swap things around. And be realistic – don't set unachievable goals. Can you delegate any tasks?

EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY

It's important to balance the pressures of running a business with taking time out to relax; exercising, eating healthily and getting enough sleep all help boost your overall productivity.

REGULATE EMAIL

Checking your email every five minutes is the fastest way to reduce your efficiency. Set a schedule for dealing with email – perhaps first thing in the morning and again in the afternoon, depending on where in the world your clients are based.

BE STRICT WITH CLIENTS

Once you've got an email schedule in place, let your clients know so that they don't inundate you with phone calls instead. If you find one client is taking up more time than is reasonable, be firm and politely explain that their requests are becoming unproductive.

Gantt chart masterclass

Less labour-intensive than expensive project management programs, a Gantt chart will track your progress

BREAK IT DOWN

You can set up a Gantt chart in Excel or Word, or draw it on a whiteboard. The first thing you need to do is break your job down according to the tasks that need to be done – by you, your team, and by the client. More information about creating a Gantt chart in Excel can be found at https://bit.ly/2MmRMUr.

LIST IT ALL

Write the tasks in a list down the left-hand side. What the list comprises will, of course, depend on the type of business you're in and what kinds of products or services you provide. However, you'll also need to factor in any time your work is being checked by clients, and any amendments that may be necessary.

FACTOR IN TIME

Time is represented left to right across the top of the chart. Most projects rely on contributors' time measured in days, so it's best to have small columns headed 'M', 'T', 'W', 'T' and 'F' – and above that block them out into weeks. It's up to you if you include weekends.

SET UP AN ORDER

Now work out which bits of the project can be done independently, and which ones rely on one another. If you run a design studio, for example, the layout of a brochure could be started, but it can't be completed without the copy, photography and illustrations. Re-order tasks in the order you need them completed down the left-hand side.

COLOUR CODE

The tricky bit is estimating how much time is required for each element. Plot this in, colour coding the days as you fill them in on the chart going from left to right. Staying with the design studio example, concepts might take four days, client approval two days, layout five days, and copywriting two days. A dependency pattern will then emerge.

FORMULA

Estimating how long a section of a project will take comes with experience. One rough formula is to take an optimistic assessment of each element of the project and a worst-case view, and then average the two.

COST IT

Cost the project by multiplying the amount you expect to spend per day on each part of the project by the number of days blocked out for it. Photography might cost £300 per day, design £150, copywriting £200, web development £200 and so forth. The chart will also tell you when you're going to need to get external help in, such as a photographer or web developer, so you can book them well in advance.

"A CHART WILL TELL YOU WHEN YOU NEED HELP"

SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Update your Gantt chart as you go along because things are bound to change. However, make sure you keep your original, so when the project is complete, you can go back and see where your projections were correct, and where they were shaky.

Case study: MARC&ANNA

Great communication is the key to running a successful business, say Marc Atkinson and Anna Ekelund of MARC&ANNA

Nine years ago, Marc Atkinson and Anna Ekelund set up MARC&ANNA, a studio working mainly in print design. They do a lot of work for major charities and cultural bodies including Arts Council England, English Heritage, Cancer Research UK and the World Wildlife Fund.

"One of us will manage each project," explains Atkinson, "from clients to suppliers and designers. Each job usually runs in the following order, one leading to the next: briefing meeting or discussion, agreeing costs and schedule with client, briefing designers, managing the creative process, presentation, receiving feedback and managing the design development."

There are often slight adjustments that need to be made depending on the nature of the project. If this is the case, the pair then conducts extra research to make sure they can adequately cover what's required. Based in the Hackney area of east London, the studio has three full-time designers. Over the years they've honed their process but still can't legislate for everything – once, 20,000 bags failed to arrive with a client, while paper samples regularly go missing. "We've both been managing print for over 10 years, but there are still things that surprise us, or happen unexpectedly. It can be bloody annoying, but you just have to embrace it and get on with things," smiles Ekelund.

"Communication is key," adds Atkinson. "You really have to regularly keep in touch with everyone – clients, suppliers and designers. You'll never anticipate everything, so talking things through lessens the chance of any surprises. You'll learn stuff this way, too, which you can then take into your next project." ●

MARC ATKINSON AND ANNA EKELUND
Co-founders, MARC&ANNA

Secrets of success

They did it, and so can you

136 THE MAKE IT BIG CHECKLIST
Think you're ready to make it in business? Let's do some revision

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How did the Virgin mastermind rise to the top of so many businesses?

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One man, one beard, one dream, and some serious success

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The Owltastic designer on making it in the freelance world

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A lesson in looking after yourself as a one-man-band entrepreneur

The make it big checklist

What do the big-hitters in business have in common? Read on to find out...

If we knew what the world's most successful people have in common, we'd bottle it and sell it. But we don't. Instead we write and read endless books and articles about them, desperately trying to get to the bottom of why on earth Jeff Bezos quit his whizzy New York hedge fund job to drive to Seattle and start a little company called Amazon. Or why Howard Schultz thought it would be a really good idea to rejoin a sinking Starbucks.

World Changers: 25 Entrepreneurs Who Changed Business as We Knew It (Portfolio Penguin), by John Byrne, looks at the various things that unite the world's business movers and shakers. He speaks to Herb Kelleher, co-founder and former CEO of Southwest Airlines, who offers his dictum, "The business of business is people. In a lot of companies you have to surrender your personality

when you show up for work. If you allow people to be themselves at work, they will enjoy what they are doing."

The inimitable Steve Jobs is also in there, of course: "Picasso had a saying: 'Good artists copy, great artists steal.' We have always been shameless about stealing great ideas. Part of what made the Macintosh great was that the people who were working on it were musicians, poets, artists, historians, zoologists, who also happened to be the best computer scientists in the world."

So what does unite the entrepreneurs we revere? What do their personality traits say about how to make it big?

BE A PERFECTIONIST

Steve Jobs is described as a lot of things but always revolutionary and always innovative. How did he do it? By being a perfectionist. The development of the Macintosh famously took more than three years because of his insistence and obsession over the smallest details. Apparently, in the 1980s, Jobs insisted that in adverts and on packages the Apple logo was printed in six colours, not four, which was considerably more expensive. He would also reportedly sit in a restaurant and send his food back three times, or arrive at hotel suites for interviews and then decide that the piano needed repositioning at the last minute.

STAY FOR THE LONG HAUL

Warren Buffett, one of the most successful investors of the 20th century, is known for his ability to make very few investment decisions and stick with them until the bitter end. All his bets are for the long-term. In 1993 he said, "I believe every business school graduate should sign

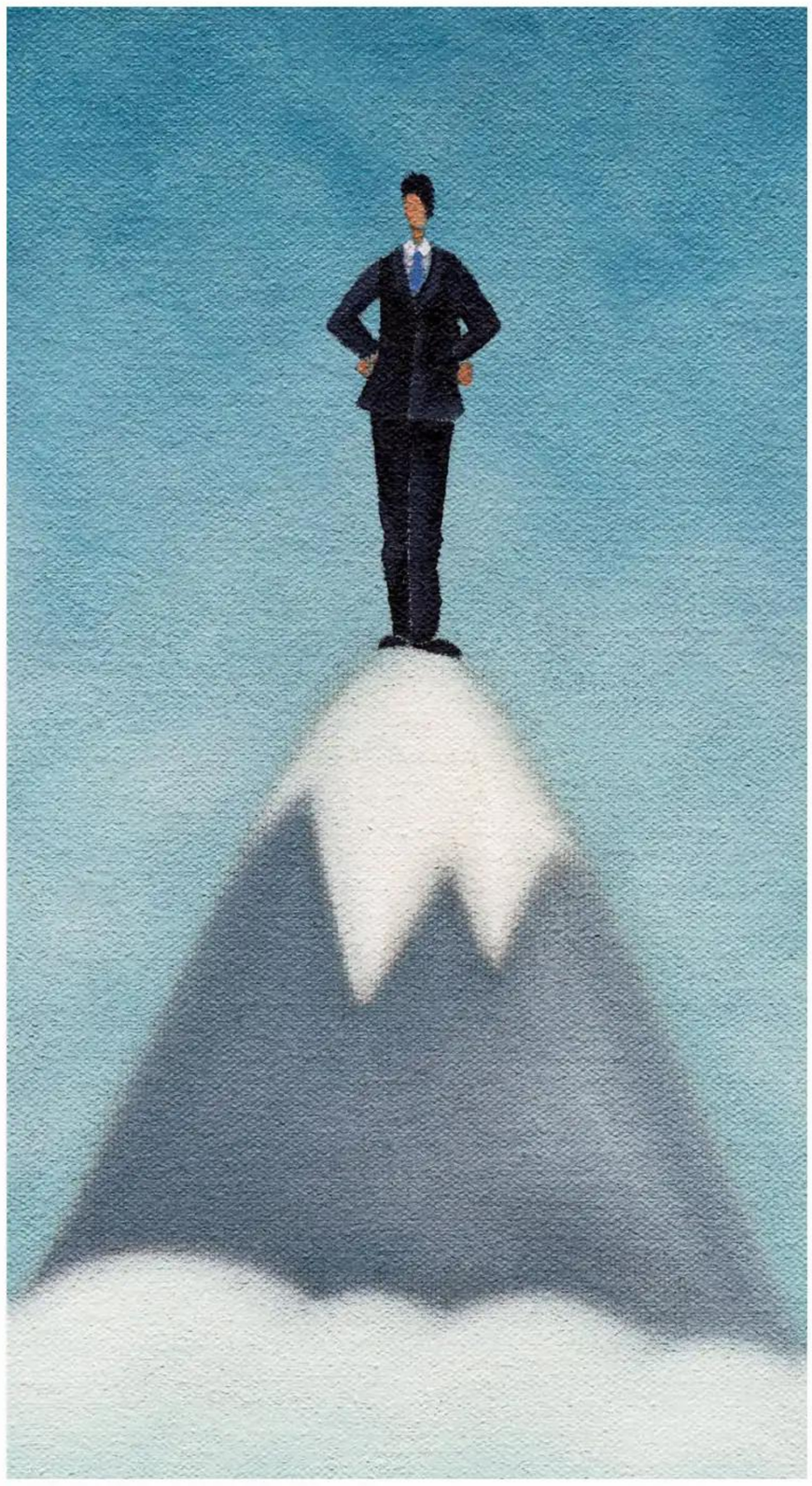


Image ©Thinkstock

an unbreakable contract promising not to make more than 20 major decisions in a lifetime. In a 40-year career, you would make a decision every two years."

HAVE COURAGE

It takes a lot of guts to turn your back on a degree from one of the world's best universities in pursuit of a big dream. But the expensively educated Bill Gates abandoned his studies at Harvard in favour of setting up his own company, Microsoft. Which did pretty well.

Similarly, Mark Zuckerberg dropped out of Harvard in his sophomore year to complete work on Facebook, rejecting offers from major corporations to buy his company for megabucks. In 1971, one year after enrolling, Steve Wozniak (Apple) withdrew from the University of California, Berkeley. He made the right decision.

MAKE HEADLINES

Virgin boss Richard Branson never shies away from being at the forefront of his brand – hell, he is his brand. He's a kitesurfing, kilt-lifting attention-lover who showed up nearly nude in Times Square to promote Virgin Mobile. He's also posed as a Malay warrior, worn his own brand of cosmetics and ridden a camel to promote his flights to the Middle East.

In short, Branson knows full well the power of personality as PR and uses every opportunity to exploit it fully (read more on page 140).

DO THE RIGHT THING

Google founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page found themselves under immense pressure when they initially abided by Chinese requests to censor search results. But in 2010 they decided to end dealings with China. They did the right thing, and demonstrated to their already loyal following that they really were a brand fighting for the greater good. See also Google's attempts to eradicate global poverty and save the environment.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is the largest transparently operated private foundation in the world, with an endowment of more than $36bn. The $800m that the foundation gives every year for global health is almost as much as the annual budget of the United Nations World Health Organisation (WHO).

CREATE YOUR MARKET

"If I'd asked the market what they wanted, they would have said 'faster horses'," Henry Ford famously said. He created the need for cars and also the wealth with which to buy the cars, while Jeff Bezos revolutionised the way the western world buys books when he left his cushy finance job to launch an online bookseller (with no advertising and no press), which has gone on to become the most successful internet retail site ever. In doing so, he created the territory that he is now king of.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO FAIL

Being resilient, it is said, actually has little to do with actions and more to do

"We have always been shameless about stealing great ideas. Part of what made the Macintosh great was that the people who were working on it were musicians, poets, artists, historians, zoologists, who also happened to be the best computer scientists in the world…"

QUOTE

Steve Jobs, co-founder of Apple and one of the world's greatest entrepreneurs

with reactions. How a person reacts to business failure says a lot about how they do business in the future. LinkedIn's Reid Hoffman co-founded his first company, SocialNet.com, in 1997, focusing on online dating and matching up people with similar interests, like golfers who were looking for partners in their neighbourhood. Nobody was interested, but he wasn't put off. LinkedIn is now the world's largest business network.

HAVE FAITH

James Dyson famously made more than 5,000 prototypes of his vacuum cleaner, getting himself into considerable debt. But he never gave up. He tried to sell his invention to the major manufacturers but nobody wanted to know. Still he persevered. He encountered meeting after meeting with negative executives before deciding to manufacture them himself, testing them himself, ad nauseam.

Though he has always claimed not to be a businessman, Dyson exhibits one of the most advantageous business entrepreneurial traits, that of complete and utter faith in his product.

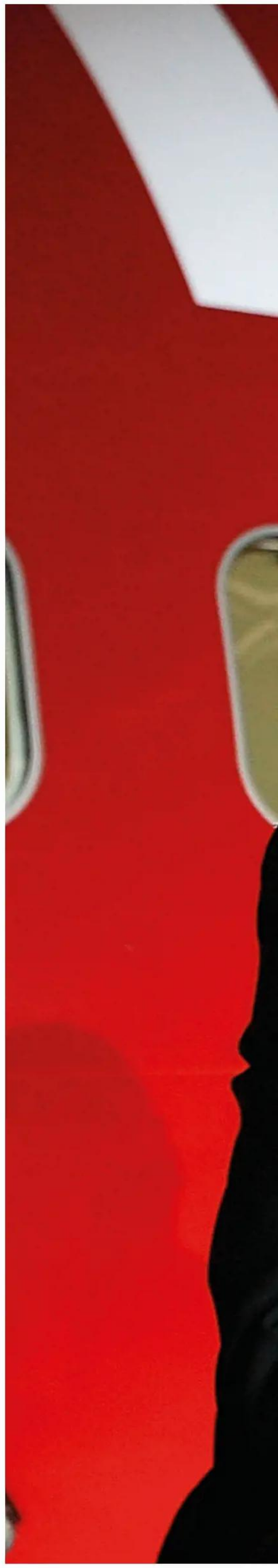
THINK DIFFERENTLY

Apart from the fact that it's nearly the Apple slogan, you can pretty much bet that most of the entrepreneurs on John Byrne's list at some point have 'thought differently', whether that's been the organising of small companies into large distribution networks or the niggling idea that people might like to compare two students as being 'hot' or 'not'.

As we've seen here, the ability to think differently and embrace change is usually the deciding factor between those who succeed and those who struggle. ●

Richard Branson

Rebel billionaire turned space explorer. The entrepreneur's entrepreneur



Anyone else who called themselves Dr Yes would find themselves the object of ridicule. But Sir Richard Branson is the oldest person to kitesurf across the English Channel and the first person to hot air balloon across the Atlantic and the Pacific. It's hard to find fault with anyone so enthusiastic about life.

The self-proclaimed 'tie-loathing adventurer' is as known for his daredevil pursuits as he is his business success. But the Virgin brand is one of the most recognisable in the world and it exceeds its products. As its figurehead, Branson is one of the most recognisable business 'celebrities' and an icon of can-do.

Born in London in 1950, Branson went into business aged 16 with youth culture magazine *Student*, from the crypt of a church. Though he dropped out of school, he'd always had an entrepreneurial streak and it's been reported that he tried and failed to sell Christmas trees and budgerigars before he launched *Student*.

TOUGH LOVE

In his (bestselling, naturally) autobiography, *Losing My Virginity*, he recounts the following story: "My childhood is something of a blur to me now, but there are several episodes that stand out. I do remember that my parents continually set us challenges. My mother was determined to make us independent. When I was four years old, she stopped the car a few miles from our house and made me find my own way home across the fields. I got hopelessly lost. My youngest sister Vanessa's earliest memory is being woken up in the dark one January morning because Mum had decided I should cycle to Bournemouth that day. Mum packed some sandwiches and an apple and told me to find some water along the way. Bournemouth was 50 miles away from our home in Shamley Green, Surrey. I was under 12, but Mum thought that it would teach me the importance of stamina and a sense of direction. I remember setting off in the dark, and I have a vague recollection of staying the night with a relative. I have no idea how I found their house, or how I got back to Shamley Green the next day, but I do remember finally walking into the kitchen like a conquering hero, feeling tremendously proud of my marathon bike ride and expecting a huge welcome. 'Well done, Ricky,' Mum greeted me in the kitchen, where she was chopping onions. 'Was that fun? Now, could you run along to the vicar's? He's got some logs he wants chopping and

Image ©Getty

I told him that you'd be back any minute.'"

RECORD BREAKER

Branson started Virgin as a mail order record retailer in 1970, before opening a shop on Oxford Street in London. He founded Virgin Records in 1972. The label's first recording artist, Mike Oldfield, recorded *Tubular Bells* at the Virgin recording studio, The Manor. The label went on to sign the likes of the Sex Pistols and The Rolling Stones and became the world's biggest independent label.

In his autobiography, Branson tells of a Mike Oldfield concert that was to take place at Queen Elizabeth Hall. Oldfield had decided he didn't want to do the gig, despite the fact it was designed to showcase the label and its star. Branson took Oldfield for a drive that day in Branson's Bentley and asked the musician if he'd like the car as a gift. Oldfield said he would and Branson said all he had to do was drive it to Queen Elizabeth Hall and go on stage. *Tubular Bells* sold 13m copies and became one of the bestselling records ever.

In the mid-1980s, Virgin was floated on the Stock Exchange but, reportedly, Branson's style didn't fit the way the shareholders expected him to behave, so he bought it back.

Branson founded Virgin Atlantic in 1984, and in 1992, to keep the airline company afloat, Branson sold the Virgin label to EMI for £500m. In 1993, his Virgin Trains company obtained the franchises for the former InterCity West Coast and Cross-Country parts of British Rail. He went on to become the only person to build eight billion-dollar companies in eight different sectors. (He also launched Virgin Mobile in 1999, and Virgin Blue in Australia – now named Virgin Australia – in 2000.) He was made a knight in 1999. In

Image ©VirginAtlantic

2011, Virgin Money bought Northern Rock, in a move that some described as 'bittersweet'. In 2013, he sold Virgin Media to John Malone of Liberty Global for $400m.

No stranger to records – vinyl and daredevil – Branson has made the fastest ever Atlantic Ocean crossing, and kitesurfed across the Channel. He has said that his interest in life "comes from setting myself huge, apparently unachievable challenges and trying to rise above them".

But it's his space adventure, Virgin Galactic, that he's described as the "greatest adventure of all". Branson registered the name Virgin Galactic way back in 1999, and testing for commercial service is currently underway.

Branson is the most followed person on LinkedIn (according to the Virgin website), with more than 11.5m followers across five social networks, and manages to find time to write a daily blog, which covers everything from his house renovations through observations of beasts in the wild to take-away inspirational quotes such as, "Think small to grow big. Keep your eye on the bigger picture, but don't slip on attention to detail."

"Back when I was a teenager, I thought that with the right bunch of people anything was possible, and that turned out to be the case," said Branson in a recent *Entrepreneur* article. This sums up his attitude. "The people I surrounded myself with made the difference," he says. "If you treat your employees right, they will treat your customers right, and sustained profits will follow."

PEOPLE POWER

Says Charlotte Sweeney, co-author of business book *The Executive Diet* and founder of Charlotte Sweeney Associates, "No matter what someone's background is, where they're from, their job title or gender, Branson is known for hiring people with vision. He takes a far more inclusive approach than many, looking for great ideas and skills that will be an asset to the organisation. Branson is a real pioneer, and takes his employees along for the adventure."

Branson's management style is famously personal. He has said, "In the same way that I tend to make up my mind about people within 30 seconds of meeting them, I also make up my mind about whether a business proposal excites me within 30 seconds of looking at it. I rely more on gut instinct than researching huge amounts of statistics."

Sweeney agrees that this is key to his success, "Trust and professional respect are the best motivators in the modern workplace. This is the type of environment that Richard Branson seems to forge. We see it played out time and again in the values of his brands, and the way he talks about his ventures."

Sweeney adds, "Branson knows he doesn't have all the great ideas, or all the answers; he is not scared to make mistakes, and knows there are lessons to be learnt from them. This style of leadership really empowers people to think for themselves and push the boundaries."

There are now more than 40 Virgin companies worldwide, employing approximately 70,000 people in more than 35 countries. ●

HIGHS AND LOWS

Richard Branson has lost more money than most of us will ever see. He's quite happy to talk about the millions he's lost over the years, and it's for this reason that we are happy for his billions. "If you want to be a millionaire, start with a billion dollars and launch a new airline," he famously said. One of his biggest mistakes was the ill-fated decision to take on multinational giant Coca-Cola when he launched Virgin Cola. In the US, despite Branson's Times Square billboard, Virgin Cola could only secure a 0.5% market share by volume.

GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT

Branson has done what many have tried and failed to do. He's built a fortune on being a rebel and maintained his integrity in the process. If (or probably when) he pulls it off, Virgin Galactic, his commercial aerospace business, is likely to be his finest moment and the fulfilment of every small boy's dream.

NET WORTH

As of January 2021, Bloomberg had Sir Richard as being worth $5.68bn.

Haraldur Thorleifsson

UENO.CO

The prolific web designer not confined by geographical location or razors

Despite dabbling in everything from philosophy to finance and structural engineering in his younger years, design has been the one constant in Haraldur Thorleifsson – aka Halli's – life. And once he'd settled on a career pushing pixels around the internet, there was nothing half-hearted about his efforts.

So far he's racked up a client list that includes the likes of Google, The Economist, YouTube and Microsoft, set up his own full-service agency – Ueno – and picked up Webbys, Awwwards and FWAs – not to mention a net magazine award for his outstanding portfolio site (haraldurthorleifsson.com). We chatted to the nomadic designer to find out how he got started, the key to a great personal site and what it was like working with Santa.

Hello! Why don't you introduce yourself and your work?
HT: Hey there! My name is Halli, I'm a creative director and designer of things that appear on screens. I'm the founder and principal of Ueno (ueno.co), a full-service digital agency. I'm originally from Iceland but for the last few years I've been working mainly for international clients. Our current clients at Ueno include great companies like Google, Fitbit, Reuters, Medium and Dropbox.

When did you first become interested in design?
HT: I started designing after I took an IT course as part of my studies in finance at the local university. I quickly moved on to Flash, where I stayed for a few years, and then I came back to design. I've really only ever designed pixels. I can't draw much on a piece of paper, and print design has never interested me – there's way too much physical stuff in the world.

What has your career path been?
HT: For a long time I had an on-again, off-again relationship with design. I used design to support myself through university,

finishing a BA in philosophy, a BS in finance and then I went on to an MS degree in economics. Around the time I was looking for topics for my dissertation in economics I realised I didn't want to be an economist, so I put that on hold and started to design again. At one point or another I have studied construction engineering, development studies for the Third World and song-writing. I guess you could say I've been all over the place, but for the last five to seven years most of my professional work has been in some way related to design.

In 2007 I moved to New York to work for Cuban Council, which was a small digital agency with some very big clients. I stayed there for about a year before moving back to San Francisco to focus on my freelance career. I did a lot of work with Upperquad, a SF-based agency, and then late last year I started my own digital agency, Ueno, based in Iceland.

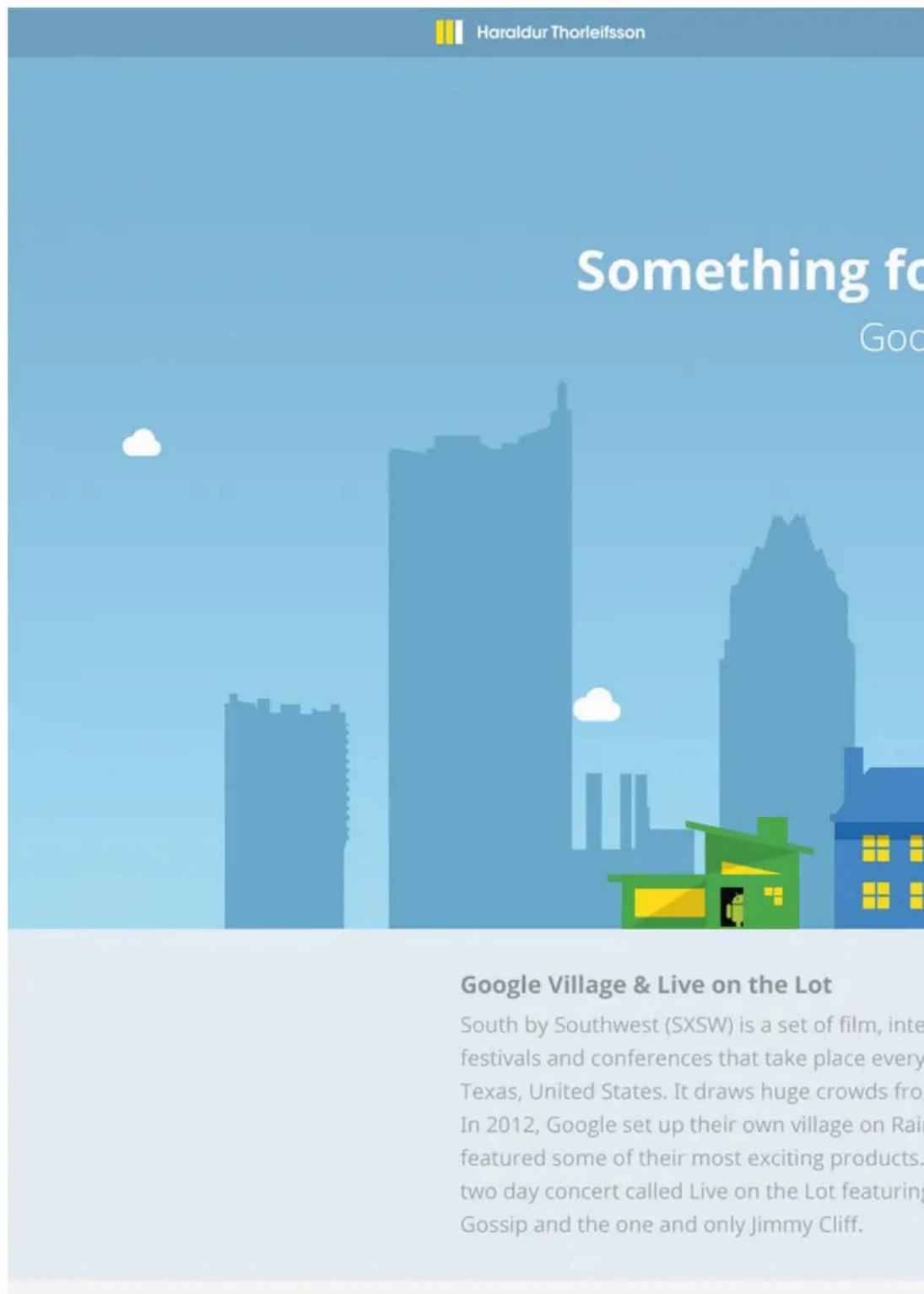
What prompted you to start your own agency? Did it throw up any unexpected challenges?
HT: I had been working on my own for about seven years and the projects were getting bigger and more complicated. I always had collaborators that I would bring in on projects, as needed, so in a way I was already running an agency. But I realised I was hitting a ceiling on scale, and I also had problems explaining to potential clients that they weren't just getting me, it was a full digital offering. So I gathered some of my collaborators, found a few new people and brought it all into a single entity. I think the challenges are there but none that I wasn't expecting. To be honest I was expecting it to be harder than it has proven to be. But it's early days yet, check back with me in a few months!

So far in your career you've worked with a huge number of top tech companies. How do you go about landing such big clients?
The first steps are always the hardest, but once you have a good track record and some solid projects under your belt, you can use those as proof of your ability. We get a lot of work referred to us, so it helps to have good relationships with clients – my tips would be to deliver on time, be nice and help them achieve their goals. I also get a lot of project requests through my personal website and Dribbble account. My site has been featured here and there and I've managed to build up a large Dribbble following, which helps.

Again, with such a roster of clients, how do you keep yourself creatively fresh? Do you ever feel burned out?
HT: I sometimes work too much and it almost always leads to burnout. I think the 40-hour work week is there for a reason. You need to spend time with your family and friends. Travel, listen to music, meet new people. Basically take time to enjoy life before it's over.

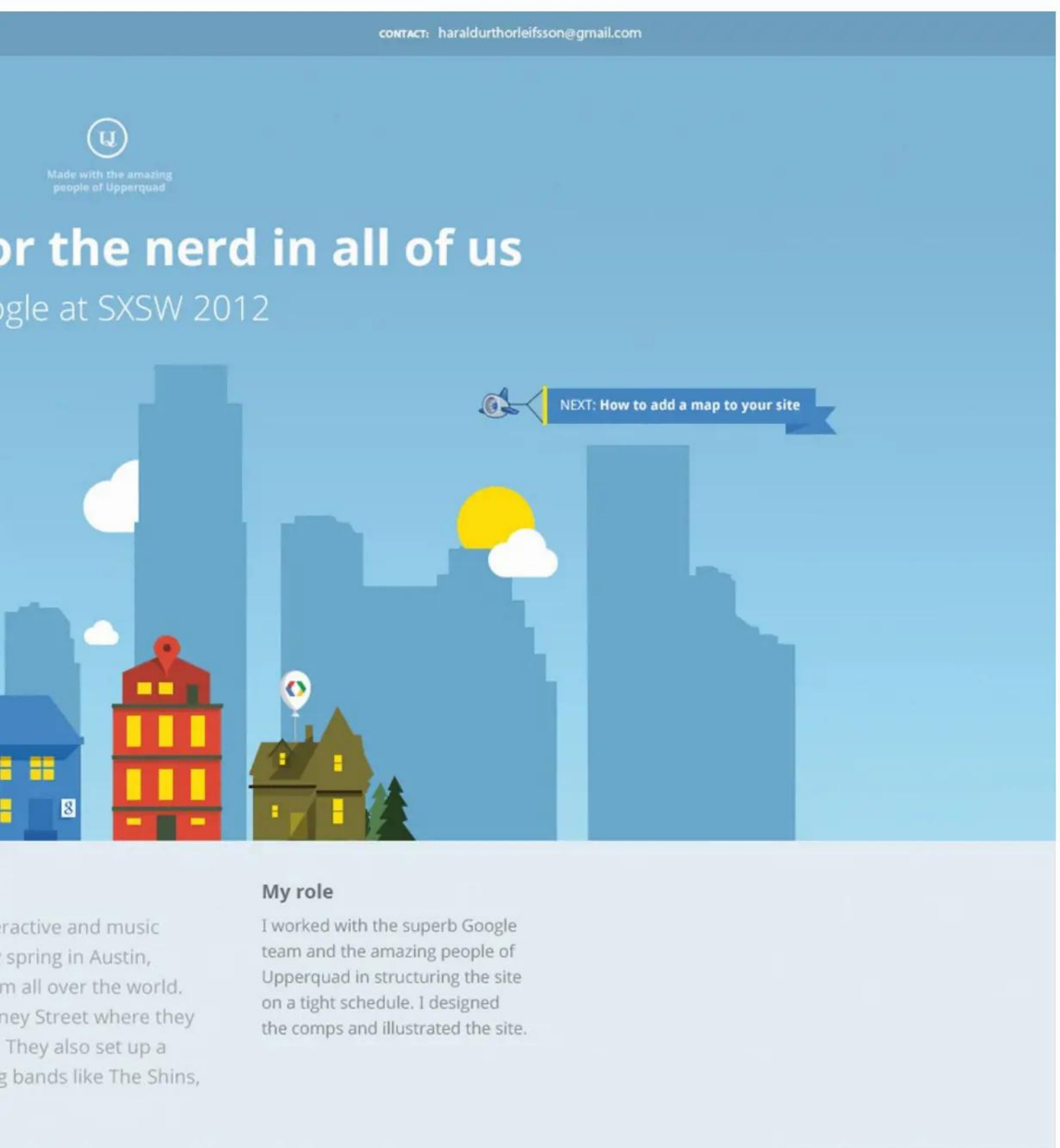
What advice would you give a senior designer looking to step up and become a creative director?
HT: Know your strengths and weaknesses. Build your own team and know their strengths and weaknesses, too. Trust the people you work with, give them as much creative freedom as possible but know when to nudge them onto the right track. Have a vision for the project and be prepared to fight for it. Realise that the client has business objectives that might not necessarily fit your original creative vision. Adapt. Realise you are very likely living in a designer-developer bubble, so you might want to expand your circle of friends.

You won Best Online Portfolio in the 2014 net magazine awards. Congratulations! What's the secret to a winning portfolio site?
HT: Thanks! Well, having good projects to show off is obviously a plus. I try to build a story around the projects, draw out interesting assets and concepts, give a bit of a glimpse of what happened behind the scenes and show a bit of my character. I also had quite a bit of help from my good friend James Dickie, who did all the coding and had some great ideas and insights.



Village life Thorleifsson helped create a site for Google Village at SXSW, including illustrating the site.

The Google Santa Tracker (google.co.uk/santatracker) was a big hit. How did the project come about?
HT: The Google Maps team came to Upperquad in the autumn of 2012 and asked if the team had some good



holiday ideas. The core idea of the Santa Tracker – a site where kids could follow Santa as he travelled the world, handing out gifts – was already there. But we quickly realised that we needed some kind of platform to build suspense before the 24th, so we came up with the idea of Santa's Village. In 2012, Santa's Village had a few games and scenes but in 2013 we went all out, created 24 unique experiences and turned the whole village into an advent calendar.

And – without using the word 'magic' – how does the site work?

HT: For me 'magic' is pretty much the right word. I don't code, myself, so I can't really go into the specifics of it but we had such an amazing group of developers and they pretty much were able to pull off all the insane ideas we threw at them. By the end they even managed to make the whole site (games and all) fully responsive which I think is a truly remarkable feat.

The Santa project team was distributed all around the globe. What challenges did this present?

HT: Most of the work I've

OFFICE CULTURE

Haraldur Thorleifsson
Creative director

WHAT'S ON YOUR DESKTOP TODAY?

Soda water, Mac Mini, Apple display, iPhone, iPad Mini. A banana.

LITTLE THINGS THAT MAKE YOUR LIFE WORTHWHILE

Websites: Twitter, TED, Dribbble, Wikipedia
Apps: Spotify, Gmail, Flipboard, Google Maps, InstagramReading: Anything by Haruki Murakami or Paul Auster. I've just read Creativity Inc, which was pretty good.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE ON THE WALLS?

At the moment they're totally blank.

WHAT WILL YOU DO FOR LUNCH?

I usually work from home and eat with my wife and our daughter, but I'm working from the Ueno office in Iceland for the next couple of months. I try and invite a friend or colleague over a few times a week to eat with us, so I can catch up with the people I know here before I leave the country again.

WHAT HOURS DO YOU WORK?

Depends on where I am in the world. Most of my clients are in the Bay Area so I need to adjust to their schedule. When I was in Japan that meant waking up 5-6am. In Europe it means staying up until close to midnight.

WHAT ELSE DO YOU DO?

The Ueno office is really nice. We have a shared space with a few other tech companies. There's a foosball table, board games, and on Fridays there is music, games and beer.

done in the last seven years or so has been done off-site so at this point I am pretty used to it. For me it means spending a lot of time on Google Hangouts and I have come quite good at calculating what time it is in different parts of the world. When we did the first Santa project I was in Tokyo and I decided that I wasn't going to let geography get in the way when sourcing the talent. So I started building the best team I could find. By the end we had a lead illustrator over in New Zealand and key people in Sydney, Chicago, Reykjavik, London, Stockholm and a bunch of other places. There were some early mornings and late nights, but in the end I think it all worked out.

Summertime Santa Thorleifsson was the creative director on Santa Tracker, a fully responsive holiday site for Google, filled with games, videos, and interactive experiences and looping scenes

What's the biggest lesson you've learned about working with a team spread across the world?
HT: I spend about half my day on Google Hangouts. It's probably the one piece of software I couldn't really work without. It's simple and easy to set up for new people, but the killer feature for me is the focused screen sharing. I've also tried to use project management tools like Basecamp but I always go back to good old email. The simplicity and flexibility of it is hard to beat!

Looking across the web, whose work is impressing you most at the moment?
HT: On the agency side I think Hello Monday is at the top of its game. B-Reel, Fi, Odopod (now Nurun) usually produce great work as well. I always enjoy the work of people like Claudio Guglieri, Anthony Goodwin and Brijan Powell, and I've actually been fortunate enough to work with all of them on different projects.

The killer question: What's the secret to growing the best beard?
HT: Don't shave. ●

TIMELINE

A run-down on what Haraldur Thorleifsson did and when

FEBRUARY 1998
Thorleifsson takes an IT course as part of his university studies, which involves creating a simple HTML page.

MAY 1998
Gets his first paid-for project as a designer and developer.

MARCH 1998
Launches his first agency with a few other people. It goes bust a year later.

OCTOBER 2004
Starts working at a local bank's marketing department as a designer.

SEPTEMBER 2006
Moves to New York to work for boutique agency Cuban Council.

DECEMBER 2007
Starts freelancing.

MARCH 2009
Works on his first Google project as a freelancer with Upperquad.

MAY 2012
His daughter is born: a very successful personal project launched!

SEPTEMBER 2012
Starts focusing on building his own brand: developing his personal site and building a Dribbble following.

2013
Launches Ueno, lands a lot of good projects and wins some prestigious awards: a pretty amazing year.

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Meagan Fisher

OWLTASTIC.COM

The nocturnal designer on the importance of analytics, having a style that's not a style and grappling with the business of design

Having spent her childhood visiting galleries with her grandfather and being taught the subtleties of good craftsmanship by her father, it seems that Meagan Fisher (for the record, it's M-ee-gan, but she won't correct you if you get it wrong) was always destined for a high-flying creative career. Her journey has seen her flitting between studio jobs and freelance work, switching between cities and keeping night-owl hours. We caught up with her ahead of her talk at Generate London on 26 September, to find out about her decade in design so far …

Hello! Why don't you introduce yourself and your work?
MF: Hi! I'm Meagan Fisher, a freelance web designer working in Brooklyn, New York. I've been designing since 2004 – a whole 10 years! I've done work for a wide range of companies – nonprofits, agencies, big brands, you name it. Lately I've been doing a lot of marketing work for startups, and some frontend work creating responsive and Sass-based sites.

You have a thing for owls…
MF: I do, it's true. The owl obsession developed slowly from several directions. I used to do most of my design work from 10pm to about 6am, because that's really my most productive period of the day. So I identify with nocturnal creatures on that level. Also, when I left for college my father told me an owl had moved into the big tree in their backyard, and it reminded him of me because it kept him up half the night and made a lot of noise. It seemed like a sign that the owl was meant to be my symbol. Plus, I aspire to be more wise, and owls are a great reminder of that.

How and when did you first become interested in design?
MF: When I learned how to write, probably. One of the earliest memories I have of 'designing' is sitting in church services and sketching on the backs of the programmes, trying to mimic the different font styles I could see in the chapel. Also, when I was young my grandfather – who was a New York City advertising designer in the 60s and 70s – would take me to art museums around the city. My father, who collected antiques, taught me to note the lettering, patina, finish and craftsmanship that went into making his treasures. These things shaped my appreciation of the details that make something beautiful, so I think I was trained to look for the design in everything from an early age.

And the web – when did you start thinking that tech might be your medium?
MF: I never thought I could make a living from my love of design. I'd considered studying graphic design in college, but I thought it'd mean a career creating billboards and magazine ads, which I wasn't much interested in. So I majored in English Literature instead, but I also started doing Flash tutorials for fun (when I was meant to be doing homework). A few friends

asked me to make Flash websites for them, and I realised I enjoyed making websites more than studying, so I dropped out of school and found a job. During my internship at a software development company, I was introduced to web standards and Photoshop (thank God!), so I moved away from Flash.

Do you code?
MF: I 'code' in that I work in HTML, CSS and sometimes Sass or Less to create in-browser prototypes of my designs. Sometimes these markup-based design prototypes end up being the finished product that gets launched, other times a 'real' developer will use them as a jumping-off point.

I think I'm a better designer because I know how to do most of the frontend development for my work. I understand the medium I'm designing for (browsers), and I don't have to rely on other people to see my ideas come to life. When I'm making a site that's responsive, I don't have to create 12 different PSDs per page to show how a design should adapt to different screens. I can simply make the design responsive in the browser, and test my ideas live on different devices. I'll always consult and defer to a specialist when it comes to development work, I just think it helps that I can speak their language.

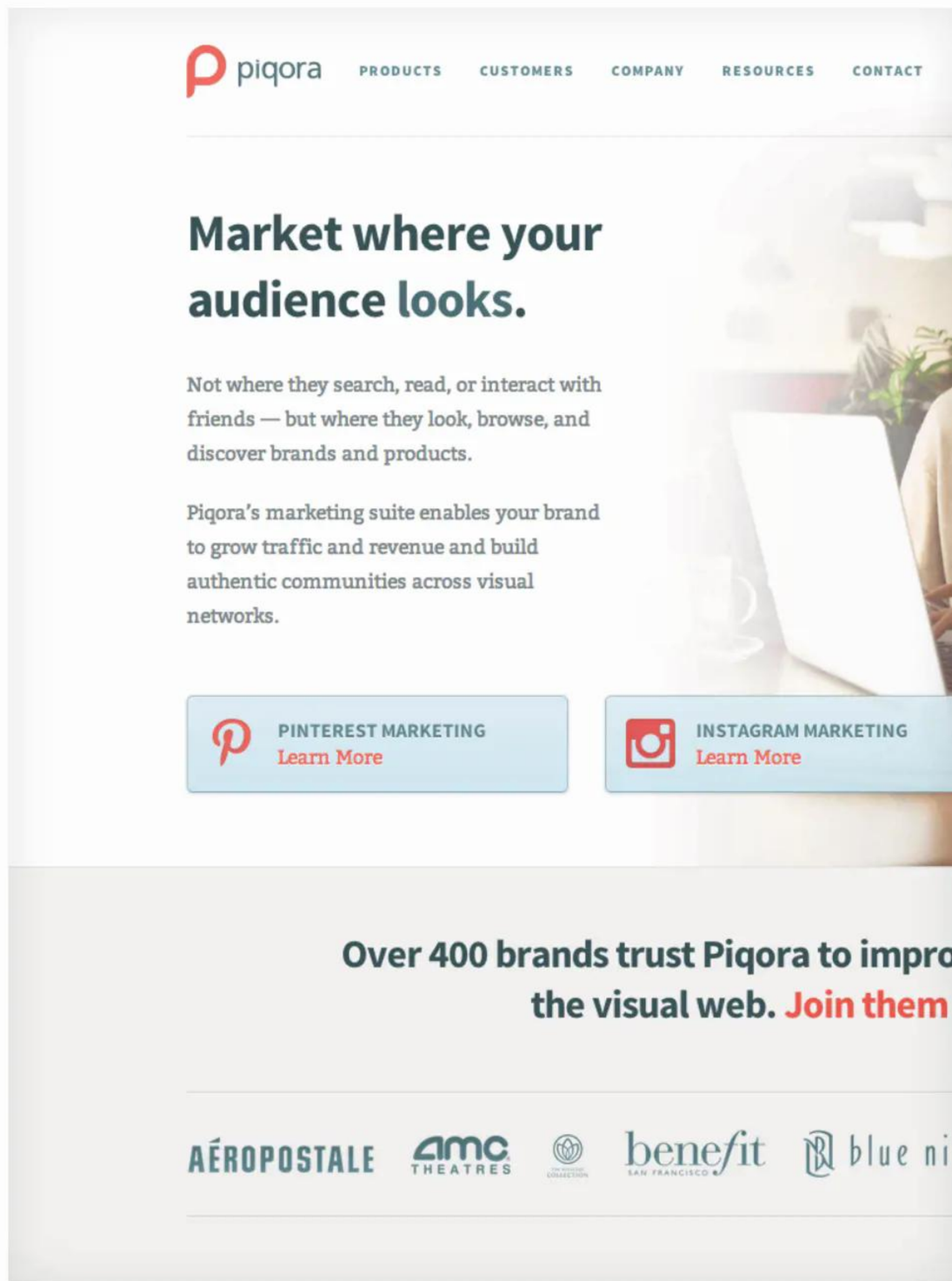
How do you think your style changed over the years?
MF: I think 'style' is a largely superfluous thing, at least in the way the term gets used today (as in "We want the site to have a flat/textured/big-photo-based style"). I focus on having a more intimate understanding of the timeless principles of good design, and be thoughtful about how they can be applied to each new project.

But maybe that's a bit of a cop-out answer. I'd say I certainly have a better developed sense of white space than I used to. Initially my work had small fonts and I filled every available pixel, now I take away more 'stuff' and give the meatiest content plenty of breathing room.

There are also aspects of my 'style' that have remained consistent for much of my career: I'll always love a bit of detailed ornamentation to draw the eye to key elements. I've always focused on typography first, and let that guide the design. I lean towards muted, earthy tones or deep, bold blues in general, because that's a palette I've developed a feel for, and can easily do colour magic with.

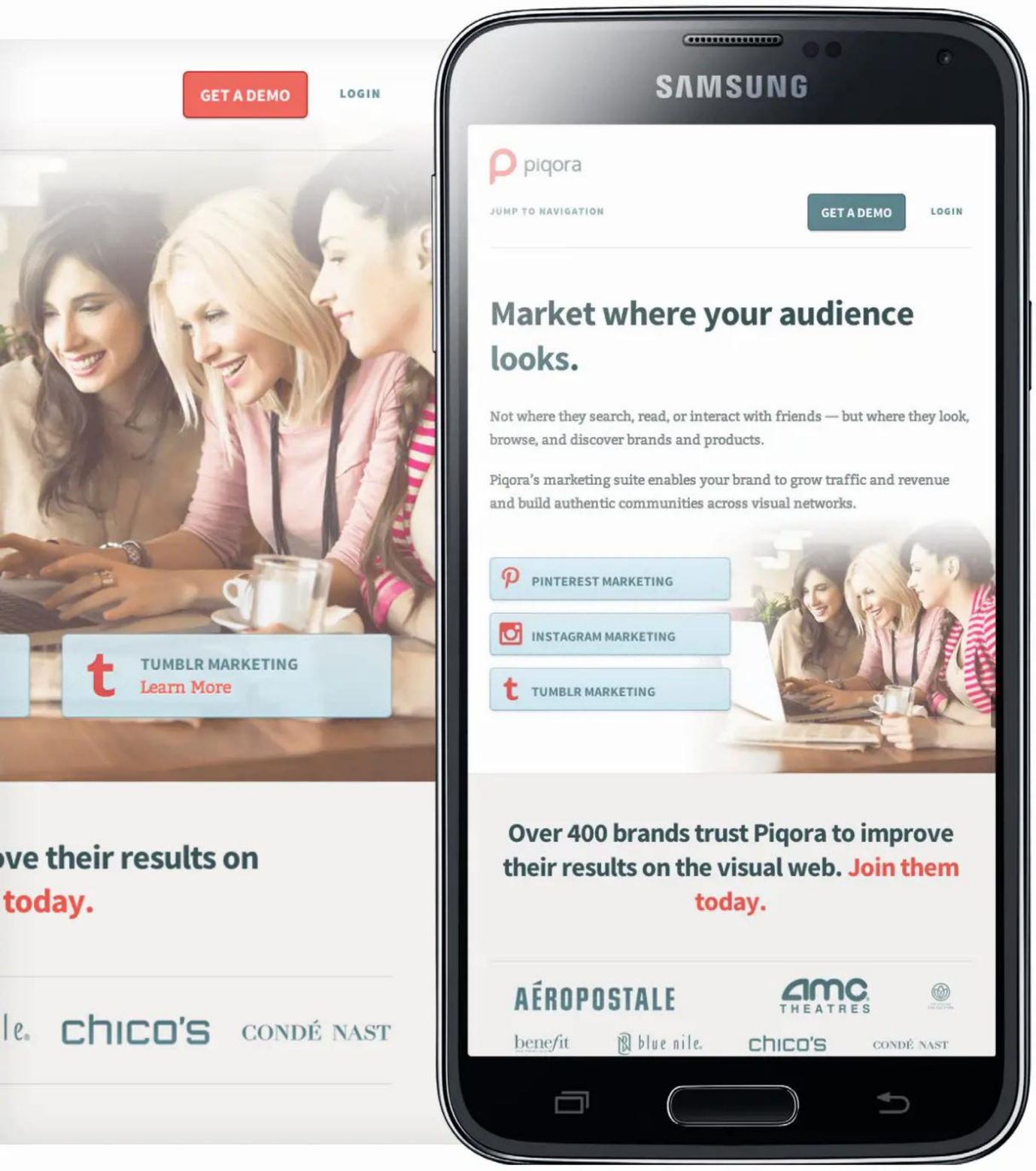
And do you feel your approach to your career has changed?
MF: Starting out, work was perhaps the most important thing in my life. For the first six years or so I was happy to sacrifice my personal health and sanity for design, because proving I could 'make it' as a designer made up much of my self-worth. Naturally this led to burnout, especially once I moved to New York and was so overwhelmed by the city's possibilities.

The two years I spent at Chartbeat provided a wonderful space for me to focus on one product and continue to learn about design, but also to develop other interests (including a perhaps unfortunate proclivity for wine and karaoke). Now I'm in a place where I'm craving the challenges of freelance work again, but hopefully this time around it'll be with a more mature eye towards living a balanced life.



New Look Fisher completed a total redesign of Piquora's site, including responsive, Sass-based markup

What's your workflow? Do you start with ink on paper and arrive at pixels or is it digital all the way?
MF: My process is a fluid, project-by-project thing. I usually start by creating an



HTML and CSS wireframe with as much real content as is available. The goal in this phase is to see the content laid out in the browser, and to get a feel of the structure. Once we're comfortable with the hierarchy and flow, I use Photoshop to create rough mockups and style tiles. I see Photoshop as a sketching tool, and I test things out for real in the markup. Some clients struggle with wanting to see pixel-perfect mockups, but most are excited to see their site coming to life directly in the browser.

Do you feel design is being reduced to science by analytics, data and research? Is there any room left for gut feeling?

MF: I mostly look at analytics and data before beginning a project to get an idea of where most of a site's current users live: on their phones, their tablets, in Internet Explorer, and so on. It helps me think about creating the best experience possible for users across the spectrum of the web, and I think that's a key component of design. I also use analytics tools after a design change, to see how it's resonating with people. I view data and analytics as a tool for getting a sense of who the users are, and then as a way to evaluate my ideas. I can't see anything reductive about that.

OFFICE CULTURE

Meagan Fisher
Designer

WHAT'S ON YOUR DESKTOP TODAY?

Well, my cat is sitting between me and my little MacBook Pro. Otherwise I have a sketchbook, some owl salt and pepper shakers, a coffee cup, an antique phone, a half-empty bottle of wine and a lamp.

LITTLE THINGS THAT MAKE YOUR LIFE WORTHWHILE

Websites: A List Apart (alistapart.com), Dribbble (dribbble.com), Happy Cog's Cognition blog (cognition.happycog.com). Apps: Instagram, Foursquare, iBooks, Balanced, Simplenote, Sleep Cycle Reading: Every A Book Apart book, and lots of Anne Lamott and Alice Munro.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE ON THE WALLS?

Oh man, so much weird stuff. I collect souvenir Florida pennant flags, owl paintings (of course!), and unwanted photographs of strangers' families from yard sales.

WHAT WILL YOU DO FOR LUNCH?

Whatever leftovers are hanging around the fridge, with a fried egg thrown on top to make it seem new.

WHAT HOURS DO YOU WORK?

I don't have a strict schedule, but usually it's about 1pm to 8pm. Since a lot of my clients have been on the West Coast, this works out nicely for them.

WHAT ELSE DO YOU DO?

The office is my house, and even though I have an 'office' space, I work in every room. I get the most done in the kitchen and in bed, because these rooms have the best light and the comfiest seating.

As far as 'research' … I do think spending too much time researching can get in the way of rapidly iterating on a design. That said, once we are mindful of the landscape of our designs – who the users are, what their interaction with our sites are like, and what they need – then we can let the "gut feel" have its fun, within those constraints.

The Environment Theo the cat, and plenty of owl pictures, keep Fisher company as she runs her design studio from her home in Brooklyn, New York

You're a designer. How easily does the business side of things come to you?
MF: The business part is the hardest part, by far. Finding clients who are a good fit, managing proposals and contracts, figuring out how to keep consistent pay coming in – these things are huge challenges for me. I often wish I could hire someone to manage the business side of things for me. Maybe one day I will. For now it's still a skill I'd like to develop, so I read a lot about running a business and try to think through the lessons I can take from every mistake or success.

What's the biggest mistake you've made as a businessperson? And what's been your biggest success?
MF: The biggest mistakes are not clearly defining the parameters of a project, and not insisting on regular payment for my work throughout the project. It's taken some time to build up the confidence to say: "Here's exactly what I will and won't do, and here's how often I have to be paid for it".

The biggest success I've had is probably just that I'm still running my own studio, even though I've thought about going back to being a full-time employee at least once a week.

Surely kittens are cuter than owlets …
MF: That's maybe the hardest question so far! Owlets are adorable, but since my primary work companion is my cat Theo, I might have to say kittens win out. Otherwise Theo will probably throw up on my pillow. ●

TIMELINE

How Meagan Fisher got to where she is today

NOVEMBER 2004
Begins creating Flash websites

SEPTEMBER 2006
Accepts full-time job at software development company

OCTOBER 2007
Quits full-time job, begins freelancing and working remotely for first startup

JUNE 2008
Realises startup is doomed; quits

JULY 2008
Moves to Salem, Massachusetts

APRIL 2009
First speaking gig at FOWD London, talking about mobile design

DECEMBER 2011
Moves to New York City

JANUARY 2011
Works with Hoefler & Frere-Jones on its web typography service

JANUARY 2012
Works with Chartbeat; is talked into joining full-time as art director

JUNE 2012
Moves from Brooklyn to Harlem

FEBRUARY 2014
Returns to original dream of running a design studio

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Drew Wilson

DREWWILSON.COM

The California-based entrepreneur on building tools to solve your problems and investing in your wellbeing

Designer, developer, proud stay-at-home dad, entrepreneur, brewery owner, healthy living advocate: Drew Wilson's job titles are long and varied. But his work ethos is simple – create things you would use, and design them how you'd like them to be designed. The approach has worked well for him so far – after kick-starting his entrepreneurial career by being the first to the icon party with Pictos, Wilson is now busy living up to his early success with payment service Plasso. How does he do it?

So, introduce yourself and tell us what you do?
DW: Hey! Thanks for having me. I'm Drew Wilson and I'm a dad, designer and developer who makes various things. I have a handful of apps I've built for the web, Mac and iOS, as well as a brewery, winery and a restaurant. I consider myself an entrepreneur, as I make a living from my ventures.

When did you first discover design?
DW: I started designing out of my passion for art when I was a kid. My dad used Photoshop (version two) to lay out his comic book catalogue – he created the first ever mail-order comic catalogue. I started playing with Photoshop from a young age, and started designing with it when I was around 14. I built my first website in 1996, and the rest is history.

What about technology and the web – when did they first make an appearance?
DW: I grew up on Macs and we never had a PC in the house, so my computer experience is very different to most at my age. I was home-schooled, so educational games on the Mac were a part of my curriculum. I got on AOL in around 92, when you had to pay per hour! The internet to me then was just chat rooms and email – a very different world compared to today.

Ever since then I've been interested in technology and making things interactive, but it wasn't until 2003 that I bit

the bullet and learned backend code. Before then I just did HTML/CSS and Flash. I never wanted to code – it seemed so nerdy and boring!

What does your typical day look like?

DW: My wife and I switch who gets up with the kids each day. I hang out with the kiddos (I have three) until around 9:30am, when I start work. I work from home and my door is usually closed, but the kids come in a few times a day to say hi, and I see them for lunch as well. I'm off work at 5pm. Once we're done getting the kids down to bed (it takes a long time!), I'll either hang with the wife and watch a movie, or if we both have lots to do I'll hop back on the computer for a night shift.

Also, I don't take full weekends off – instead I take off one day during the weekend (usually Sunday) and then one in the week. It's fantastic because a day off during the week means we can do anything with our kids, and

never worry about crowds. I've been doing it for years now and I'll never go back to two-day weekends.

How do you juggle fatherhood and work?
DW: It's true, I am a stay-at-home dad and my wife is a stay-at-home mom. We love it, and so do our kids. Some people have told me it "must be hard", but that's only if you consider 'work' the primary focus. I used to be of that same train of thought. I had to train myself that my kids are the primary focus, and work is secondary. Armed with that mindset, it becomes very easy and enjoyable to work from home.

I'm fortunate to have the opportunity to be around my kids 24/7, so I want to take full advantage of it. I also don't get stressed out easily, which is a convenient trait if you work from home and have three little kids!

Lumo, Plasso, Pictos, Valio Con: you make lots of stuff! From where do your ideas and motivation come?
DW: Almost everything I've built has started as a desire to solve a problem for myself. I built all the apps you mentioned because I needed something like them, and the existing options weren't a good fit for me, or didn't exist. It's easy to be motivated when building for yourself, which is one of the main reasons I can build so much.

Do your products share DNA?
DW: They're all a part of me. They are the way I would do things. Valio Con (valiocon.com), for example, is an extension of myself. If you come to the conference you'll be treated to a vacation and conference in the style I would most prefer. It's very laid-back and fun – no 'VIPs', no stage, custom-brewed beer, local food, situated on the beach. So I guess my products all share my DNA.

Do you have a template or is every product started from scratch?
DW: I don't try to build products or apps around a set of rules. I'm not an organised person so that idea never even enters my brain. I just figure out the way I would want to do things and then base the core feature set on that. When it comes to the actual code implementation, I do have a mini framework (really just a set of classes and functions) that I copy and paste. With each project it gets better and more robust, and cuts down on dev time. I don't have that for HTML/CSS though.

When inspiration strikes, how do you harness it?
DW: I have a book on that: *Execute*! I build immediately when inspiration strikes – at least the design, so I can flesh out my ideas. Over time I've gotten less free time, so I'm a bit more picky about what I spend my time on now. I let things sit in my head for a few days to a week before acting on them, to see if they really stick with me.

This also gives me an opportunity to outline (in my head) how long it will take to build, and how much return I would see. And I can judge if it would be worth my time to prototype something, rather than adding to existing products. It's a balancing act. These days I'm trying to focus more on only a few things, and get away from building new stuff all the time, but it's hard.

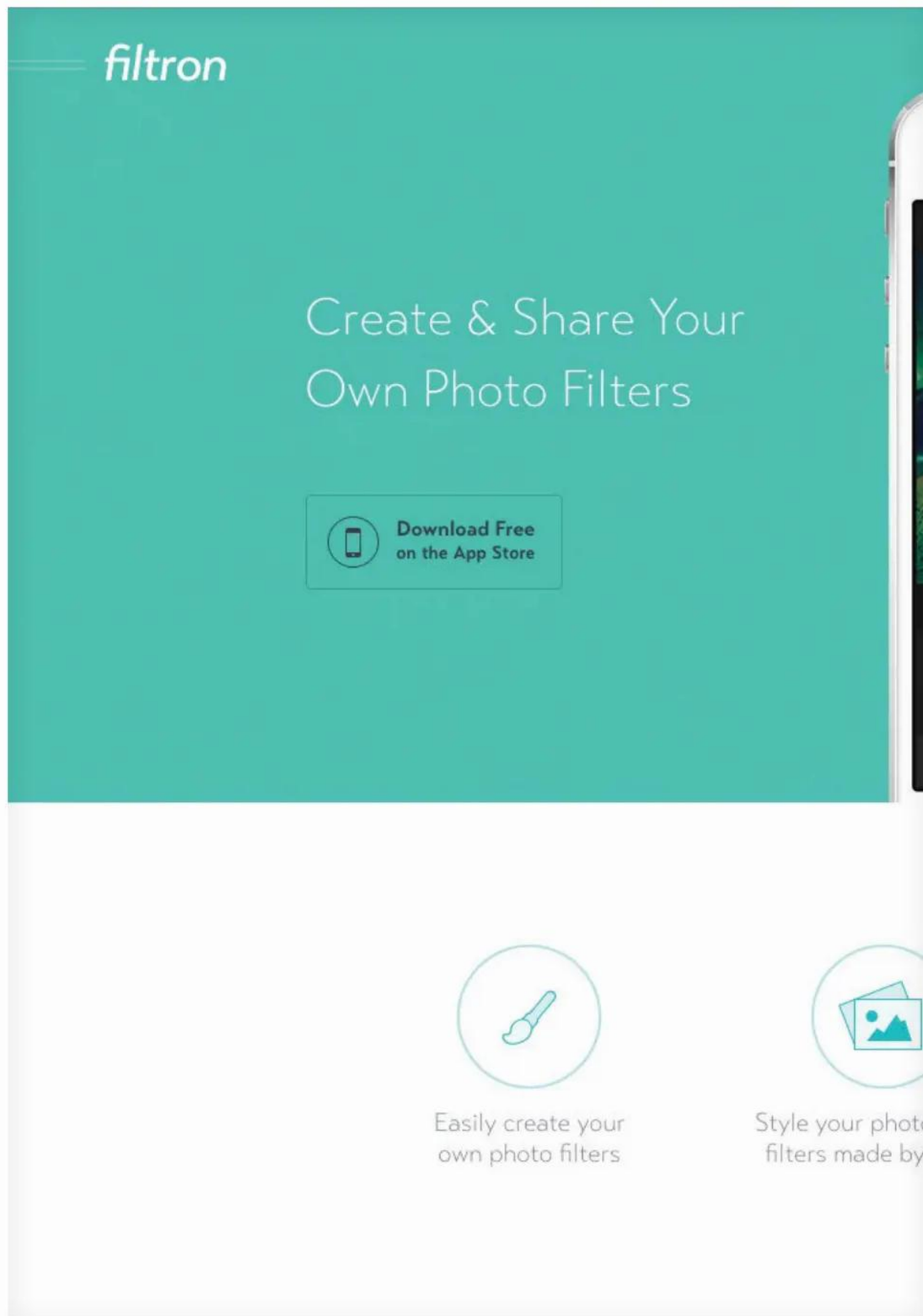
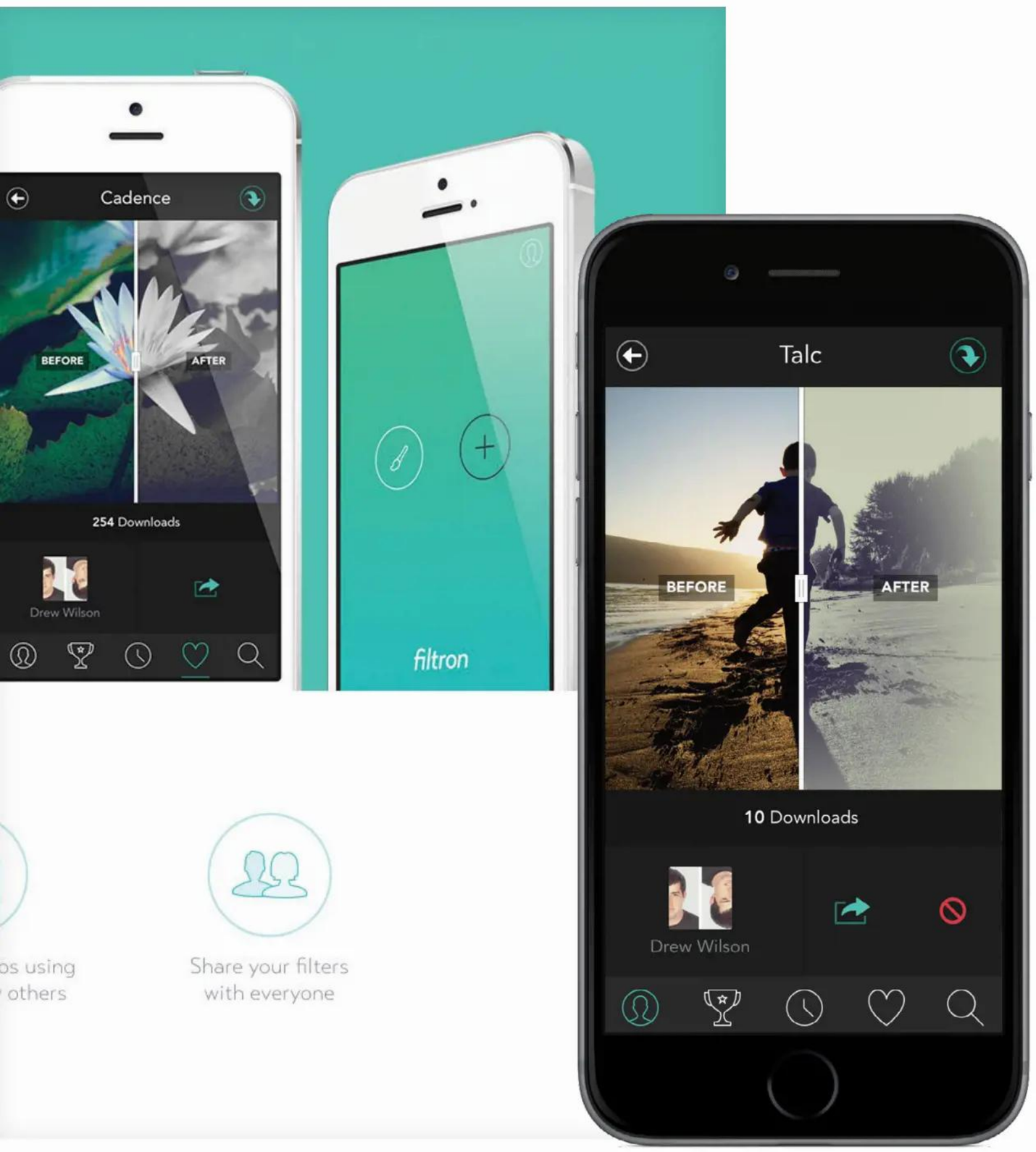


Photo-ready Filtron enables users to create, use and share photo filters Wilson describes it as "super-radical"

Do you make all of your projects in their entirety, or do you work with others?
DW: I usually try to partner up with a developer. Tackling a product all on your own is only good if you're doing one thing. If you're doing multiple things it becomes too much work for a single person with



only 24 hours in a day. Plus, partnering gives you the benefit of having someone else's talents and ideas contributing to the product. It's much better to do 50:50 than any other arrangement (and I've tried 'em all). I do have a few products that are 100 per cent me, including Plasso and Pictos.

Which product makes you feel most proud and why?
DW: Plasso (plasso.co). Because its success is a result of skill and not luck. Pictos (pictos.cc) was a stroke of luck. I was one of the first to sell icons, so I made tons of money – but only because I was one of the first. If I were to launch an icon set today, it would make nowhere near what I made with Pictos. I was lucky enough to be early.

Plasso is different. There are a number of other services in the same space, yet it is doing well (well enough that it is where I draw my salary). I launched a similar app back in 2010 called Quixly, but it failed to make money. Then I launched Space Box, and it failed to make money. So I changed the business model and branding and re-launched Space Box as Plasso, and it's doing really well. This shows

OFFICE CULTURE

Drew Wilson
One-man-band

WHAT'S ON YOUR DESK?
27" iMac with a 24" Cinema Display, turned vertical. Rode Podcaster microphone. Various phones and tablets for testing. I love my Humanscale Float Table desk!

LITTLE THINGS THAT MAKE YOUR LIFE WORTHWHILE
Websites: Devour.com, Dribbble.com
Apps: Photoshop, Sublime Text, GitHub, Tweetbot, Rdio Audio
Reading: TED

WHAT DO YOU HAVE ON THE WALLS?
Nothing right now since I just moved, but typically a few pieces of art.

WHAT HOURS DO YOU WORK?
Typically I start at 9am and go until 5pm, with a break or two for lunch and to see the kiddos. Depending on how busy I am, I'll go back to work after putting the kids to bed for another four hours or so.

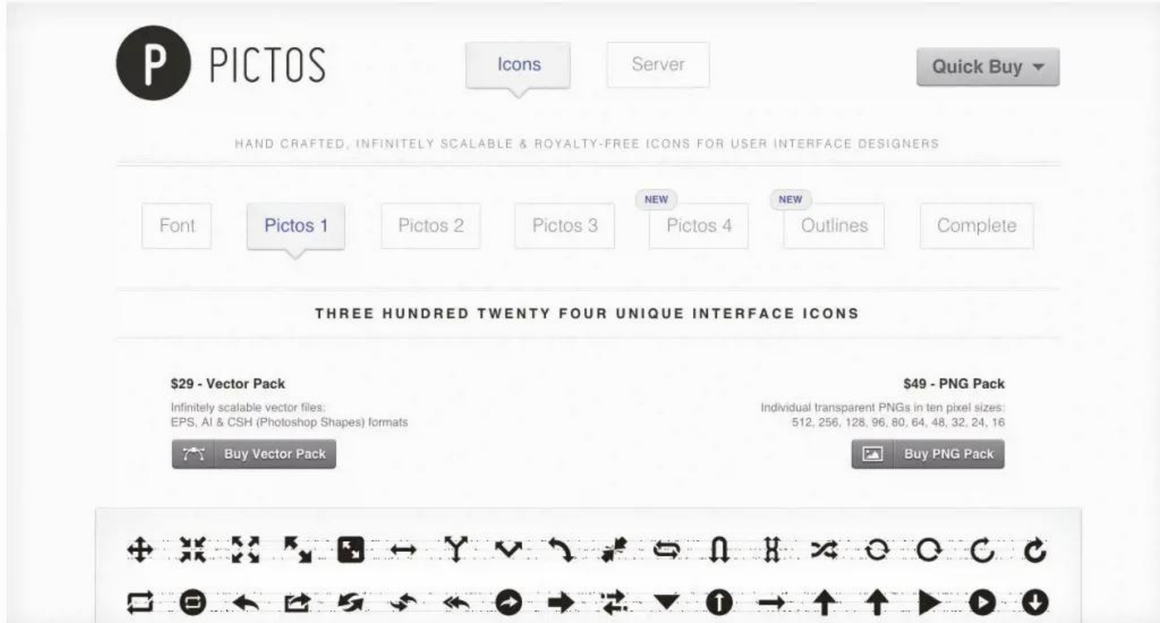
WHAT ELSE DO YOU DO IN THE OFFICE?
My wife and I watch movies on the TV, but it's mostly a work space.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU HANG OUT WITH OTHER DESIGNERS?
I love hanging out with fellow tech people, but I'm a dad of three little kids, so I barely get out of the house at all!

DESCRIBE YOUR WORKING CULTURE IN THREE WORDS
I have fun.

me it isn't luck, but my experience that has made it successful. That's why I'm most proud of it.

Do you do client work?
DW: I used to. I stopped in 2008 to work full-time on my first software product I was going to sell. But it didn't work out and I had to take on some client work in 2009. I also had to sell off furniture and all my camera gear – it was a very tough time. When I launched Pictos, that brought in enough money to finance me, and now Plasso is doing well enough that I don't need to do client work. That said, building your own products isn't all rainbows and chocolate baths – it's hard. You will be poor. But if you're smart and continue to push through, it will be worth it.



Early icons Pictos was one of the first icon sets for sale online, and was successful enough for Wilson to give up client work altogether. He describes it as "a stroke of luck"

What's your take on the web's caffeinated attitude to work and health?
DW: I hear ya. I personally don't drink coffee, but I do eat chocolate! We all work in an industry that kills human bodies. The analogy I like to use is this: a construction worker buys and wears a hard hat to keep him safe on the job. We need to pay for and participate in exercise and healthy food to keep us safe on the job.

Looking at it that way, it's much easier to spend money on these things, because it is worth it. I've had a personal trainer for over three years. It forces me to leave my desk because I have to be on time to meet up and to work out. I'm also fortunate that my wife is into healthy eating and is an amazing cook. So unless I go buy pizza or a burger, I eat about as healthily as a human can.

Do you manage to build time into your day to keep yourself healthy?
DW: Most definitely. I work out with my buddy and trainer Rhett Andersen three days a week. But the kids keep me active on my days off too! ●

TIMELINE

How Drew Wilson went from designer to entrepreneur

JUNE 1996
Makes his first HTML website

AUGUST 1998
Hired for his first paid design project - a poster for a local concert

DECEMBER 2002
Hired as the only designer at a local print shop

DECEMBER 2003
Leaves the print shop to go full-time freelance, with only one client lined up

AUGUST 2009
Launches first paid software after spending two years building it

MAY 2010
Creates and organises the first Valio Con, his annual design conference

JULY 2011
Sells his first company, an ad network called Yoggrt

DECEMBER 2012
Creates a book - Execute - in eight days, from concept to printer

SEPTEMBER 2012
Starts focusing on building his own brand: developing his personal site and building a Dribbble following

MAY 2014
Launches Plasso: payments made easy. This now finances Wilson and his career

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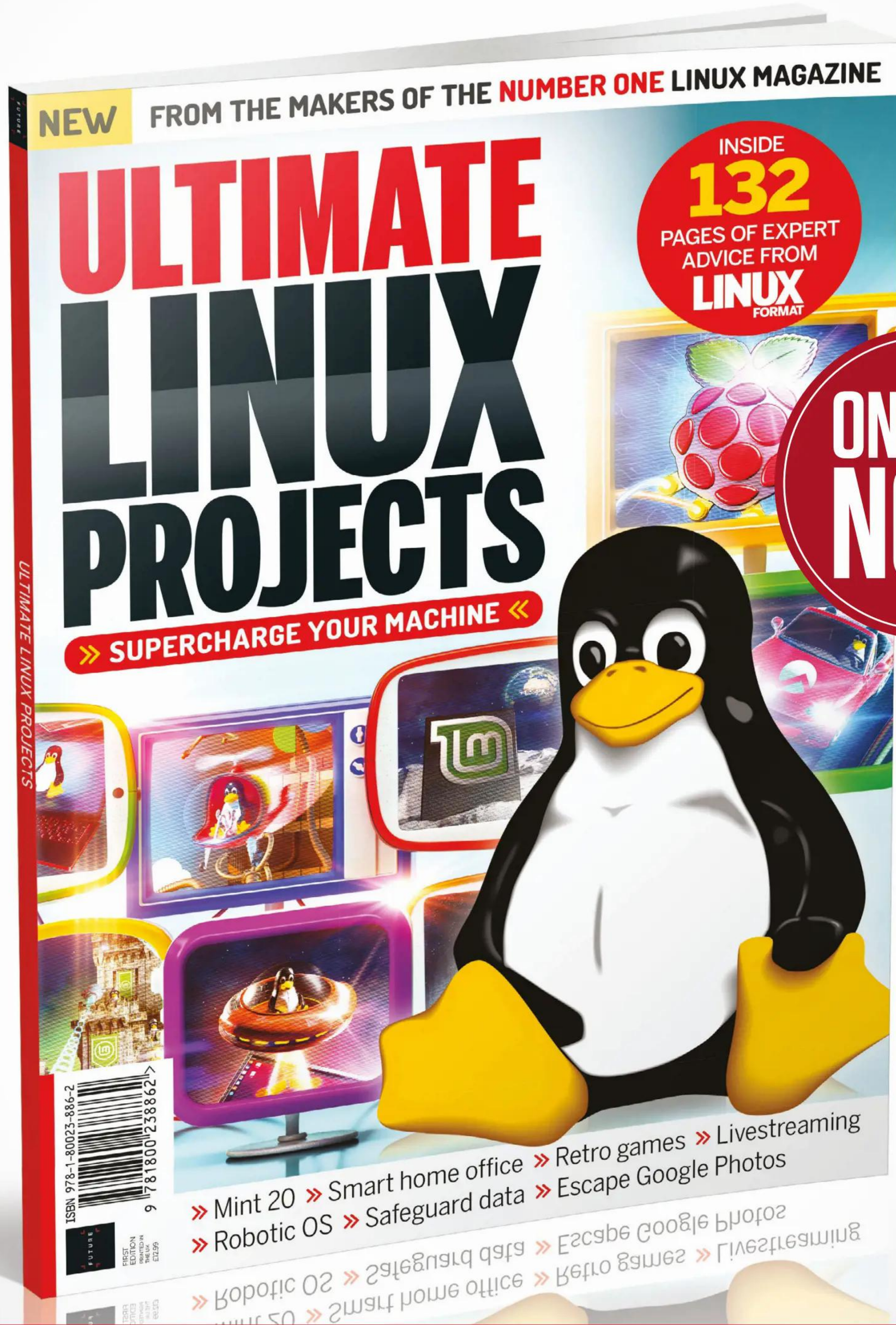

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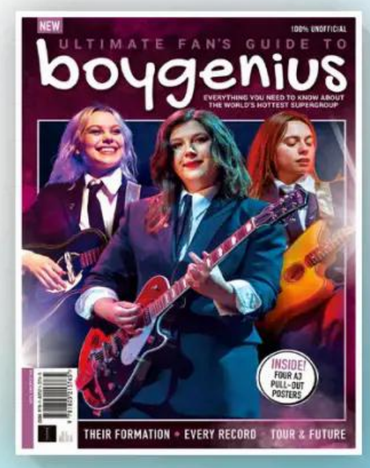

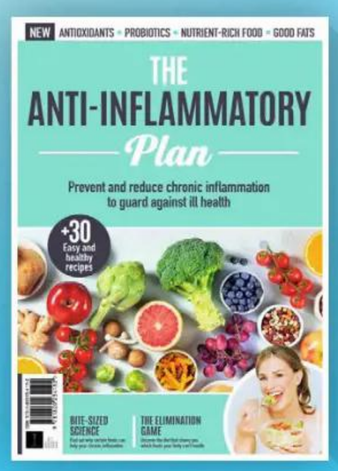

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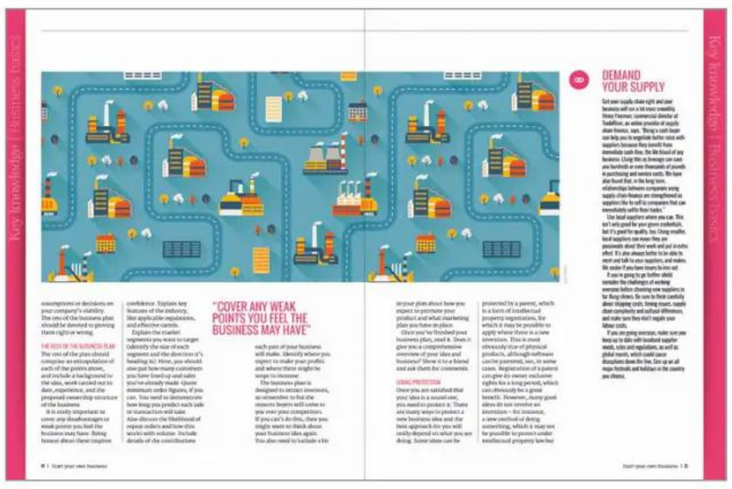
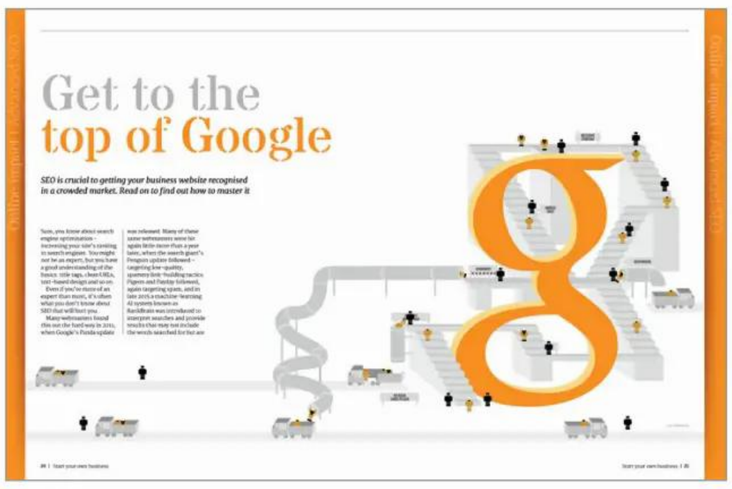


Key knowledge

Everything you need to know to transform an idea into a business

Money matters

From raising startup funds to budgeting and managing cash flow



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