out of bounds

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how to decide between freelance life and full-time employment

by Ben Tallon

7.21.2016

Recent graduates stand at a crossroads between seeking full-time jobs and striking out alone. Whatever your choice, it pays to get the basics right.

Some of my mates doing a graphic design degree left me biting my nails to the quick when they announced proudly that the companies that had taken them on during their placements had offered them full-time roles with a starting salary of £25k. It made me take a stern look at my own degree, in illustration, and face the harsh truth that a full-time employment role in my field is extremely rare.

That was 2006. The world is now at the mercy of a fully grown digital revolution that was then still peering over the play gate. Chances are, if you've just graduated, you've seamlessly grown into that digital landscape and are now standing at the freelance/employment fork in the road, hair still plastered to your head from the mortarboard that helped put real life off, just a little longer, for the camera. Both routes are fraught with many pros and cons, but thanks to the warp-speed technological advances of the last decade, roles are not as easily defined as the courses you chose from the university prospectus.

One thing's for sure. Nobody will come and find you, and tell you what to do. You're entering an overcrowded industry that's

more cut-throat than Game Of Thrones. This isn't supposed to intimidate you – it's just a fact, and it's always been that way. It's just that now it costs less to set up a business thanks to the many tools we have at our fingertips, so it's a heavily crowded market. But technology isn't all about the digital. It's humanizing many things – a backlash of sorts, from the overexposure – and placing a renewed emphasis on values that transcend technology.

Get the basics right

You may well be the best in the world, but write an email riddled with bad grammar and an impersonal tone (I've received emails asking for my time without a 'hello' or my name) and you're axing your chances of a job interview, or even a response from the people who can give you the platform to prove it. Follow trends and you're gone, creativity and identity lost in the deepest shadows of online fan art. Be respectful to all and everyone, but show passion and express your own ideas. Arrogance creates nothing but distance, while personal recommendations open secret doors.

If these things sound basic, it's because they are. Creative superpowers are deceptively simple and so often overlooked with terminal consequences.

The creative industry, like any other business, is built on the right balance of relationship building, individuality, forward thinking, resourcefulness, patience and hard

work. Neither the bipolar nature of freelancing nor the payday security of employment hold any guarantee of everlasting creativity or mortgage-busting riches. The right path can only be chosen according to what works for the individual. Even then, it will often change in time. But you can give yourself the best chance of the right start by building on the simplest of timeless foundations.

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unique is opportune

by Behance Team

Ultimately, success is a result of differentiation and emphasizing your unique value. While conformity lubricates the gears of society, the world is pushed forward by contrarians.

The advancements we know and love - new technology, medical breakthroughs, artistic achievements - are made by passionate

people with bold and often unpopular ideas. These creative geniuses also had the guts to endure unchartered territory. Strange that so many people preach a "traditional path to success." After all, the catalyst for making a meaningful impact is doing something different.

Society is a bit hypocritical. We shun college drop-outs and "wayward creatives" with skepticism. Yet we celebrate the successes of the emerging artists, bold entrepreneurs, and trailblazing musicians that enrich every aspect of our lives. Society celebrates what society shuns?
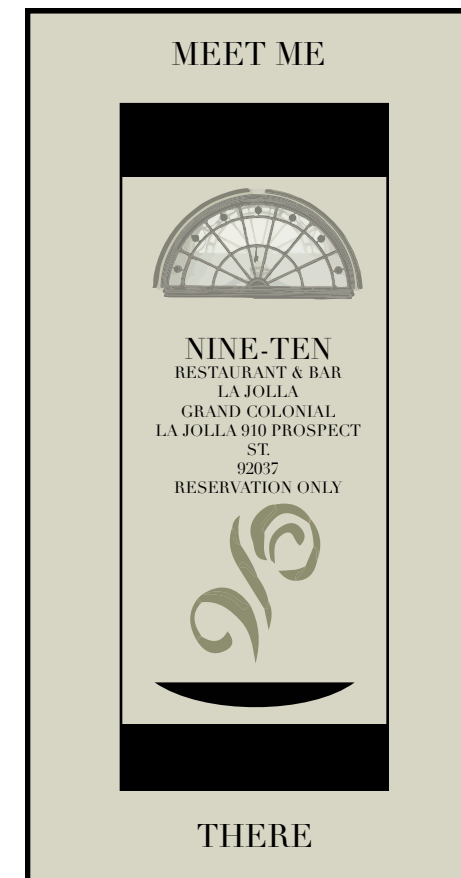

All too often, we consider creative successes as one-offs rather then the logical outcome of doing something different and taking enough initiative to make it happen. What one views as a tremendous risk may appear to others as an obvious and compelling opportunity. A passionate person that is willing to challenge a conventional approach

will, in fact, stake claim in unchartered territory. Whether or not this advancement becomes something meaningful and significant is dependent on leadership and hard work. Totally doable.

Gain confidence from the unexpected path. Nothing extraordinary is ever achieved through ordinary means.

essential steps to making a killer portfolio

A primer on planning, presenting, and posting your best work.

By Matt McCue

You have the ability to capture the attention of a creative director in a single glance of your portfolio, so it's vital to get the details right. What is the most compelling way to curate your images? How do you best present your designs? And what are the important mistakes to avoid?

Since Behance launched in 2006, we've seen a lot of portfolios. The website has 7.4 million members who post 12,000 new projects every day and draw a collective 200 million page views each month. That can make it difficult to stand out, but it's worth giving your portfolio a polish and shine in an effort to do so. Think of it like this: We all tend to eat with our eyes first. If a dish looks good, we'll be that much more eager to want to devour it. The same idea applies to your work. If your projects are stylishly presented, the chances are likely better that people will want to check out your work — which is the first step to getting more opportunities.

To help you stand out, we've asked Behance's Brand Director Mark Brooks what one should (and shouldn't) do to create an eye-catching portfolio. He walks us through the planning, presentation and posting stages of the process.

the planning stage

highlight your best work, not all of it

"Quantity doesn't necessarily mean quality. Often times when we feel like our design isn't strong enough, we tend to show a lot of images of the same execution to build it up and to make up for what we probably consider an average or rather weak project. And any professional can tell when you're doing that."

showcase the kind of work you want to be hired for

"Your portfolio defines who you are as a designer and where you want to go. If you have a specific interest in a certain design field such as editorial design, that's what you need to focus your portfolio on. If you show projects featuring web design, branding, and packaging, you will be highly unlikely to get an editorial project. Young designers tend to show that they are versatile and able to tackle any project that comes along, but versatility is not necessarily you being able to work on any design field. It's rather the ability to be resourceful and to explore various creative approaches within one single field. Once you have explored, and gained experience in that field, move to the next one. Being a Jack of all trades in design rarely implies doing amazingly good in all of them."

don't rely only on personal projects

"Self-initiated projects are great to explore and practice, but when it comes to your portfolio try to show as much real stuff as you can. A real project means you have had to adjust to certain parameters and production limitations. You have dealt with a client, undergone revisions, and had to justify the choices you've made. Things you did in your personal project are things that might never happen in the real world because your personal projects are rarely compromised by real-life circumstances, like client input. If you have created something you really consider worth showing, make a mockup so good that it will be hard to tell the real from the fake and specify it's a self-initiated and the thinking behind it."

craft the presentation

it's not just the work you've done – it's how you present it

"An average execution that is beautifully presented can take that project to a higher level, whereas an amazing project poorly presented will lose a lot of its impact and value. It's almost like fashion shoots. If someone is advertising shoes, they will have a model, great setting, and great light, and a lot of times you will barely notice the product because the whole composition is what ultimately ends up captivating you. It is common to find young designers using blank images from image banks or anywhere on the internet and pasting their artwork on them. No, if you are going to put a graphic on a T-shirt, buy a T-shirt on which your artwork will look best, find an interesting place to shoot it, a friend that will wear it for you, get the right light and then take a photo to create your own thing. A lot of the presentations on Behance have probably taken as much time and effort than the actual design of the piece."

perfecting the post

to show the creative process or not?

"A lot of times the process and steps involved in a project are interesting only if it was really complicated and detailed. If your project requires a lot of hands-on skill, like drawing a complex illustration that you may turn into vector and into a brand icon for example, or if you are developing a laborious project that implies multiple stages of production or several participants involved in it, showing the making of it will add value to the project. Otherwise, I'd just show the final result."

keep the words to a minimum

"A lot of creatives start their websites with this big manifesto about themselves, phrases like, 'Our main goal is to make sure our clients know we understand their necessities and we strive to reach the solution that will please both them and their customers.' What? If I'm not going to buy that from a well-established design/branding firm, then I'm definitely not going to believe it from someone who just got out of school. Show me your work."

Congratulations, you've now successfully curated your portfolio. The best way to ensure you give your work the credit and attention it deserves in your portfolio is to build in time at the end your creative projects for planning and prepping your pieces. It's essential that you update it regularly with your best recent work and, above all, view it as part of the creation process.

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the value of photography in web design

Many designers underestimate the importance of good photography. Don't be one of them, says Kris Jeary of Squiders.

By Kris Jeary

10.10.2014

Many designers underestimate the importance of good photography. Don't be one of them, says Kris Jeary of Squiders.

Probably the biggest issue we have in designing a website is the lack of compelling photography.

I really can't state enough just how vital a cog photography is, combined with well written copy it is the meat that goes on the bones of any site, no matter the subject (I will cover content writing in a separate post).

Let's be clear, the internet is a visual media, visitors judge with their eyes and will only digest the content if you make the whole experience a pleasurable one.

fit for purpose

No matter the images you have in your library they will rarely be suitable for the task. Sorry, but that is most often the case. You need photography that has been taken for purpose, by a professional and with a brief from both client and designer.

Consider the responsive nature of web design, different areas of the photo will be visible depending on the device size. The exact same web page is then rendered differently on different devices but we still keep control.

directing the shoot

The biggest benefit for me (as a designer) is the ability to direct the shoot in order to obtain images that will work seamlessly with the website, I'm not having to compromise design to fit in with pre-existing images, images that haven't been taken for purpose.

The aim of design is to direct the visitor down paths that will lead to a sale, either online (with eCommerce) or by contacting the company. Every element is important in this and photography, massively so.

people buy from people

Our previous point leads on nicely to the question of stock photography. How can you buy an image that will represent you, your products, your services? How can a visitor trust an invisible supplier?

There is a lot of research showing the psychological issue with trust when buying online, and this isn't just for eCommerce websites, if you have a website highlighting your products or services you are selling online, you want a visitor to trust your business to such an extent they will make

contact with you, to potentially throw themselves at a sales pitch, they have to know you are worth it.

solipsistic introjection

John Suler makes a great point in his book The Psychology of Cyberspace on what is know as solipsistic introjection.

"Absent F2F [face to face] cues combined with text communication can have an interesting effect on people. Sometimes they feel that their mind has merged with the mind of the online companion. Reading another person's message might be experienced as a voice within one's head, as if that person magically has been inserted or 'introjected' into one's psyche. Of course, we may not know what the other person's voice actually sounds like, so in our head we assign a voice to that companion."

– John Suler, The Psychology of Cyberspace.

Of course this has massive implications with the tone of your copy and also in allowing your visitor's internal conversation to be with a real person. You wouldn't make a sale in a business meeting if you were wearing a mask the whole time.

Photography isn't the only reassuring aspect, I for one won't buy from a website that doesn't list a physical address and telephone number, these things help foster trust and so too does photography showing you or your team at work. Make the visitor trust you more than your competitors, let them know you are real people and not machines.

working with a professional

A professional photographer isn't just a person with an expensive camera, they should not be judged on megapixels. Unfortunately anyone can call themselves a professional, much like 'web designers'! Chose your professional carefully, make sure they are asking the right questions, that they want to understand your business, the goals of the site.
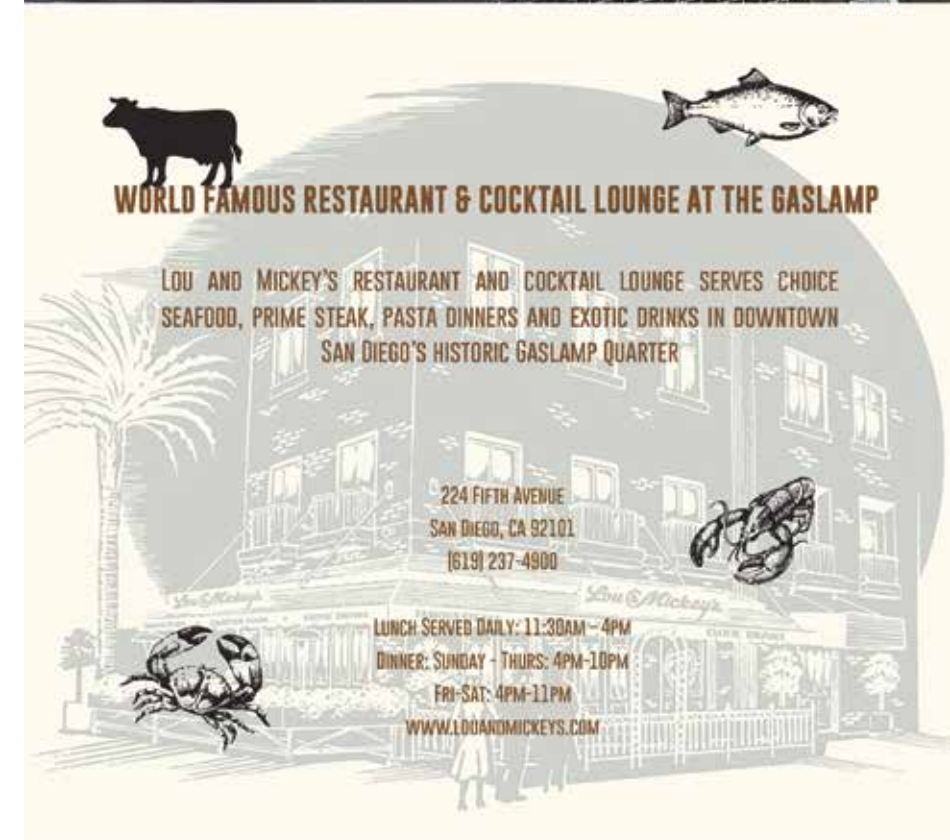
We work (wherever possible) with the same photographer on projects where we are asked to help on the photography front. His name is Steve and he is wonderful. Aside from the expected amount of talent he is brilliant with web photography, here is why:

*He always asks the right questions.

*He knows us well enough that he always produces what is required.

*He is vastly experienced with web photography and keeps himself up to date with web technology (quite a thing for a photographer to do).

*He balances product, lifestyle and reportage amazingly well.

We have encountered many DIY jobs from our clients, but to be blunt, if you think you have the ability you probably don't have the experience of photography specifically for the web.

conclusion

Any website can be let down by its weakest link, the purpose of design is to deliver on the goals on the site. Engaging photography can boost success rates, poor photography can severely hinder. Give your designer the tools to best meet your goals and present yourself in the best possible light, you won't regret it.

With more than 10 years' experience in the web industry, Kris Jeary is founder and director of Squiders, a specialist, independent web design studio dedicated to creating bespoke and tailored solutions to digital problems.

the future of design (and how to prepare for it)

A handy guide to navigating what's coming up next in the design world.

By Matt McCue and Kiana St. Louis

In trying to figure out what the future of design will look like, we're at a bit of a loss.

Technology is changing at a rapid pace. In five years, mobile platforms have gone from being an emerging part of a company's strategy to the focal point of its future. So who's to say when virtual reality and automation become more prominent? Quickly-evolving tools like these and a shifting playing field make it almost impossible to predict the future, because the gadget that will drive our lives in 10 years probably hasn't even been invented yet. And then there is the matter of divergent career paths. The age-old standard of working your way up the ladder at a single company for the duration of your life has been disrupted by career professionals blending skills that were once thought to be mutually exclusive — like design and computer programming — to make entirely new hybrid careers in anticipation of the market needs of tomorrow.

So that is why we've reached out to visionaries and experts across the design world to get their take on what the field will look like in the next 10 years when the very definition of the designer will begin to loosen up and designers will soon be called on by companies to re-think the entire way businesses function, from how teams collaborate to how corporations are structured.

It's setting up to be a golden age, one filled with wonderfully-wild new possibilities (full-body virtual reality suits that generate real-life senses, anyone?) and career opportunities. Worried? Don't be. We asked each participant to give us a glimpse into how we can prepare for the world ahead.

the definition of *design* will loosen up

Historically, you would study graphic design, industrial design, or interaction design and there were a finite number of crafts out in the world. Now we're starting to see that design and creativity can be brought to bear on a greater number of things. One is organizational design, thinking about anything from the design of culture within an organization to how those organizations are designed themselves in terms of the structure and roles. Another is business design, the idea of bringing a creative lens to anything from business models to venture funding.
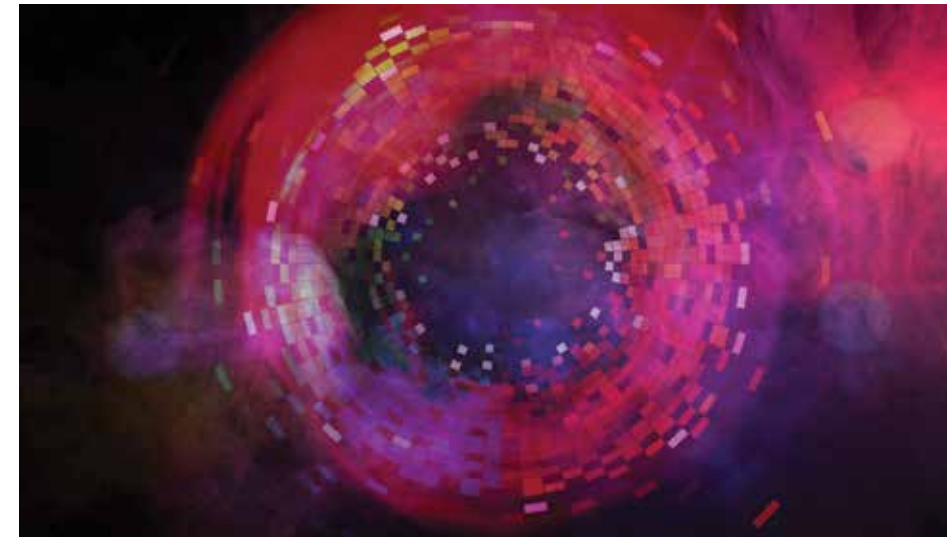
- Duane Bray, Partner and Head of Talent, IDEO

creativity will become a coveted corporate leadership trait

We're seeing teams of people from different disciplines spending time together from start to finish on a project. How do you maximize their creative potential? The core skill is unlocking collaboration between teams.

- Duane Bray, Partner and Head of Talent, IDEO

data and design will make life trippy

Designers are typically experts in things you can touch, see and act upon. Now with software eating the world, a lot of the manifest expressions of the design world are giving way to things that are not as see-able, like personalization data that remember who we are. Designers are going to have to think about how a human and a machine will interact. For example, if a smart home artificial intelligence system sensor sees a home door unlock and then recognizes the face of the person entering, should it be able to look up that person's data about what that person likes and turn on a certain light for them? Or you have to decide if, every time you show up at your home, if you want your smart home system to turn the lights for you versus you doing it yourself. Or, do you develop a smart home system that interacts with you on a decision-by-decision basis? In most of what I'm talking about, there are no switches to turn on the light or system interfaces to tap. It's artificial intelligence and all of these decisions are being made using personal data. That is the new kind of design problem.

— Mark Rolston, Founder and Chief Creative, argodesign

3d printing will continue to grow in importance

As creatives, it's our duty to incorporate 3D printing into our work. When you have the possibility to make your work tangible, that gives it more richness. I hope 3D printing allows people to fully customize their lives. One day if we need shoes or more silverware, we can just print them in our home. I think this will be true for all of our household basics. We're going to have more creatives in the world because things that have traditionally been done on an industrial scale will be able to be done by anyone with 3D printing.

- Daniel Aristizábal, Columbian Illustrator

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you'll have to broaden your skill set

You can have a great design, but if you can't communicate the story behind it, it will be the downfall of the greatest designers. It's important to learn the 'soft skills' which are learning how to speak publicly to grab attention, keep attention, and clearly articulate your ideas. You should learn to negotiate your prices, as well as know how to read a room and when you should disappear. The other side is the psychology of the business upfront, the questions of: Why am I building this? Why is it important? Or what impact am I going to have on the world? It's important to answer before you design. Having the business and designer mindset is important.

- Mona Patel, CEO and Founder, Motivate Design

visual vr is just the start

There really is a lot of opportunities and means for expression inside VR. For example, Axon VR is developing full body virtual reality, both the software and hardware. The apparatus is somewhat imposing, and the leap to a first-person experience is astounding when you add visual, sound, and the sense of touch. The visual power of the experiences has sky-rocketed as a result. When you put that in the hands of creative people, there's a real opportunity for the experiences that come out of it to be completely, utterly fantastic.

- Paul Matthaeus, Founder and Chairman, Digital Kitchen