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October 2007

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CREATIVELY

Self-Employed

How Young Artists, Writers and Other Creative Types Embrace Self-Employment

By Kristen Fischer

It's inspiring when you hear about people making their dreams a reality. Even more so when they're doing it before they even hit 40.

Let's face it: Becoming a writer, artist, or designer can be extremely difficult. Following such a goal means facing rejection and solitude, trying to earn a steady wage, managing an erratic schedule, and even obtaining health-care. All of these challenges are what make creative self-employment such a unique business platform.

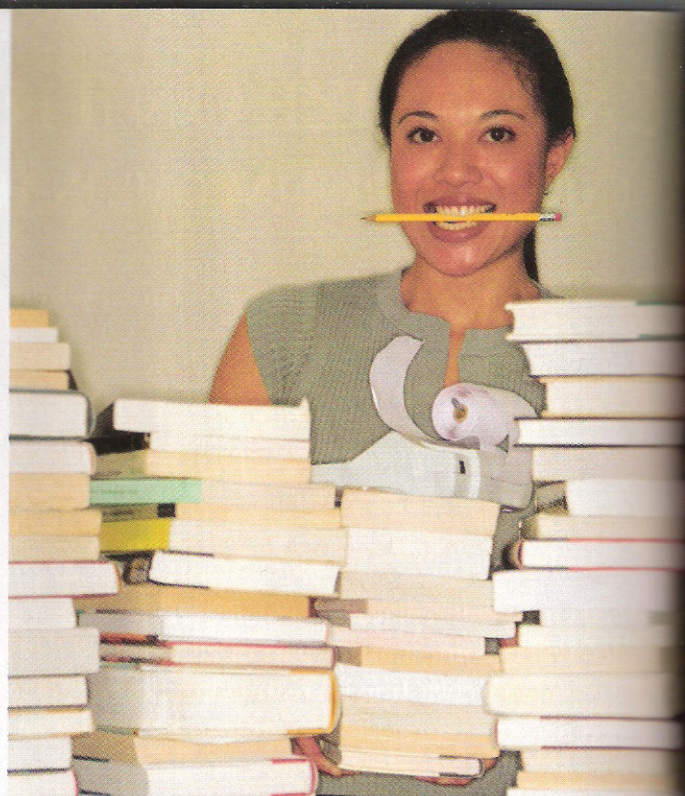
When promoting my book, *Creatively Self-Employed: How Writers and Artists Deal with Career Ups and Downs*, I found that most interviewers were more amazed by me than the 65+ creatives I interviewed. They seemed stunned when I told them that I was 28 when the book was released, and started working on it at 25. I didn't think it was a big deal at first, but then I realized what a profound thing I had done by writing that book — and how astonishing it was because I hadn't even hit 30 yet.

This led me to become intrigued by others around my age that are doing extraordinary things. It's hard enough to do it as a mid-lifer, but to do it just out of college or with only a few years of experience in the traditional working world? That is really awe-inspiring! So, how do they do it? And are more people considering this career platform?

“Becoming a writer, artist, or designer can be extremely difficult.”

BALANCING A CREATIVE ACT

Kristen King, a writer-editor living in Virginia, had freelanced out of college and was used to the unpredictable schedule that came with it. When she got a 9-to-5 job, she kept freelancing on the side. The “side” business



With practical business skills, your career as a creatively self-employed person will continue to flourish through retirement.

eventually became so strong, and she was able to go into business for herself while she pursues her Master's degree. She is just 25, but it's easy to see how her entrepreneurial mindset has aided her as she thrives at her award-winning writing and editing consultancy (www.kristenkingfreelancing.com).

“Education certainly gave me the foundation for a successful career, but it was personal drive, and the examples set by my parents, that made self-employment appeal to me,” says King, who always dreamed of being a writer. “I grew up in a household with two self-employed parents. Freelancing was just a logical choice for me. I love it! Working for myself lets me choose how I organize my work time, and it also affords me the opportunity to develop real relationships with the people I am working with.”

Penelope Dullaghan, a 29-year-old illustrator from South Carolina who also had the entrepreneur gene, says her passion is what helped her leave an ad agency and plunge into creative self-employment. “I love illustrating. I love getting ideas out and seeing connections between stories and images. I can't imagine doing anything else, really.”

DOUBTS AND FRUSTRATIONS

The creatively self-employed lifestyle doesn't come without some drawbacks. Billy Bussey is just 30 years old, and he runs a digital design company from San Francisco (www.billybussey.com). Even though he has been very successful, he admits that doubting one's talents comes with the territory of being

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Tips for a Strong Creative Business

By Kristen Fischer

1. **Be professional.** This not only includes developing a logo and web site, but sticking to deadlines, keeping regular business hours, and being professional. Keep in mind that you will probably still have to interact with others and please them with your work, as you would a regular boss.
2. **Spend time marketing.** Network with others. Make friends in the industry so you will be able to gain advice and insight. Continue to look for new work, and reach out to prospective clients on a continual basis. Business will not come to you all of the time, so build a sturdy client base.
3. **Absorb resources.** Use books, Internet forums, and magazine articles to help you learn how to run a business. If you're serious about being in business, learn about marketing, accounting, and time management. **HBM**

Creatively Self-Employed

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a self-employed creative.

"I've never had a problem getting work, but I doubt my talents anyway. I've always felt like a fraud when it comes to professional work. Lately though, I've talked to other artists about it, and they all seem to go through a similar thing. That makes me feel a little better about myself," says Billy.

It's very common for artists — employed full-time or not—to doubt their work. Creative talents are manufactured from within, so dealing with rejection, for example, can be frustrating. Instead of letting things roll off their backs, many creatively self-employed individuals take the criticism personally.

Luckily, Billy hasn't had this problem. "I learned early in my career to ignore negative criticism. If a client doesn't like my work, I never take it personally. I may think they're completely wrong and secretly be annoyed with them, but their opinions on my work don't bother me," he says.

Nikita Prokhorov, 27, an associate professor of graphic design and freelance designer, says the creative industry can breed self-doubt, which is a normal part of the inventive process. "When you are...surrounded by a lot of extremely creative, talented, and unique people. There is a natural tendency to doubt your own work and ask yourself whether you really are good enough," he explains.

“...doubting one's talents comes with the territory of being a self-employed creative.”

Nikita says that one of the biggest challenges for young creatives is to get over self-doubt and generate confidence in their work. "If you give yourself wholly to your work and to your craft, your doubt will be replaced by confidence in yourself and your work," he says. Even though his students may hear this message, I think many have to go out and get their feet wet before they really believe in themselves. So, how do they do it? Start working — self-employed or not.

"Once someone saw the potential I had, they gave me a chance as a designer," says Calvin Lee, principal and creative director of Mayhem Studios (www.mayhemstudios.com). He says working in your industry helps to increase your confidence and business know-how, a surefire plus for those looking to take the creative plunge.

ORIGINS OF YOUNG SELF-EMPLOYMENT

For me, a few years in the corporate world not doing what I wanted encouraged me to



Instead of letting things roll off their backs, many creatively self-employed individuals take the criticism.

bust into self-employment at a young age. But what causes other younger professionals to go into business for themselves, especially in the creative industry?

"I had the goal in mind to be my own boss and be the best I can be since I was a kid," says Calvin, who adds that younger people today think a lot differently than when he was growing up. "Most of us back then wouldn't take chances. We would go after dreams or jobs that were safe. People today are more likely to go after their dreams and are risk takers. Today, people are more liberal and outspoken."

Joel Hurst, 34, an art director from South Carolina, says it's not a matter of generations, but a personal ideal. "There are always going to be those that go to school or choose a profession based on what is expected of them. I sure did. Luckily, I was able to figure out shortly after graduation that I never wanted to be an accountant, and that design and art are my passions. I have a useless degree, but I have a job I absolutely love."

THE DRAW OF FREEDOM

Ilese Benun, founder of Hoboken, New Jersey-based, Marketing Mentor (www.marketing-mentor.com), has a different take.

"I think young creatives are more open to self-employment at younger ages, because they realize that very few people have jobs for life anymore, and they also see the enormous free-

dom available by running their own business," says Ilese.

Even though she says there are pluses to self-employment at a young age, there can be disadvantages. "Unfortunately, what young creatives fail to see is the equally enormous responsibility that accompanies that freedom," says Ilese. "As a result, there are a lot of young (and old) creatives running unhealthy businesses and just scraping by, because they don't want to be a 'business person.'"

Armed with a valid point, Ilese sheds light on the importance of marketing and keeping a business strong. This is fundamental for anyone who considers creative self-employment, regardless of age. With practical business skills, your career as a creatively self-employed person will continue to flourish through retirement. **HBM**

Kristen Fischer is the author of "Creatively Self-Employed: How Writers and Artists Deal with Career Ups and Downs." She lives in New Jersey with her husband and cat, and has a whole year left until she hits the big 3-0.



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