


BECOMING A
HIRED
GUN



presented by von glitschka

Becoming a Hired Gun

by Von Glitschka

Let me start off with the most important, number one, universal rule for our industry:

Life is way too short for bad design. Thank you for coming that's all I have to share with you.

- DON'T SUCK!

I recently read this quote by the co-founder of Twitter Evan Williams and it speaks volumes in regards to how far we've come regarding mainstream design in all it's various forms.

"Good design use to make you stand out on the web. Now it's the price of entry."

The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

Every industry has them and the design industry is no exception. But the quality of a creative shouldn't be limited to the mere realm of aesthetics. It applies to smart strategic thinking, marketing, and a good business sense as well.

So while our aesthetic may be Good, our ability to facilitate sound marketing and garner business success for our clients may be bad or just downright ugly. Lipstick on a pig if you will.

This presentation covers specific areas a freelance creative (or any creative for that matter) needs to handle well in order to become a hired gun that other agencies will seek out, use and come back to on a regular basis.

- POST ANALOG DESIGN

The reality of our industry has fundamentally changed over the last two decades. The last ten years have firmly cemented a digital lifestyle. And this has effected our work flows, our skill sets, our marketing, and our own creative growth. At times it can be very overwhelming. In essence a reality shift has taken place.

Here's what Dutch designer Wim Crowel had to say about this.

Find Your Own Way

Our industry is filled with a diverse range of skill sets, and disciplines that we use daily to produce our work.

When it comes to methodology, what may apply well for one person may not be universal for all. So I encourage you to take what I share and make it your own, evolve it and find the specific methods that align with your core values and creative passions.

Develop that niche you work best in and you'll find your own way.

A friend of mine who knew what I was going to speak here commented:

"Aren't you just equipping your competition?"

LOL Well, yeah I guess I am. But I'm of the opinion that raising the bar industry wide will only make this a better industry to work in, not a worst one.

- THE FANTASTIC FOUR

We're going to cover four essential areas than any design can utilize to transform their creative career:

1. It's the Work Stupid

Your portfolio, where to show it and what to show.

2. Be a Smartist

Optimizing your creative potential by working smarter.

3. Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of New Clients.

Lock and load your promotions.

4. Destroying Plateaus.

Facilitating your creative growth.

I should point out that there's lots of overlap and some of points I'll make will apply to several if not all of these categories.

Truth be told, if you're weak in any one of these categories, you run the risk of weakening another. To quote a famous philosopher, you want to bring balance to the design force. (Anytime I can use a Star Wars reference I have to do it.)

- IT'S THE WORK STUPID!

Time to talk about portfolios. Your portfolio will make or break you. It's that simple. Remember, DON'T SUCK!

Your design work is your creative identity and as such you need to be consistent with it's management and more importantly it's quality.

Your Portfolio is like an Ad Campaign

You have to keep it consistently in front of the right audience in order to build a following, garner new recognition, and market yourself effectively. Putting your work online is the new normal.

Master of Your Domain

Gone are the days of physical portfolios, if your work isn't online than you're limiting your exposure and opportunity to get new work. And it goes without saying that it should be well designed.

You need to seek out and purchase your own unique domain name. This is easier said than done but doing so will go a long way towards branding yourself.

A unique and original domain be it your actual name, or a cleverly branded one will serve as a trigger point for people to recognize, remember and discover your business.

You want to turn your URL into a YOURL!

Think of your domain URL as a benevolent doppelganger, it should be seen where ever you show up be it virtual or real and work on your behalf 24/7.

- Email Signatures
- Credit Lines
- Social Media
- Interviews
- Embed in Downloads
- Posts
- Conversations
- Business Cards

These links will live a long time online and work as residual marketing to help you grow your business. We'll touch on this more in promotions.

Only Show Your Best Work

This may seem like a big DUH but many designers showcase marginal work. So when you post your work to your portfolio you want to only show your absolute best work period the end.

It's always best to show less work and keep the quality high. Hence DON'T SUCK!

You're selling and marketing your potential, not the marginal. If a client makes a bad decision and it degrades the final design on a given project, that's normal. And you can't always win those battles. But if you think another approach you created for the same project is stronger than by all means use that design in your portfolio instead.

It's your prerogative as a creative to model your creative perception, what you can offer a client, and where you can take them. Your portfolio isn't merely a showcase for the work someone else strong armed into existence.

You Get the Work You Show

Some of the best advice I ever received regarding my portfolio came from a designer / illustrator by the name of Craig Fraizier. I was sitting next to him at a conference looking at his new book and kept asking point to various images saying "I've never seen that one before." He looked at me and said "You get the work you show."

That really resonated with me. Don't expect someone to see potential, show them what you can and want to do. Don't wait for them to hire you out of mere chance, convince them visually of your desire and abilities. There's no such thing as spec work when it's for yourself!

It's your prerogative as a creative to model your perception, what you can offer a client, not merely showcase the work someone else strong armed.

"Designers are victims of the graphic precedents they create."

If you don't like doing something, than don't show it. Play your strengths, if you excel at something and enjoy doing that type of work, than that's what you want to put forward. Don't try to be something you're not.

All that said I have a mortgage, so I take on work for no other reason than to pay my bills. But this work rarely gets posted in my portfolio because it's simply not my best work. So I'm not going to show it because I'm not trying to get more of that type of work.

But today I'm going to share one with you.

- BE A SMARTIST

Optimizing your creative potential by working smarter.

The smartest thing to remember is...DON'T SUCK!

Develop an Inner Circle

As an independent creative we run the risk of being isolationists. A design shut in if you will. We all have moments where we wish we had someone we could share a business matter with and get some sound consultation.

And because of this type of need I've developed my own inner circle made up of fellow creatives and non-creatives that I can run any type of business or creative question by and get their wise counsel at any time. I suggest having at least five individuals in your inner circle.

These are the core characteristics I look for:

- They know me personally
- I respect them and their work
- Their ethics and morals align with mine
- They demonstrate business smarts
- Their willing to collaborate with me
- They have a sense of humor
- They have a depth of life experience
- They care about me and my family

I ask my inner circle to hold me accountable in the following areas:

- My core convictions both personal or professional
- To audit my business goals and dreams
- To critique my work or ideas
- Advise me on client relationships or pricing
- To help me balance work and family time
- To make sure I DON'T SUCK!

So make it a priority to form your own inner circle.

Pricing and Funding Your Design

A whole talk could be formed around the topic of pricing and quoting design work. I'm by no means a specialist in economics, but I will share two simple examples.

The first one is how you can approach quoting a project. How to reverse engineer a clients request for a quote and gauge it according to their business and the potential it will offer them to make money.

To price a Nike project I did some research and pulled up facts that gave my common sense a foundation to logically deduce a price for their project. Here is how I did it:

- World Series is a huge money making sports event
- 2010 Winning team attendance per game: 48,721
- Guesstimate on nation wide fan base: 12,000
- Total potential fan base buyers for t-shirt: 60,721
- Average price Nike sells a t-shirt for: \$30
- Actual cost per garment for Nike to produce: -\$5 (per shirt)
- Nike profit if sold to 10% of the fan base: \$151,800
- Taking a 3% cut of total to cover design cost: \$3,036
- I quoted the Nike project at: \$3,500 (Always quote higher)
- Nike agreed on a \$3,000 budget (Buyout)

Too many designers use the excuse of not having the money they need to do this or to do that. That is the reality of life for most people and design is no different. But it shouldn't hold a creative back in terms of pursuing an idea. Part of the creative challenge is to find a way to get it done.

But some times creativity needs funding in order to facilitate it. An easy way of doing this is to use the web site www.kickstarter.com to build a grass roots team of public venture capitalists who'll capture your vision and fuel your design ideas in a very practical way, they'll commit small amounts of money investing in your creativity.

In today's industry there is no excuse not to try to do something. The internet gives you the ability and tools to dream big and pursue them in very practical ways virtually to build a foundation for funding. All you have to do is try.

So embrace the fear of failure and go for it.

Super Sizing Your Clients

A client comes to you because they've decided you can help them. For example I recently had a client approach me about updating their existing brand logo. I could have done what they wanted and invoiced them when done but instead I audited their entire brand strategy including their website UI and the tone of their copywriting.

When I quoted their project I also suggested this may be a good time to overhaul everything and relaunch them with a fresh new brand identity. I already had the logo re-design in the bag so the worst that could happen is they'd say no.

The client realized this made a lot of sense and the budget tripled.

A smart designer will look beyond the immediate need a client brings to them and take into consideration the big picture for their clients business. This will not only lead to you making more money but also building long standing trust with a new client who realizes you have their best interest in mind.

hey didn't though, they agreed and the project total .

Your a Speedboat not a Cruise Ship

Large agencies get a lot of exposure, they work with massive budgets and multi-national brands but they are also big, bloated and slow to respond to fast changing trends. Think of them as cruise ships.

What many might not be aware of is that most of the creative work produced by large firms and ad agencies has been contracted out to small independent creatives or boutique firms i.e. speed boats.

Cruise Ships

- Big and slow
- Lots of overhead
- Too many managers
- Rigid methodology
- Lack of talent depth
- Waste lots of time
- Million dollar budgets

Speed Boats

- Small and fast
- Little to no overhead
- You're the boss
- Flexible work style
- Diverse skill sets
- More efficient
- Smaller budgets

It takes a cruise ship eight miles to shift course and turn, a speed boat can do that in a mere 105 ft. The same principle is true in regards to responding to trends in our industry. A cruise ship simply can't respond fast enough and that is why they hire speed boats so they can capitalize on them quicker than trying to do it alone.

If you position yourself with agencies as a go to source they can rely on, that will help them achieve the turn around and quality they need and there by make them look good they'll hire you. Just like all of us they search the internet, they click links, they follow people on Twitter etc.

So leave the comfort zone that is your dock and go cruising like the speed boat that you are.

- LIFE LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF NEW CLIENTS

Lock and load your promotions.

Turn SOI to ROI

Your sphere of influence (SOI) is the most effective way to grow your business and make profit (ROI: Return on investment) doing so. Moving into new areas of design and creativity is far easier when you can utilize on known contacts to help you navigate uncharted waters.

Each of us has an SOI filled with people in and outside our industry that is made up of fellow creatives, friends, vendors, people we've met professionally either directly or indirectly.

These touch points give you a larger reach than anything you could achieve on your own because everyone within your SOI has their own SOI and when combined can form a chain link promotionally that easily goes beyond your own SOI.

Designers aren't the only ones needing to promote their services and products, so audit your SOI find connections that you can combine for a common purpose and facilitate promotion that not only serves your need, but the needs of the other parties involved. When you do this you open up new potential horizons for promoting yourself without having to invest a lot of money or resources.

Learn from Stupid Criminals

When CSI goes into a crime scene their looking for trace elements of the ones who were there, the ones responsible for the crime that has taken place. Their search for the subjects has just began and they hope to find enough evidence to make that happen. A stupid criminal will give them that evidence and lead the police to their door where they'll be arrested.

I want you to be a stupid criminal when it comes to you promoting yourself. You need to leave evidence of your creative work in as many locations as you can online in order for potential clients to find you.

Promotion is a numbers game and you can increase your potential for work by increasing the exposure to your work. Share your work where ever and when ever you can. Participate in collaborative projects, fundraisers, curated image sites, offer to write articles etc. Your seeking a balanced saturation. And remember....DON'T SUCK!

Be Social, Be Yourself and Share

Social media assumes you want to be social. Lurkers are a reality but in order to leverage the viral power of social media in all its various forms you should just be yourself. No one likes someone who pretends to be something their not. If you're a jerk in real life than you might not have a lot a followers on Twitter but at least you're consistent.

If you're excited about your creative work, than share it. Have an insight that might resonate with other designers? Share it. Passionate about something and it inspires you, share that too. Sharing is what being social is all about, giving, not just taking. If you make this a habit you'll really enjoy sharing creativity online and it will server you well as a promotional vehicle whether that is your motivation or not.

When you share content that others like they in turn tend to share what you shared and that helps to promote your work in general as the information gets passed along from one person to the next. People tend to value shared information from people they already follow or trust so in essence it's better promotion than a shotgun promotion for example. And that's because it's truly a social one.

Social media whether it's through facebook, twitter or your blog should be engaging. It should facilitate conversation between yourself and the people you're sharing the content with. Because no one likes a one way conversation be it real or virtual.

Shaping Perceptions

In order for agencies to take your serious you have to present a serious ability to create on their level. You are your own brand so you need to build your brand equity. Your primary presence online should reinforce this professionalism and aesthetic. Whether you like it or not perception is everything when it comes to marketing yourself to this industry.

The place to be yourself and share personal creativity, insights, rants, or any other kind of essential nonsense is via your blog. The only real world project work I post on my blog is purely exploratory work that isn't in depth enough or to justify a post on my primary site. Everything else is either personal creativity, industry related rants or experimentation. All of which can be found from my primary site through a link but never posted there.

You'll Never Beat Laughing Babies

Promoting yourself online will help you land new clients and opportunities. Do the best you can, be consistent with it but always remember....DON'T SUCK!

That said in the strange dynamic that is the internet, your best efforts to promote yourself online will probably never come close to beating a laughing baby and his 5,000,000 views.

- DESTROYING PLATEAUS

Explore, dream and facilitate your creative growth.

It's too easy to become creatively complacent. Complacency breeds career plateaus. A plateau is a beautiful thing if you're talking about landscapes, but it's not so beautiful in context of a career.

You want to nuke career plateaus. When you do this it'll shake you up and help you move to the next level.

You're an App

If you own an iPod, iPhone, or an iPad than you're familiar with the apps you can use on such devices. These apps once purchased are in a constant state of improvement with the developers updating features and performance as time goes on.

You're an app. Meaning you should always be improving, fixing those buggy areas you know aren't good or proficient as they should be, upgrading your skill sets so you become more valuable to the ones who can hire you. And what happens to apps that aren't updated or become less usable over time? They get deleted. So you want to update or you'll just be deleted from consideration.

Play with TNT

TNT, try new things! It's a simple saying and it's a great way to push yourself out of a comfort zone and into new arenas. Most often it aligns with a passion or a new found interest. Don't ignore those interludes of curiosity, explore them, take them for a test drive and ignite creativity and growth.

Think of it this way, people love explosions. And design explosions are a good way to get you noticed, so blow up your stale routine, detonate the past, through a new type of controlled creative demolition.

- PARTING SHOTS

A few comments in closing.

I hope this presentation will help you pursue your own dreams and become the designer you want to be. If there's one point of reference I want you to remember it would be...DON'T SUCK!

One last point and we'll bring this to a close.

Get Fired Up

Sometimes it takes a drastic change in our day to day reality in order to make us see new potentials. I know that was true for myself. It was February 12, 2002 when I got fired. I won't bother going into all the details but suffice it to say that I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now if that had never happened.

I look back on it and I'm glad it happened to me because it forced me to move in new directions and grow well beyond the point I could of within the context of my former employers the previous 15 years in the industry.

So I'll leave you with this quote, which I feel applies and to a creative career as much as it does life in general.

"Success is a journey, not a destination." - Arthur Ashe

Thank you and remember...DON'T SUCK!