

PROCREATIVE: A BUSINESS GUIDE
FOR CREATIVE PROFESSIONALS

by

Louise Frank Pennebaker, B.F.A.

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Art
with a Major in Communication Design
December 2014

Committee Members:

Maia Wright, Chair

Grayson Lawrence

Jeffrey Davis

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Drew, for all his patience and for believing in me; my son, Robert, for giving up some “mommy time” so I could complete this project, and for being so good with whoever was babysitting him; my parents, Judy, Charles, Ed and Cathy, for their unwavering support; my mother and father in-law, Susan and Ward, for all their encouragement. I am beyond grateful and feel so blessed for all the love and support I have received in this process. Thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Maia Wright, my committee chair, for all her patience and thoughtful guidance. I would also like to thank my committee members, Grayson Lawrence and Jeffrey Davis for their time and feedback.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank all the professors that taught me during my tenure in the MFA Communication Design Program. This has been a wonderful experience, and without the knowledge and enthusiasm of my professors this degree would not be possible. I am extremely grateful to Claudia Röschmann and Christine Haney for their dedication to improving our program. I am also grateful to my MFA classmates, especially Maria Beane, for her support and guidance throughout this process, and April Wright, for sharing her thoughts and experience during our long commutes.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Current Data on Self-Employment in Creative Careers

A vast number of creative professionals choose self-employment or freelance careers as their primary source of income. A creative professional refers to anyone working in art, design, entertainment, writing, or other creative or artistic fields of work. According to Richard Florida, “there are several occupations where self-employed workers make up a much higher proportion of workers. These include: arts, entertainment and media, where more than one in four workers are self-employed.” In 2010, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that about approximately 29% of graphic designers were self-employed.

A variety of incentives attract creative professionals to self-employment, including: the ability to act as one’s own boss, the increased variety of clients and projects, and the flexibility in work hours and schedule (Ewer). As the Internet, social media, and online markets progress and develop, an increasing number of opportunities are available for self-employment and freelance work. Online journalist Edward Snow claims, “the majority of creative people will be freelance before long.”

To start a freelance career, creative professionals need to be equipped with the knowledge of the logistics of running a business. Although many design programs offer internship programs for students, there is a lack of instruction in the subject areas of business planning and management within art and design school curricula. In reference to a 2011 nationwide study by the arts alumni project, Repko explains, “Nearly 80 percent of [art professionals] reported that their arts education had taught them ‘very little’ or ‘not

at all' about financial and business management skills, according to the survey.” A small business can easily collapse without proper business knowledge and instruction. If creative professionals do not learn about this during their formal education, there are a number of resources that aid in business start-up. However, the problem with these resources is that they are text heavy, generalized, and intimidating. This thesis proposes that a business tool that uses visual cues, interactivity, and user customization can fill the educational gap that exists for creative professionals trying to learn about starting and running a business.

CHAPTER II

Investigation of the Problem

Methodology

Paul Nini's research-based creative process provides the methodology used in the design and completion of this project. Nini's design process consists of two phases: phase one involves investigation and planning, while phase two involves development and user research. In phase one of his model, Nini stresses the importance of initial research, which is significant for finding the proper design solution for this problem and defining desirable outcomes and objectives (117–129). For phase one of this project a comparative audit, interviews, and surveys were conducted to gather all necessary content. Phase two of Nini's method explores various solutions to the design problem, and tests the design solution through evaluative user testing and surveys. Following Nini's model, any of the processes can be repeated in an iterative cycle, in response to what is discovered during the research.

Comparative Audit

Phase one of the project began with a comparative audit. A review was conducted of available resources that aid creative professionals in starting up their own business, including a number of books, websites, and blogs. Following the review of these resources, an assessment was conducted to determine the value of their content and the format in which the information is presented. According to The Visual Teaching Alliance, "approximately 65% of the population are visual learners. It is also a fact that the brain processes visual information 60,000 faster than text." Based on these findings, an examination of the visual elements for each resource was included. The comparative

audit also includes an examination of the interactive and customizable elements of each business resource. The following resources were reviewed: *Small Business for Dummies*, the AIGA website, the Visual.ly website, the U.S. Small Business Administration website and the *Graphic Artist Guild Handbook: Pricing and Ethical Guidelines*.

Small Business for Dummies, a book by Eric Tyson and Jim Schell, is a comprehensive step-by-step how-to guide that helps individuals establish their own small businesses. This resource is informative, but the information is delivered primarily in text. It does not include visuals, illustrations, or checklists to assist a visual learner in understanding the information. The resource also excludes customization options that could enable the reader to sift through information that does not pertain to their particular business.

The AIGA website is another helpful guide to both students and working designers. The guide includes a vast amount of helpful information: a current survey of design salaries, job postings, agreement forms, and articles from designers and educators working in the field. Unlike other business resources, this one is interactive and customizable. Included in the site there is a section where you can view member portfolios. While browsing, the user can specify what portfolios they want to view by the creative field, timeline and project type. The site also has a forum where designers can ask one another questions. Even with the helpful tools available at this resource, there are still a few problems: First, it is specific to designers, leaving out other creative professions; Second, it does not directly guide users on how to start a run a business. Details about legal structure, accounting, and filing taxes are not included in a clear step-by-step instruction. Overall, the site is a useful resource because of the interactive and

search capabilities, but it does not include adequate instruction to guide a creative professional in starting or running a creative business.

An example of a more visual resource can be found at the infographics and data visualization website, Visual.ly. When “business” is entered into the search tool, a variety of infographics are returned as search results. The infographics range from topics of business card design to the importance of social media in business, but each one only illustrates one small aspect of owning a business. Even though the infographics are helpful and easy to digest, it is an incomplete resource for business start-up purposes because the information is so limited. There are no visual aids that act as an all-encompassing, comprehensive guide explaining the essential steps of starting a small business.

Another helpful resource available to creative professionals is the U.S. Small Business Administration website (www.sba.gov). The website covers a vast amount of information from writing a business plan to filing taxes. The biggest drawback of this site is the generalization of the given topics. There are no customizable aspects to the site, so the information is generalized in order to apply to many different types of businesses. This resource does provide a checklist of what is needed to start a small business, but there is no interactive component enabling the user to personalize the list.

Lastly, *Graphic Artists Guild Handbook: Pricing and Ethical Guidelines* is an essential resource for many self-employed creative professionals. The handbook includes extensive information for freelance designers, however the information is not presented in a format that can be personalized by the user. Additionally, there is no platform for users to engage with one another, and there are no visual navigation cues. Like other

guidebooks in this area, this source is also text-heavy, and does not engage the reader though visual methods.

Survey and Interviews

In a 2013 survey that I conducted with an exploratory group of designers and artists, only 12.5% of respondents were “very satisfied” with the resources available to help creative professionals start their own businesses. 66.7% were “somewhat” satisfied, leaving 20.8% either “not really” or “not at all” satisfied with the current resources available. When asked whether the resources were user-friendly and easy to navigate, only 4.3% were “very” satisfied, leaving 95.7% either “somewhat” or “not really” satisfied. When the group was asked whether the resources were visually stimulating, only 41.7% were “somewhat” visually stimulated, and 50% were either “not really” or “not at all” visually stimulated, leaving only 8.3% “very” visually stimulated by the resources available (see Appendix A for complete survey data).

In May 2013 I conducted a series of interviews with several different creative business owners. Each creative professional was asked a series of questions involving their experience opening a creative business and the resources that helped guide them along the way.

One of the questions included in the interview was, “What resources do you wish were available to help you, but you haven’t found out there?” Interviewee 3, a creative business owner, responded as follows: “I wish there was a clear resource for licensing businesses, taxes, gross receipt taxes, LLC; all that important but seemingly buried stuff. I’d also love a clear guide to creating work contracts and support for independent woman run businesses. I know there is a lot of information out there but have been unable (time

or energy-wise) to sort through it all.” When Interviewee 1, a retired creative business owner was asked the same question she responded: “I wish there was more Quickbooks [an accounting software program] software and accounting help for a small business like my own. It is essential to have book keeping down and be able to accurately assess the health and growth of your business with real-time data, but it did take me a few years to figure it out on my own.”

The interviews included the question: “What were your biggest fears about maintaining your business?” Interviewee 2, a printmaker and creative business owner, answered with a list that included: “I won’t be able to manage the business side” and “that I’ll mess up on my taxes.” Lack of confidence and lack of business knowledge can discourage creative professionals when they are first getting started.

Based on the survey and interviews about starting and running a small creative business, it is indicated that there is bewilderment among creative professionals about the details of business ownership. Whether it is the time dedicated to flipping through several different guides, struggling to find user-friendly accounting and studio management software, or gaining confidence in one’s ability to succeed in business, there are multiple issues to be addressed in designing a business guide to exceed the current resources.

Statement of Problem

The current resources that assist artists and designers in starting a business are limited in the ways the information is delivered to the viewer. Many of the resources are extremely text heavy, and offer little or no customization options. In order to rectify this limitation, it would be helpful to have a single resource that allows creative professionals to acquire this information in a personalized and visually oriented manner.

The majority of creative professionals in the exploratory group indicated that they are not “very” satisfied with the current resources available to aid them in starting a small business. It could be possible that the reason these materials are not receiving a more enthusiastic review is because they are so text heavy and rarely include engaging visual instruction. “The visualization of information is enabling us to gain insight and understanding quickly and efficiently, utilizing the incredible processing power of the human visual system” (Lankow, Ritchie, and Crooks). Kouyoumdjian explains, “Our brain is mainly an image processor (much of our sensory cortex is devoted to vision), not a word processor.” If our brains engage more with visual cue than with text, this supports the claim that the current business resources are too text heavy. Based on these findings, the proposed project must include visual elements to help the viewer understand and feel at ease with the information presented to them.

This thesis proposes that creative professionals would find business startup tools more engaging and informative if the information were delivered in a primarily visual format, using less text and more images, videos, and interactive elements. Including options to personalize the guide would enhance usability. Designing such a resource is intended to evoke greater interest, enthusiasm, and confidence about navigating the difficulties of starting and managing a successful creative business.

CHAPTER III

Design Development

Developing a Design Solution

Phase two of the project begins with developing a design solution to the stated problem. In order to address the lack of interactivity and customization revealed in the comparative audit, it was determined early in the design process that this business guide would require a web-based design. A website can offer a variety of features that a printed guide cannot: a user profile, a messaging system, an online forum discussion, and a paper-free filing system. It also enables the administrators to make necessary content changes in a timely manner. For example, if a new and improved accounting software comes to market, a website can easily be updated to display this information. If the guide were printed, the old and less effective accounting software would remain as the status quo, or the guide would be reprinted at great expense. A website enables users to access the most relevant and up-to-date content available.

The next step to developing a design solution is determining what information is imperative for the website. The U.S. Small Business Administration website, SBA.gov, includes a list of steps necessary for starting a business. The list includes items such as: writing a business plan, determining legal structure, registering your business name, obtaining a tax identification number, and registering your business for state and local taxes. The interviews summarized in Chapter I also revealed a need for help with bookkeeping, taxes, business licensing and determining legal structure. The Graphic Artists Guild states that “one of the most vital, but frequently neglected, aspects of being a graphic artist—which applies to all illustrators and graphic designers who function an

independent contractors—is marketing and self promotion” (14). Based on this information it is imperative that a marketing section be included in this website as well. Another way this proposed business guide will differentiate itself from other guides on this topic is through a user forum, where creative professionals can engage each other with thoughtful questions and feedback about issues surrounding their creative businesses.

Design Principles

One of the first items addressed when designing this creative business tool was the identity of the website. According to Pricken, “One of the most important creative strategies is to combine two concepts or objects that were previously unconnected, so as to produce something completely new” (55). When designing this business tool, Pricken’s strategy was used when creating both the name and the logotype. The name ProCreative is a combination of two words, professional and creative, bringing together two concepts to create one idea.

Visual hierarchy is another design principle implemented in ProCreative. According to Jones, “information that is organized with a hierarchy in mind will always be more effective at communicating than unorganized information.” All of the various steps necessary to start and run a successful creative business can be daunting, so ProCreative simplifies and organizes the information into 6 categories: Getting Starting, Bookkeeping, Marketing, Taxes, and Forums. The principle of visual hierarchy guides the designer to arrange these categories in a way that will stand out and take precedence with the viewer. Visual cues, size, and color will emphasize the importance of these categories over subsequent categories.

Another design principle considered in the design process was the use of a grid.

According to Vinh, “grids allow an audience to predict where to find information, which aids in the communication of that information” (9). ProCreative was designed using a six-column grid, which enables enough flexibility to organize a diverse set of information, while maintaining the predictability necessary to present information in a user-friendly manner. The grid also enforces a symmetrical layout, reinforcing the simplicity this website strives for. If starting a creative business can be confusing and complicated, then ProCreative needs to be simple, predictable, and easy to navigate.

Preliminary Designs

The identity, color palette, layout, typography, and visual cues of ProCreative underwent a series of design iterations before arriving at their current manifestation. For the visual cues, the first iteration was a comic-like depiction of each business step (see figure 1). This approach was ultimately discarded, considering that an initial aim of the website was to clarify information; presenting a page filled with a variety of drawings and colors seemed counterintuitive to the goal of design simplification. The next series of visual cues took the form of hand-drawn illustrations. Each page would include an illustration that represented the business information or start-up step (see figure 2). Because of the various facets to starting a business, one illustration per page could not address or communicate all the tasks to be completed. The illustrations were friendly and inviting, but were more decorative and less helpful. They did little to enhance user experience or comprehension. The next visual design style examined was the use of icons. According to Mertz, “With icons you can quickly sum up what your text is about.” Based on the design objective to simplify and clarify business information, it was decided that the use of visual icons was the most successful approach.

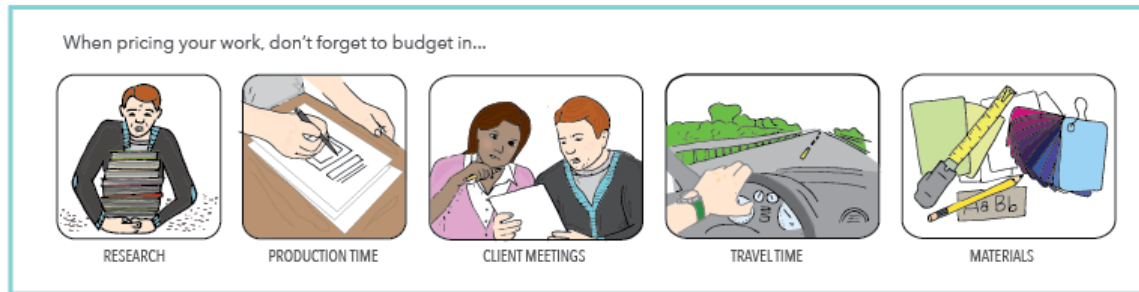


Figure 1. Discarded idea, using illustrative scenes to give instruction

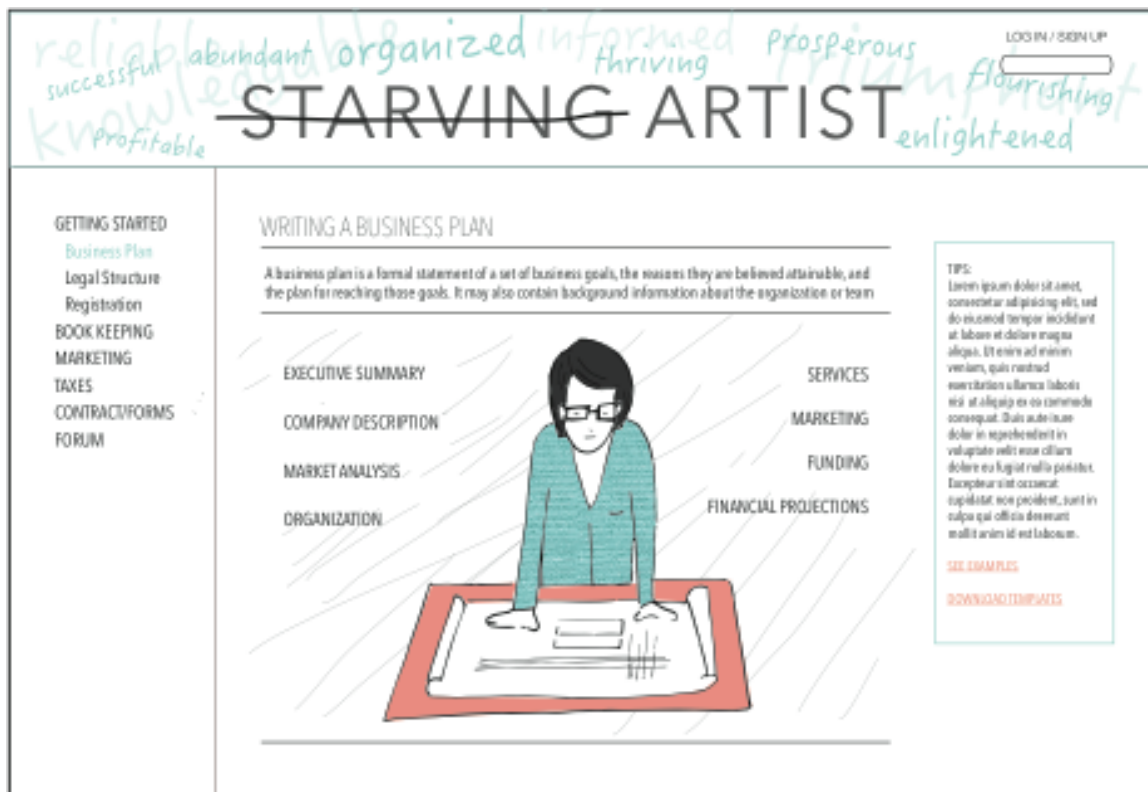


Figure 2. Discarded idea, using illustration for individual website pages

The typography of the site was also reformatted throughout the design process. The identity of ProCreative was first designed with a straight-forward sans serif typeface. Bosler claims that “typography becomes the key component in ensuring the logo communicates its message clearly” (64). After examination of the use of a sans serif it was decided that a friendly, yet professional slab serif typeface would be a better fit. The navigation and copy of the website also went through a series of typographic

transformations. At first the text used a traditional serif typeface and the navigation used a thin, condensed sans serif type. The letters of the condensed typeface were so condensed, that the navigation became difficult to read, detracting from the usability. The text of the site was changed to the more readable sans serif typeface, Helvetica. According to Bosler, “Helvetica is also a universal web font, so whatever brand of computer the end-user may have, it will always display correctly” (65). Another reason to use Helvetica is that the simplicity of the letterforms reflect the simplicity of how information is delivered on the website.

CHAPTER IV

Design Outcome

Home Page

The Home page of the website acts as the introductory page; here the user has the opportunity to read the informational text about what ProCreative is and how it can be used (see figure 3). The Home page follows the same underlying grid as the rest of the site, but the navigation buttons are unique in size, arrangement, and placement from the other pages on the site. According to Steve Krug, “Since a large part of what people are doing on the Web is looking for the next thing to click, it’s important to make it obvious what’s clickable and what’s not” (37). ProCreative uses the Home page to capture the attention of the user with buttons that are oversized and prominent, emphasizing that this is a visual and interactive guide unlike other business start-up resources. The size and placement of the buttons also allow the user to become familiar with the icons before entering the other pages of the site. Each icon represents one of the six primary categories of the website: a stop light icon represents the Getting Started page, a pen and pad icon represents the Bookkeeping page, a megaphone icon represents the Marketing page, a hand and dollar icon represents the Taxes page, a document icon represents the Contracts/Forms page, and a message bubble icon represents the Forum page.

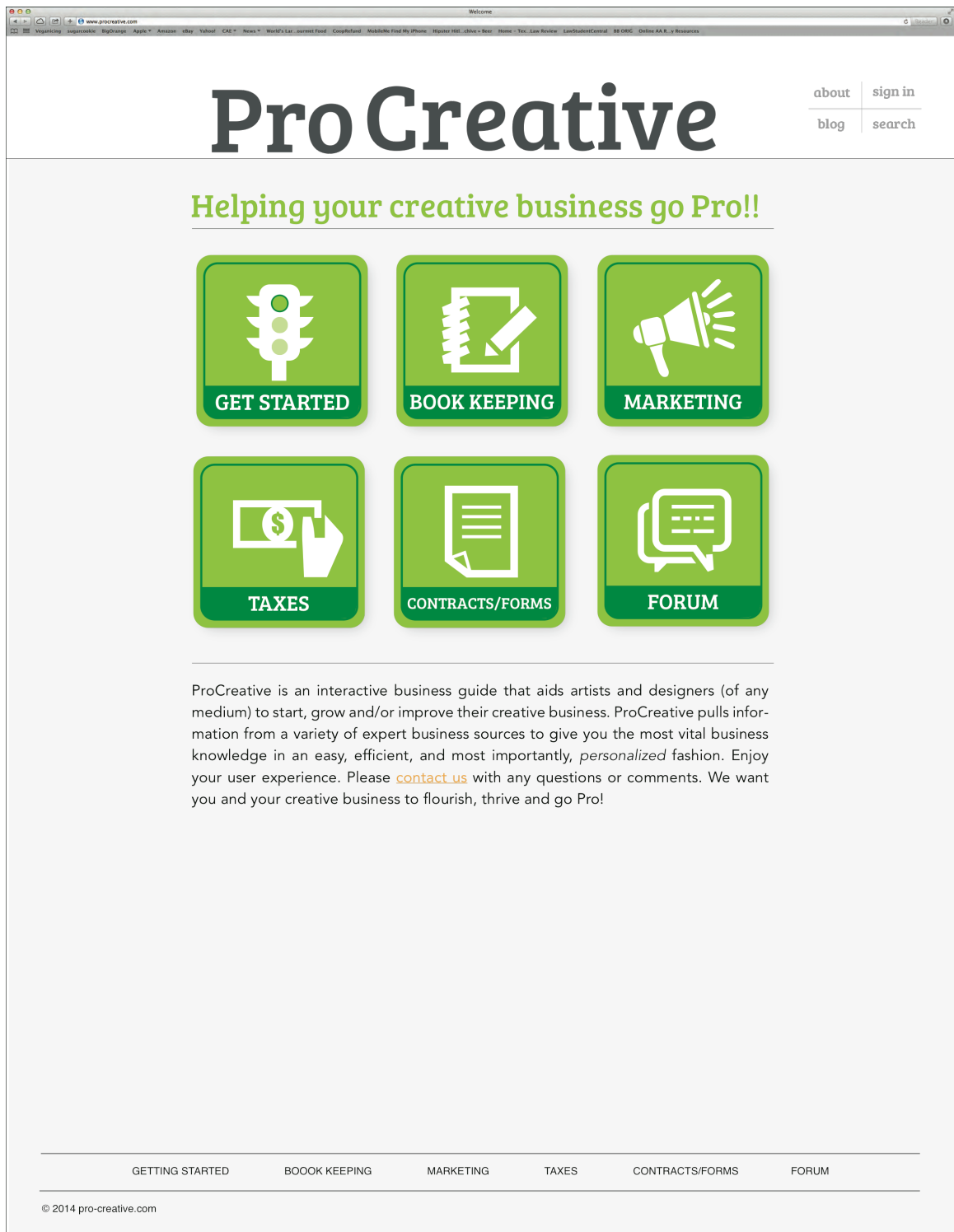


Figure 3. Home page

Getting Started

The Getting Started page introduces the primary steps to starting a creative business and also introduces how the navigation of the rest of the site will be set up. Under this section of the website, there is a set of sub-topics. Each sub-topic relates to items that are necessary when starting a business, including: business plan, legal structure, registration, and business checklist.

The first step in the Getting Started section is developing a business plan. First-time users will be directed to this page and will be required to download a business plan template. The business plan page illustrates the eight key items that need to be included in a well executed business plan: executive summary, company description, market analysis, organization/management, service/product, marketing/sales, funding requests, and financial projections (see figure 4). Users can learn about the details of each key item by clicking on each icon. The information provided is from the U.S. Small Business Administration website. A description of each item will appear, as well as a link to sample items and template downloads.



Figure 4. Business Plan page

When the user clicks on legal structure, they are asked to fill out a customizable drop down form. The form asks what state the user is in, the projected income range of the business, the type of business, and the number of employees in the business. Based on the individual user's answers, the best business legal structure appears on the bottom of the page (see figure 5). There are six different types of business structures: Sole Proprietorship, Limited Liability Company, Cooperative, Corporation, Partnership, and S Corporation. Figure 5 displays how the webpage would appear if Sole Proprietorship were selected. The informational text included was retrieved from Michael Spadaccini's *Business Structures*. If the user is not interested in personalizing this information to their particular business needs, and only wants to browse the different legal structures, they can click the "more about legal structures" link.

GET STARTED
 BOOK KEEPING
 MARKETING
 TAXES
 CONTRACTS/FORMS
 FORUM

[sign in](#)
[contact](#)

[blog](#)
[search](#)

[business plan](#)
[legal structure](#)
[registration](#)
[check list](#)

Legal Structure

Is your creative business going to be a sole proprietorship or a distinct legal entity? Fill out the form below to find out what business structure is best for you and your business.

[more on legal structures](#)

TEXAS

< 50k/yr

craft product

of employees

FIND

We Suggest a Sole Proprietorship

The sole proprietorship is the simplest business form under which one can operate a business. The sole proprietorship is not a legal entity. It simply refers to a person who owns the business and is personally responsible for its debts. A sole proprietorship can operate under the name of its owner or it can do business under a fictitious name, such as Nancy's Nail Salon. The fictitious name is simply a trade name--it does not create a legal entity separate from the sole proprietor owner.

The sole proprietorship is a popular business form due to its simplicity, ease of setup, and nominal cost. A sole proprietor need only register his or her name and secure local licenses, and the sole proprietor is ready for business. A distinct disadvantage, however, is that the owner of a sole proprietorship remains personally liable for all the business's debts. So, if a sole proprietor business runs into financial trouble, creditors can bring lawsuits against the business owner.

If such suits are successful, the owner will have to pay the business debts with his or her own money. The owner of a sole proprietorship typically signs contracts in his or her own name, because the sole proprietorship has no separate identity under the law. The sole proprietor owner will typically have customers write checks in the owner's name, even if the business uses a fictitious name. Sole proprietor owners can, and often do, commingle personal and business property and funds, something that partnerships, LLCs and corporations cannot do. Sole proprietorships often have their bank accounts in the name of the owner. Sole proprietors need not observe formalities such as voting and meetings associated with the more complex business forms. Sole proprietorships can bring lawsuits (and can be sued) using the name of the sole proprietor owner. Many businesses begin as sole proprietorships and graduate to more complex business forms as the business develops.

[GETTING STARTED](#)
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Figure 5. Legal Structure page

The Getting Started section of ProCreative also provides instruction on how to register a business with the state and federal government. Registering a business varies from state to state and business to business. ProCreative addresses the various tasks by asking the user to complete the drop down form, specifying the state in which they intend to register their business, their business legal structure, the number of employees in the business, and the type of name of the business. After the user completes the form a step-by-step list appears (see figure 6). Each listed item is accompanied by an explanation of how and where to complete the tasks. If pertinent, the explanation will include links and/or forms necessary to complete the task. If the user is unable to complete all of the registration tasks at that moment, there is an option to add those items to their personalized to-do list.

[sign in](#)
[contact](#)

[blog](#)
[search](#)

[business plan](#)
[legal structure](#)
[registration](#)
[check list](#)

Registration

The necessary registration steps will vary depending on the type of creative business you would like to open. Please select from the form below to find out the steps you need to take to register your business.

TEXAS

sole propri-

assumed name

1

FIND

STEPS	HOW TO COMPLETE STEP	add to to-do
1 THINK OF BUSINESS NAME	Remember, you may get more business if your business name reflects the type of work you do	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 CHECK AVAILABILITY OF NAME	Check through the search engines in the links below Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts U.S. Patent & Trademark Office	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 COMPLETE ASSUMED NAME CERTIFICATE	complete now save for later	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 APPLY FOR THE TEXAS SALES TAX PERMIT	Apply for your sales tax permit at the link below http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxpermit/	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Figure 6. Registration page

To-Do List

When the user chooses to add an item to their to-do list, they are directed to their personal profile page (see figure 7). Computer interfaces should aid users in their tendency to multitask. Many interfaces do not account for this, influencing the user to rely on their short-term memory or sticky notes for information they need in the future (Mandel). The to-do list section of ProCreative enables users to save tasks that they have not yet completed, ensuring that essential steps of starting or maintaining their business are not forgotten. On other instructional pages of the website, the user is given the option to add to their to-do list, so they do not have to return to this page every time they see a new task they need to complete: this feature can be seen on the registration section of the Getting Started page, the Marketing page, and the Bookkeeping page.

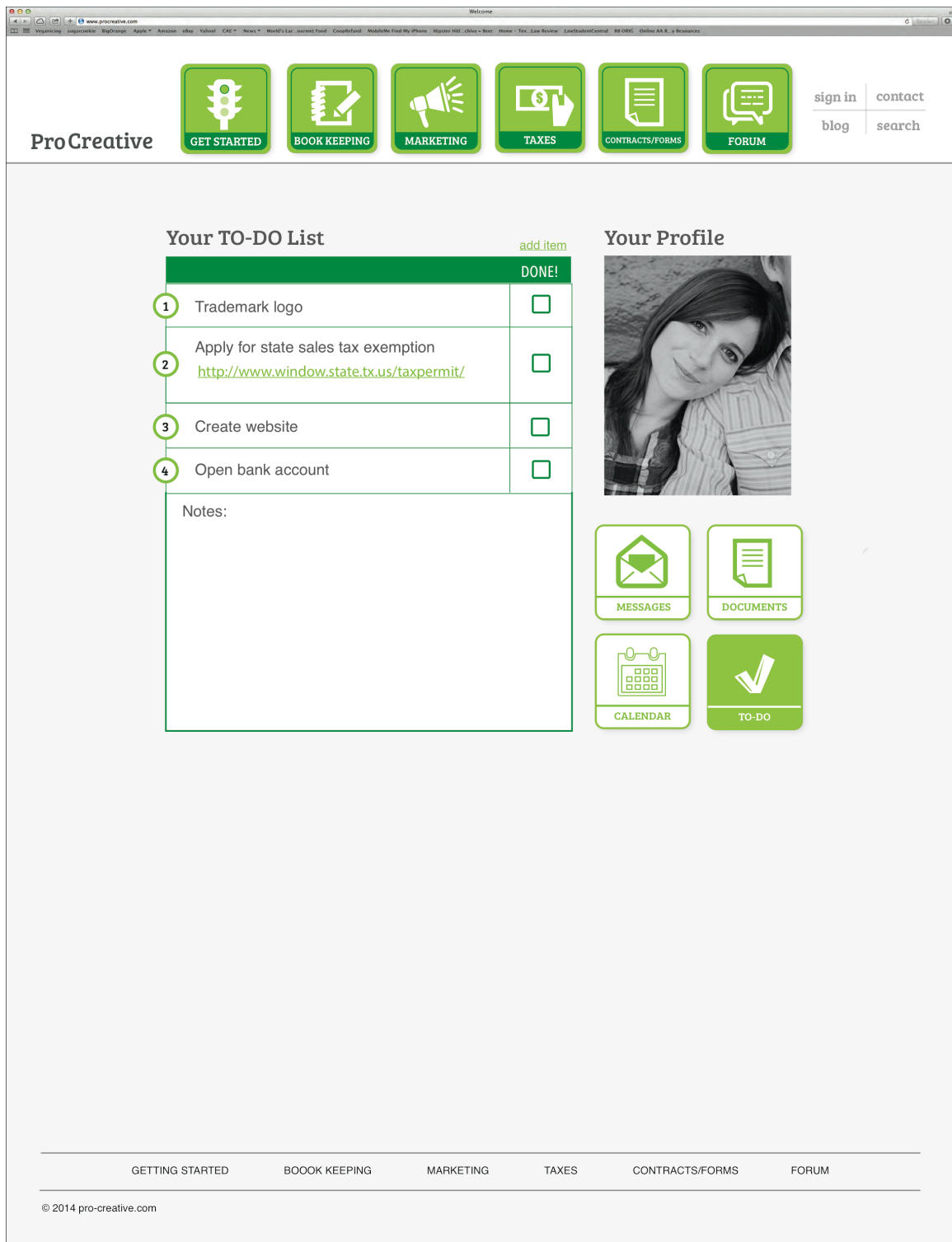


Figure 7. To-Do List page

Bookkeeping

The Bookkeeping page of ProCreative includes information about the basics of bookkeeping, studio management, filing systems, and a place to download bookkeeping templates. The user can navigate through these sub-topics by either clicking on the bookkeeping icon, or using the sub-navigation below the icons. When the user clicks on bookkeeping basics (see figure 8), another step-by-step list appears for the user. The list includes a video of how to organize your invoices, receipts, and other accounting papers. Similar to the Registration page, the bookkeeping basics section provides the option for the user to add the listed items to their to-do list.

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[basics](#)
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[book keeping templates](#)

Book Keeping Basics

If you want your creative business to flourish, it is essential to have an organized and efficient book keeping system in place. Below are some introductory steps to help you get started.

		add to to-do list
1	OPEN A BANK ACCOUNT No matter the size, it can be helpful to have a separate bank account for your business. This way you can keep track of purchases and deposits, making it easier when reporting taxes.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	ORGANIZE RECORDS It is always important to have a proper filing system for your receipts. See the helpful video we found that can give you an idea about filing receipts, invoices, and other important documents.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	PICK YOUR ACCOUNTING TOOL There are many options out there for accounting software. In hopes to simplify this process we recommend that you either use an Excel Spreadsheet or Quickbooks. You can use our Excel template below for free. If you feel like your business is ready because of volume of work, you may want to upgrade to Quickbooks.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	SELECT A STUDIO MANAGEMENT TOOL There are a few tools that can help you manage your studio. The industry standards for graphic design are Clients & Profits and FunctionFox.	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Figure 8. Bookkeeping page

Taxes

The Taxes page of ProCreative addresses issues of tax filing and tax deductions. On the Filing Taxes section of this page, the user is asked to give specific information about their creative business: what state the business is in, the legal structure of the business, and the number of employees working in the business. With the user's information, ProCreative gives the specific dates and forms associated with filing state and federal taxes (see figure 9). The user can click the listed dates to sync the tax deadlines to their personal calendar, enabling an email reminder at each tax deadline. The user can also download and/or save the necessary tax forms to their user profile. ProCreative also advises the user about reputable tax filing websites to assist them with their annual federal income tax.

GET STARTED

BOOK KEEPING

MARKETING

TAXES

CONTRACTS/FORMS

FORUM

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[filing taxes](#)
[deductions](#)

Filing Taxes

Depending on the State that you are doing business from, the legal structure of your business, and the type of business you run, there will be varying tax implications for your business. Select from the option menu below to find out how to file your business taxes properly.

TEXAS

sole proprietorship

1

FIND

Your state and federal tax filings

STATE SALES TAX	FEDERAL QUARTERLY INCOME TAX	FEDERAL ANNUAL INCOME TAX
<p>File your state sales tax return at the end of each quarter. Save to your calendar by clicking the date below.</p> <div> <div>APRIL</div> <div>JULY</div> <div>OCT</div> <div>JAN</div> </div> <div> <div>20</div> <div>20</div> <div>20</div> <div>20</div> </div> <p>Download the Texas Sales and Use Tax Return below.</p> <div> complete now save for later </div>	<p>ONLY FILE IF YOU HAVE MADE A PROFIT THAT QUARTER</p> <p>File your estimated federal income tax return at the end of each quarter. Save to your calendar by clicking the date below.</p> <div> <div>APRIL</div> <div>JUNE</div> <div>SEPT</div> <div>JAN</div> </div> <div> <div>15</div> <div>15</div> <div>15</div> <div>15</div> </div> <p>Download the Texas Sales and Use Tax Return below.</p> <div> complete now save for later </div>	<p>Every year on April 15th, you will need to file your annual Income Tax Return. In your personal return you will need to file for your business as well under Schedule C, Form 1040.</p> <div> <div>APRIL</div> <div>15</div> </div> <p>There are some fantastic web-sites out there where you can file your taxes online. Three great resources include:</p> <p> TURBO TAX HR BLOCK TAX ACT </p>

GETTING STARTED

BOOK KEEPING

MARKETING

TAXES

CONTRACTS/FORMS

FORUM

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Figure 9. Filing Taxes page

The Taxes page also includes information about tax deductions (see figure 10). To maintain continuity with the website's main navigation, the tax deduction section uses icons as well. The icons enable to user to easily understand which items can be used as tax deductions. Clicking on an icon reveals detailed information about each particular deduction category. For instance, when the user selects the automobile icon, they are provided with an explanation of auto exemptions, as shown in figure 10; the information for this sub-section is sourced from an article by Dana Dratch.



Figure 10. Tax Deductions page

Marketing

The Marketing page of ProCreative enables users to obtain information about marketing basics, marketing through social media, and business development. The marketing basics section also includes a drop down form that produces a customized list of basic marketing steps. The user first selects the type of business they are in and the size of the business. Based on the user's selection, a list of marketing basics appears. The list includes necessary tasks that need to be completed, as well as examples of successful marketing tools from other businesses in that particular creative discipline. The examples will vary, based on the size and type of the user's creative business. Similar to the Getting Started page and the Bookkeeping page, the user is given the option to add the items from the marketing list to their to-do list (see figure 11).

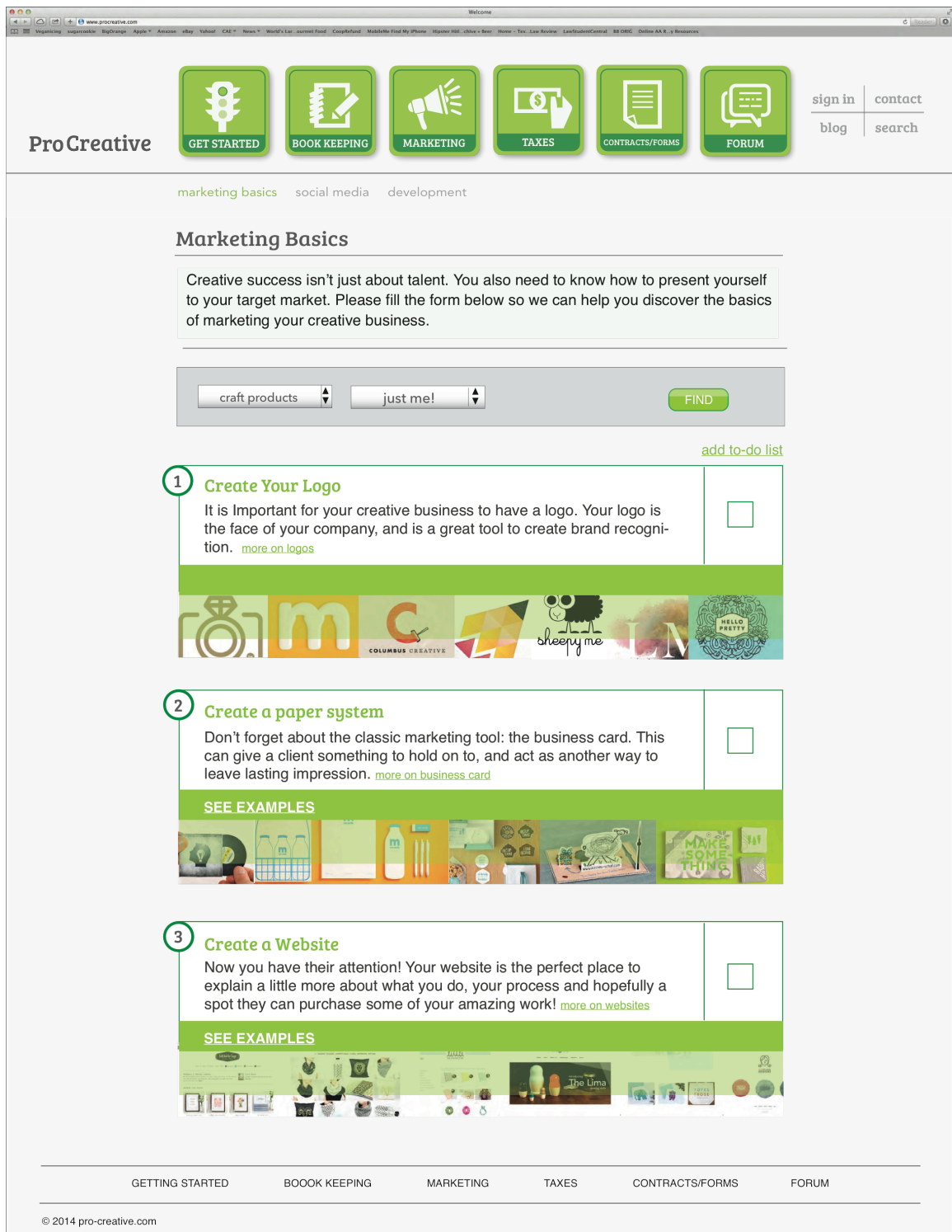


Figure 11. Marketing Page

Contracts/Forms

The Contracts/Forms page of ProCreative is designed to help creative professionals obtain the appropriate documents when providing services or products for their clients. Users can also find tax forms on this page as well. The page is divided into three sub-categories: service contracts, seller's contracts, and tax forms. The user can navigate through these sub-categories by clicking the sub-navigation listed directly below the main navigation. As displayed in figure 12, when the Service Contracts navigation is selected, six different icon buttons appear on the page. Each icon represents one of the six categories: a computer icon represents the web design section, a palette and paint brush icon represents the art/illustration section, a keyboard represents the writing section, a pen, pencil and eraser icon represents the graphic design section, a camera icon represents the photography section, and a person with a message bubble icon represents the consultation section. Maintaining consistency with the main navigation and the tax deduction section of the website, each icon correlates with the service being offered. Once a section is selected, a list of contracts and forms will appear, including: estimates, change orders, vendor relations, client surveys and questionnaires, and proof forms. The user will then be able to browse, download, save, or print the various documents.

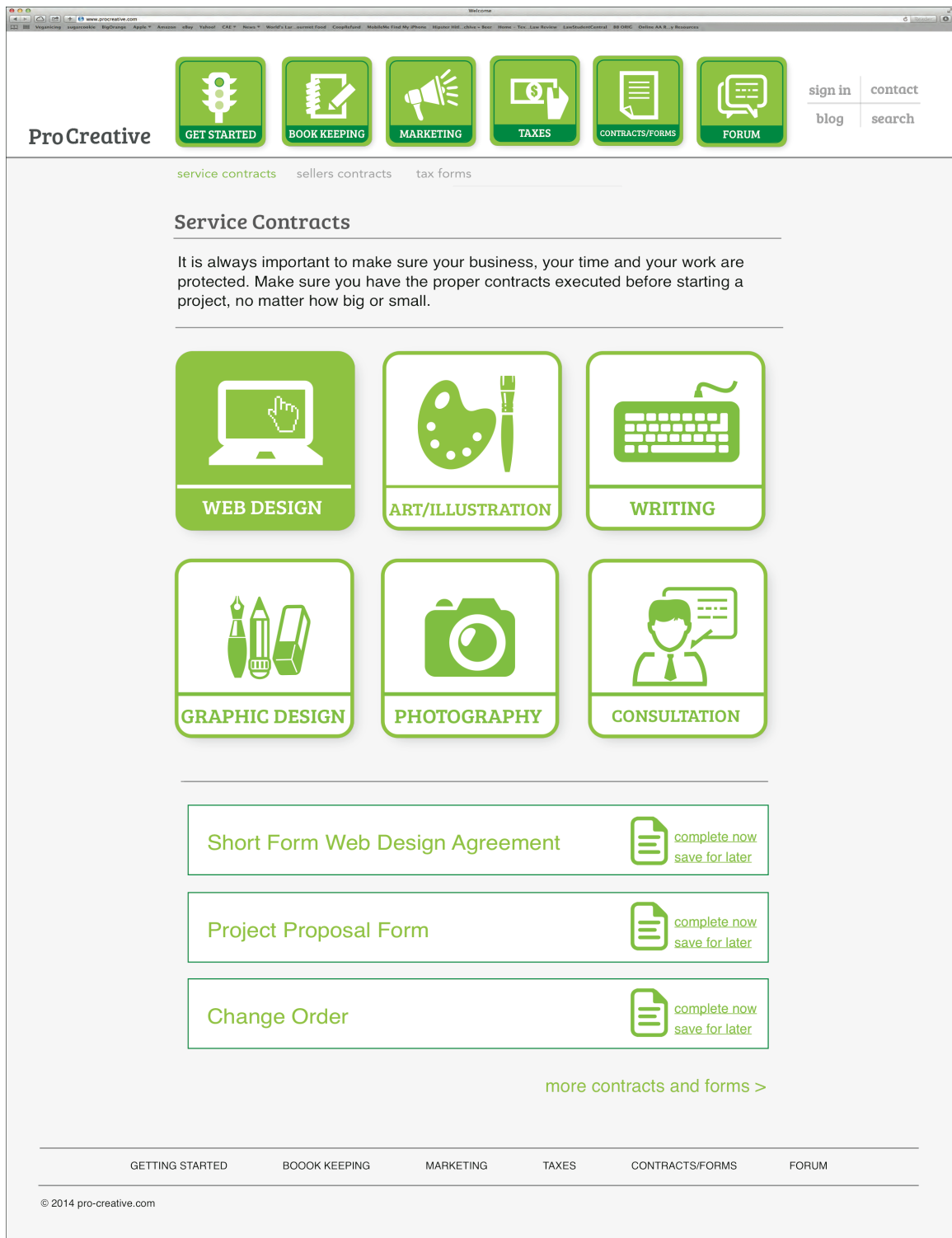


Figure 12. Contracts/Forms page

Forums

The Forums page of ProCreative enables creative professionals to discuss business problems, share personal experience, and question one another about the various intricacies of creative business ownership. The Forums page includes a search feature that enables users to find particular topics they are interested in. A drop down form allows the user to select both the desired creative discipline and the desired post timeline. This filtering mechanism is intended to enable the user to sift through unnecessary and undesired posts (see figure 13).

[sign in](#)
[contact](#)

[blog](#)
[search](#)

FORUMS

[add topic](#)
[add post](#)

	<p>What should I charge for something that took me 15 minutes?</p> <p>created by RoyGBiv</p>	
	<p>Quickbooks or Excel?</p> <p>created by RedBlue</p>	 last comment by RedBlu
	<p>Do not use BizMarket!</p> <p>created by Pencil23</p>	 last comment by blankpg
	<p>Where can I find great used art supplies?</p> <p>created by rightclick</p>	 last comment by logowiz
	<p>Where can I find great used art supplies?</p> <p>created by brownfox</p>	 last comment by AAart
	<p>Anyone ever skipped paying their taxes?</p> <p>created by ben5342</p>	 last comment by starvingA13
	<p>Any good national craft markets in June?</p> <p>created by craftbaby</p>	 last comment by rockps2
	<p>Need help with Illustrator?</p> <p>created by mousewiz</p>	 last comment by blankpg12

1 2 3 4 5 6 ...15 ...25 ...35

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Figure 13. Forums page

CHAPTER V

User Feedback

Phase two of Nini's methodology includes user testing of the design prototype. The user testing portion of this thesis proved to be a helpful tool in determining the strengths and weaknesses of the website. Five artists and designers from a variety of creative fields were selected to take part in the user testing, which consisted of a task-based analysis of the site, and a simple survey after completion. The results were consistent between users, indicating the strengths and failings of the website design (see Appendix C for user survey results).

Strengths

The user testing indicated that the visual icons were one of the website's notable strengths. When user one viewed the home page, she claimed that she was excited by and drawn to the icon buttons. The theory that our brains are drawn to visual cues, as discussed in Chapter I, bore out consistently during the observation of user testing. The survey asked the users if the navigation icons were helpful when browsing through the site. Each user answered that the navigation icons were either "very helpful" or "helpful."

The customizable aspects of ProCreative were identified as another overall strength of the site. Between the drop down information forms and personalized to-do list, each user felt their specific business needs and questions were addressed. Users one, two, and three were particularly enthusiastic about the user drop down forms. They explained that the drop down forms enabled them to save time and energy by not having to sift through the amount of information available in other business guides. The users appreciated that the information was uncomplicated and specific to their personal

business needs. When asked in the user survey if the customizable aspects of the site were “helpful,” “neutral,” or “not helpful,” 100% of the users answered that the customization was “helpful.”

As identified in Chapter II, the current resources available for starting a business are overly complicated and one objective of ProCreative is to simplify this information for creative professionals. Based on the findings in user testing, the website achieved this goal of simplification. The survey given after the task-based analysis asked: “Does ProCreative simplify the business start-up process?” to which 100% of the users answered “yes.”

Weaknesses

The task-based portion of the user testing revealed a major weakness of ProCreative in the Getting Started section. The sub-topics of “getting started” include: business plan, legal structure, registration, and business checklist. When users were asked to complete the task of finding the best legal structure for their business, there was hesitation as to where to find the information. Four of the five users selected the Contracts/Forms icon, but the information was actually located under the Getting Started icon. There was much confusion about the intention of the “getting started” category, and what information would be found there. User three explained that in other guides she has used, the getting started category is something she skips because the information is too basic and unnecessary.

Contrary to the research cited in Chapter II, an unforeseen weakness of ProCreative was the exaggerated buttons on the Home page, Tax Deduction page, and the Service Agreements page. Users four and five found the oversized buttons to be a

nuisance. Because of the size of the icon buttons, the user had to scroll down to find the information (see figure 14). Users four and five expressed that without being prompted as to where to go on the website, they might have missed the text information delivered on those pages. ProCreative is intended to help users find information, not make it more complicated. Based on the task analysis, the oversized buttons are inconsistent with the goal of creating a simple, user-friendly site. A solution to this problem would be to design the buttons to match the size and location of the buttons on the subsequent webpages.



Figure 14. Exaggerated buttons

The last weakness found while observing user testing was the secondary navigation (see figure 15). During user testing, the users did not notice the secondary navigation on their own. The secondary navigation was intended to help users find their location on the site, while also creating a quick link to the sub-topics within each category. The users explained that this goal could be easily accomplished by enlarging the type of the navigation.

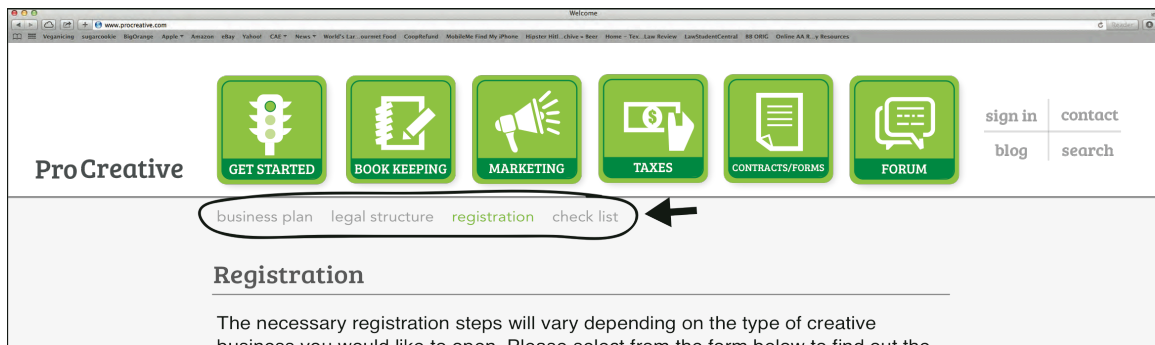


Figure 15. Secondary navigation.

CHAPTER VI

Future Research

Website Improvements

Following Paul Nini's method, future research entails improving and refining the website design based on the findings of user feedback and research. To improve ProCreative several of the website weaknesses would need to be addressed: the Getting Started page, the oversized icon buttons, and the secondary navigation on each page.

Based on the confusion surrounding the Getting Started page, it is clear that the icon needs to be relabeled, and the information reorganized. The first proposed solution would be to delete the Getting Started page and replace it with two new pages: Legal Issues and Planning. Legal structure and registration would be housed under the Legal Issues page, while the business plan and business checklist would be housed under the Planning page. The second proposed solution is to create coach marks on the Getting Started page, directing first-time users to begin browsing from that point.

A simple solution is available for the oversized icon buttons: decreasing the size. On the home page, the icons could be resized to resemble the navigation on the other subsequent pages of the website. This adjustment creates more space on the home page, leaving a variety of design and informational opportunities. The possible design solutions include: the website blog as the Home page, a visual diagram of the most important steps to starting a business, a news feed of events and opportunities available for creative entrepreneurs, etc. The buttons on the tax deduction and service contract pages would also need to be addressed. Once the user clicks on one of the large buttons, the icons could decrease in size, enabling the user to see the information that each button

delivers while still seeing the original icons. The size of the secondary navigation would also need to be adjusted. Instead of decreasing in size, it would need to be increased. The size adjustment would not only draw attention to the secondary navigation, but would also act as wayfinding for the user.

Staying consistent with Nini's model, the website would undergo another series of modifications and testing. The problems discovered during the first round of user testing would be implemented into the prototype, and then tested among an expanded sample of users. Future user testing would measure time on task as well as user comprehension.

Website Expansion

Having a guide for the legal and accounting issues is important while starting a business, but there are several other aspects of running a business that can be overlooked. One of those aspects is staying motivated once one starts a business. Being a business owner requires dedication, hard work, and often getting through demanding periods of financial strain. According to Wagner, "8 out of 10 entrepreneurs who start businesses fail within the first 18 months." ProCreative could explore what causes this high failure rate and provide tools to help creative professionals stay motivated. One possible implementation could be a newsletter or news feed of creative business success stories. Another possibility is to include a success/failure section in the forums, encouraging users to discuss what ideas have helped or hindered business growth.

CHAPTER VII

Conclusion

The available business start-up guides are informative and helpful resources, but they do not meet the need for a guide that is visual, interactive, and customizable.

ProCreative meets these criteria, therefore providing a more useful resource for creative entrepreneurs who respond better to visual, customizable, and interactive interfaces.

During user testing it was asked, “Do you wish ProCreative was available to you when you started your business?” to which 80% of respondents answered yes. ProCreative offers creative professionals a customizable tool that addresses their specific business needs. Information is personalized by location, creative discipline, and business size, which enables the user to bypass information that is not relevant to their personal business venture; user testing indicates that this is a helpful feature of the site.

In addition to offering a personalized experience for each user, ProCreative delivers the information in a simple, visually oriented manner. This caters to visual learning, in order to engage the user and to facilitate rapid visual communication of the site’s contents. Krug explains, “One of the very few well-documented facts about Web use is that people tend to spend very little time reading most Web pages. Instead, we scan (or skim) them, looking for words or phrases that catch our eye” (22). The visual cues designed into the site enable users to scan all available topics without missing important information.

With some modifications and continued design iterations, ProCreative could be a helpful resource for creative professionals who are intimidated by the complexities of starting and running their own business. ProCreative provides all the necessary steps to

start and run a business, delivering them in a way that is informative and user-friendly.

The exploratory user testing group responded positively to the ease of use of the website; the user-friendly design is intended to make users feel confident in the steps they need to take to start their creative businesses.

Artists, designers, and other creative individuals are not the only ones who could benefit from ProCreative. Many entrepreneurs looking to start or improve their businesses could use ProCreative as helpful tool. As stated in Chapter I, “approximately 65% of the population are visual learners” (The Visual Teaching Alliance). If over half the population consists of visual learners, then ProCreative has the potential to help many types of business owners. The need for simplicity, ease of use, personalization, and visual stimulation are not limited to the owners of creative businesses. The business start-up resources that ProCreative offers can be utilized not only for creative businesses, but for any business venture.

APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX A: SMALL BUSINESS SURVEY

Appendix A exhibits a survey that was conducted in November of 2013. The survey included an exploratory group of 24 creative professionals. The survey asked a total of 10 questions in reference to issues of starting and/or running a small creative business.

Table A1. Question 1: Have you ever attempted to start and/or have started a small creative business?

Answer Choices	Responses
yes	95.83 %
no	4.17%

Table A2. Question 2: When starting your creative business, how many different resources (books, websites, blogs, interviews, etc.) did you use to help you get started?

Answer Choices	Responses
One to two resources	29.17 %
Several different resources	45.83%
Too many to count	25%

Table A3. Question 3: How satisfied are you with the existing resources for starting your own art/design business?

Answer Choices	Responses
Very	12.5%
Somewhat	66.67%
No really	12.5%
Not at all	8.33%

Table A4. Question 4: What resources do you wish were available to you when you started your art/design business, but you haven't found out there?

Respondents	Responses
Respondent 1	I would love to find an older leatherworker, who has been practicing the art for decades, to take me on as an apprentice. This seems to be less and less the way information is passed down
Respondent 2	It would be nice to have more workshops put on by HOW or Communication Arts etc on the subject. They have creative conferences as well as conferences for InHouse Designers, but not ones dedicated to Freelancers/Business Owners that I know of.
Respondent 3	Step-by-step checklist by state. Each resource seems to be written in a very general way that encompasses all states and/or situations.
Respondent 4	It would be nice to have access to insights from people who have already tried and succeeded/failed.
Respondent 5	I real cost budget breakdown
Respondent 6	No kidding at all, an easier way to take care of finances. I hate doing my own, let alone being the one (of the two of us) who takes care of all the business side. Finances, taxes, filing...no bueno. I've actually considered dropping the business before during tax time. On the front end too. Invoicing, keeping track of inventory, ordering, quoting Respondent 7prices...yada yada yada. It was all a matter of trial by fire. I've actually turned down a couple jobs just because I wasn't willing to mess with the biz side of it at the time. It really takes a lot out of the creative work time I have on a job. Can you tell I'm not a huge fan? If I were to add one more thing, I would say exposure. I guess there are outlets out there, but they're saturated and you can get lost in the mix just because someone didn't happen to be on ___ website right at the time your work cycled through with the barrage of other stuff.
Respondent 7	I wish that my university would have offered a course or at least, more practical information on running a freelance business.
Respondent 8	Best resources for shared time-tracking, billing, and file-sharing/backup. Currently, we use Quickbooks, Asana, and Dropbox as well as Passpack (secure password sharing for our clients' projects) the most to coordinate work between parties and remotely.
Respondent 9	probably more educational financial resources. most of those resources are so dry it's hard to even want to start sifting through it all. i think for artists/designers stuff has to be visually exciting, quick, bullet-points, easy, etc. most artists/designers i know have short attention spans and really just do the business stuff bc they have to to be able to do their art. so the business side suffers a lot because of that. also a lot of artists buy into the idea that being "starving artists" is completely okay and normal when it doesn't have to be that way at all. (that's not on topic but...)
Respondent 10	More help in establishing a price guide for work, possible examples... Help establishing a timeline, like a typical flyer should take no more than X hours.

Table A4- Continued

Respondents	Responses
Respondent 11	I'm still figuring out the best method for tracking hours, creating invoices and contracts, and dealing with financials - that's the least creative part of the work, and I wish there was a straight forward guide to how to do this correctly right off the bat. It's very easy to get lazy on this and ultimately because you aren't correctly tracking your time, you end up working on projects for way too long and not being able to bill for all of it due to the nature of the project's budget. I am still doing my own taxes because I'm paranoid that I haven't set things up correctly for my business and don't know where to begin to work with someone else! That is going to have to change soon, as things continue to grow, and it's probably the scariest things - I honestly think it's holding my business back! I would love a very clean, pretty, smart resource online that walks through how to be an owner of a small creative company and what steps to take to make sure all your financials, copyright, contracts, taxes, etc are covered so you can grow.
Respondent 12	I wish there were free consultants to show me how to use quick books. More free personal tutoring
Respondent 13	More clear-cut info on taxes
Respondent 14	I'm a big connector and mentor person so I've traveled a non-linear, less structured path. Perhaps non-cheesy networking opportunities and mentor match-ups.
Respondent 15	There are plenty of resources out there. If anything, more face to face resources would be better, as a static blog is not as informative as a knowledgeable person.
Respondent 16	List of tasks - especially legal and accounting tasks to accomplish, be aware of
Respondent 17	Online forums with Q&A threads, for asking specific questions and getting advice.
Respondent 18	A comprehensive book/file of documents like invoices, contracts, inventory, etc. that are specific to graphic design or an arts-related product.
Respondent 19	None
Respondent 20	Accounting, bookkeeping, project tracking related to creative businesses. All the stuff that creatives don't like to mess with.

Table A5. Question 5: Have there been any specific books, websites, or other resources that have helped you in your quest to start and/or maintain your art/design business?

Respondent	Responses
Respondent 1	I wish there was one great answer, but for me it has been a combination and watching other businesses grow, seeing what has worked for them (and not worked for them), taking community offered classes on topics like the general starting/running of a business, to more specifics aspects, like crowdfunding campaigns. Also, Youtube is my best teacherfriend.
Respondent 2	Yes, other creatives and business owners, even business owners that are in other fields. It truly takes a business mindset and set of skills that I feel were not taught in the communications program that I attended in college. Business majors received this knowledge, so you almost had to minor in business to learn anything about it. AIGA is a great resource to read articles about Freelancing/business ownership.
Respondent 3	David Baker
Respondent 4	Adrian Shaughnessy's "How to become a Graphic Designer without losing your soul" is my favorite. Also, "Designers are Wankers", "Studio Culture", and GraphicDesignBlender.com
Respondent 5	Graphics Artist Guild Book AIGA website
Respondent 6	I hope it doesn't sound trite, but word of mouth (over a period of years and slowly building relationships) has been probably the most consistent. Etsy has been suggested, but I just haven't gotten the itch to sort that all out. There's a shop here in Austin, Parts and Labour
Respondent 7	The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators has been invaluable in teaching the business side of freelance illustrating for children's books/magazines.
Respondent 8	elembee.com (i think that's the name of the blog) has useful info. also, i like the alt summit channel because of the online classes. usually, i'll follow links on twitter if they sound interesting and like they might help. i also like to talk to other photographers to see how they are making their businesses work. i look at a lot of other photographers websites and blogs to see what *seems* to be working and what doesn't seem to be working. that's all surface stuff though... it's hard to really know if they're truly succeeding or not.
Respondent 9	City of Austin Small Biz Development program
Respondent 10	Can't think of one specifically...! I find a lot of inspiration from businesses and websites that I enjoy, and often they give little insights into their work habits and resources. However, none of them are created specifically just for starting your business - except for the few that offer paid workshops, but I haven't done one of those yet (they are mostly geared toward how to use photoshop or SEO for your blog).
Respondent 11	Mostly I found inspiration from other small businesses websites.
Respondent 12	Lots of creative entrepreneur-focused websites, such as Design Sponge, Jena Coray, and others along those lines.
Respondent 13	I find the nonprofits in my field are very helpful. Austin Bat Cave, Austin Film Society. Also, for me the festivals provide opportunity. Austin Film Festival and SXSW.
Respondent 14	Not really.
Respondent 15	It was a while ago but there are some books about women and small businesses
Respondent 16	GAG guide AIGA website Friends Mentors
Respondent 17	Etsy.com
Respondent 18	"Craft Inc." by Meg Mateo Ilasco
Respondent 19	Comm Arts, How Magazine
Respondent 20	The only resource that I found that had relevant resources was AIGA.

Table A6. Question 6: Do you find the resources that help artists/designers start and maintain their own business user-friendly and easy to navigate?

Answer Choices	Responses
Very	4.35%
Somewhat	69.57%
Not really	26.09%
Not at all	0%

Table A7. Question 7: Do you find the resources that help artists/designers start and maintain their own business visually stimulating?

Answer Choices	Responses
Very	8.33%
Somewhat	41.67%
Not really	41.67%
Not at all	8.33%

Table A8. Question 8: Once you got started, how satisfied were you with the resources available to help you expand your creative business?

Answer Choices	Responses
Very	4.17%
Somewhat	50%
Not really	37.5%
Not at all	8.33%

Table A9. Question 9: Why start your own creative business?

Respondent	Responses
Respondent 1	To have the creative freedom to organize my day/life/goals around my greatest strengths and passion. To feel a real sense of fulfillment, even if I'm barely making ends meet at first!
Respondent 2	Freedom in terms of hours, amount of money you can make, your opinion is the final one in terms of what is presented.
Respondent 3	in charge of your own destiny, creative freedom, thinking that you can do it better than others, nurturing younger designers
Respondent 4	For greater control. To do the work you want to do. To create your own projects. To deal with clients directly. For independence. To have your hands on every part of every project.
Respondent 5	It was my passion and my dream to have my own business.
Respondent 6	I love what I do. Creative/Artsy businesses are far too hard to not love them. I think you have to love it enough to be willing to do it for free, otherwise you are probably in the wrong business.
Respondent 7	Even if the client isn't ideal, the money isn't great, or even if you're hired to do work that isn't really stimulating, there's almost always a feeling of satisfaction in completing something. Maybe more so accomplishment, but then I guess that doesn't make a whole lot of sense if I just said the client is bad, the money's bad, and the work is meh. Getting from A-Z is good though
Respondent 8	To have the freedom to choose the clients/projects for which you work, set your own hours & vacation times. To own the work you create, work with a broad range of projects, rather than a narrow scope...essentially, freedom and choice.
Respondent 9	I wanted to be self-employed, and it's much more financially viable as well as creatively flexible to work for myself than for another company. I find it very rewarding to work directly with clients and manage my own projects and schedule. The flexibility for travel and etc. is also great.
Respondent 10	freedom. get to attempt to live the life i want and create work that inspires me/feels right.
Respondent 11	There was a need in a particular niche in Austin and the timing was perfect!
Respondent 12	It gives you control, freedom, flexibility, and is empowering to create what you envision from scratch. It's a really challenging, rewarding venture to take on!
Respondent 13	You can do what you love and have the power to create your own schedule
Respondent 14	It's fun and I prefer to work for myself.
Respondent 15	No bosses to steer or block your own creative vision.
Respondent 16	Freedom, flexibility, your own mission
Respondent 17	I enjoy the autonomy of working for myself. Flexible schedule. I can combine several different kinds of creative pursuits and keep growing as a designer - not locked into one single job description.
Respondent 18	Because I have a deep desire to be creative and share my creative outlet with the world. It's the best feeling seeing my work bring joy to others. Period.
Respondent 19	Creative freedom
Respondent 20	To work for myself and to grow something significant.
Respondent 21	To be able to deliver a product that clients need in the manner that you feel is best for their needs, and to have the ability to control that process. There is great satisfaction in knowing that you've helped a company succeed, and in the process you have the opportunity to teach, mentor and coach younger creatives and employees on your staff. If you're business brain never stops or sleeps, and you constantly have ideas to do things better, then you might need to start your own business.

Table A10. Question 10: Why not start your own creative business?

Respondent	Responses
Respondent 1	There is a huge risk in not knowing where your next paycheck is coming from and initially, at least for me, that is exactly why I have maintained my "safety net job". I want to feel confident that I can support my desired lifestyle, at least eventually. Knowing these risks, some people would feel it is unwise to start your own creative business vs. finding a stable job.
Respondent 2	Dealing with billing hassles, proposals, promoting your business. All of the unfun creative tasks :)
Respondent 3	risk, stress, not knowing where your next project is coming from, making payroll, responsibility to ensure those you hire can still have jobs, lose the privilege of working on projects because you're too busy running the show.
Respondent 4	You will have to deal with clients directly. ;-) For money. For fame and recognition. It is really hard, and not for everyone. You are probably going to be poor for a while, if not forever. it is scary and you are the only one who can make it happen—there is not a support system or backup.
Respondent 5	Overhead and operating expenses and the admin part of the business is more consuming than anyone realizes. I was spending more time operating the place than being creative.
Respondent 6	Very unstable and crazy hours.
Respondent 7	Because I occasionally like to eat... In seriousness, maybe the stability? Having a source of income that you can count on, as opposed to the stress of not, really can take it's toll
Respondent 8	HEALTH INSURANCE, difficulties in building your business and finding work, it's really hard to turn your work brain off when you work from home, it's hard to say no to jobs when you aren't sure when the next job will come along...essentially, it's more of a struggle and can be more stressful.
Respondent 9	there's a lot of hustle. you have to wear a ton of different "hats". all the responsibility falls on you. lots of pressure.
Respondent 10	It's hard to sell and design at the same time. Prepare for client overload and perhaps have a few creatives you can call on when the work begins to overload.
Respondent 11	Sometimes it's a bit lonely, the work never stops, there is no guarantee of success (financially or emotionally) - but I think it's still worth it! It's an adventure :)
Respondent 12	You should, but you shouldn't if you are not self motivated.
Respondent 13	Lack of finance and the constant audition for the next project.
Respondent 14	Too difficult, cumbersome, and that general feeling of it being a hopeless pit.
Respondent 15	It's expensive! and hard to find clients sometimes.
Respondent 16	The pay is unreliable, no benefits. Have to keep hustling to make sure you stay busy and are bringing in enough income to support yourself.
Respondent 17	It is a ton of work. It's a lot to keep up with. It can be filled with disappointment and struggles..
Respondent 18	Often times, the business management part takes up more time than the creative part which is why one starts it in the first place, and it can become unsatisfying in that regard.
Respondent 19	It requires a strong element of business development and basic sales. If you're not into that, find a partner that is -- or you'll be disappointed.
Respondent 20	If you're happy where you are and find great fulfillment in your current position, then you may not need the challenge or stress of starting your own creative business.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWS WITH CREATIVE BUSINESS OWNERS

Appendix B exhibits 3 interviews that were conducted in May of 2013. Each interviewee had experience owning his or her own creative business. The interview consisted of 7 questions.

Table B1. Question 1: What was the most challenging aspect of starting your business?

Respondent	Response
Interviewee 1	Most challenging aspect, setting my prices for services for sure. I started off too low.
Interviewee 2	Feeling comfortable marketing my work, and for me, just finding my niche in making what I want to, while filling a void in things that people want to buy. Its hard when you think you're work is great, but being unsure if it's something other people will love enough to buy. Also, finding a price point which works for the amount of money/time/effort/ and supplies that I'm putting into it. I still haven't made a profit at all. I'm only making enough to cover my studio fees. My ultimate goal is for this year is to sell at places like paper source...national level. but still manageable.
Interviewee 3	The most challenging aspect might be balancing work-time from not-work time. When working for yourself the boundaries are really grey, and often I find myself working from coffee to wine without leaving my computer. But part of that balance comes from work flow, organization, and understanding your own work ethic in order to be more efficient. I think that just takes time. And there will always be those long days, but they balance out the lighter days :)

Table B2. Question 2: What resources do you wish were available to help you, but you haven't found out there?

Respondent	Response
Interviewee 1	I wish there was more Quickbooks software and accounting help for small business like me own. It is essential to have book keeping down and be able to accurately assess the health and growth of your business with real-time data, but it did take me a few years to figure it out on my own.
Interviewee 2	Maybe this is a problem of mine, and why I haven't succeeded financially yet, is I haven't read books. I am bored by reading about how to be successful and I just want to be making things. Maybe that's the artists curse....Natalie is brilliantly smart and is just one of the lucky ones who enjoyed doing both of those things.
Interviewee 3	I wish there was a clear resource for licensing businesses, taxes, gross receipt taxes, LLC; all that important but seemingly buried stuff. I'd also love a clear guide to creating work contracts and support for independent woman run businesses. I know there is a lot of information out there but have been unable (time or energy-wise) to sort through it all!

Table B3. Question 3: Have there been any books, websites, or other resources that have helped you along the way?

Respondent	Response
Interviewee 1	AIGA online website was a big help and the Graphics Artist Guild
Interviewee 2	The websites I look at are more for inspiration. Pinterest and blogs have been a great resource for popular imagery as a use launching pad for what kind of products are selling. Etsy is always a good place to start as well. They highlight featured sellers so you can see what products are most popular.
Interviewee 3	This book has been awesome: http://www.amazon.com/Graphic-Artists-Handbook-Pricing-Guidelines/dp/0932102158 Jessica Hirsch has great resources on her site too: http://jessicahische.is/heretohelp

Table B4. Question 4: What advice would you give another artist/designer looking to start their business?

Respondent	Response
Interviewee 1	Have a clear idea of your business focus and really make a business plan and stick with it and also have an exit plan for 4-5 years down the road if the business is not working out as well. Also a clear idea of the upfront cost and operating cost; these numbers are normally higher than most people anticipate.
Interviewee 2	If you are nervous about marketing, make friends who can help you. I have been given advice about stores that might be a good fit, and an in to stores I wouldn't know about because they know the owner, or shop there frequently. So networking actually is important.
Interviewee 3	Take the time to really write out what you want your business to be, who it is for, what you want to do, and how you want to be perceived. It's really easy to let that stuff fall to the side, but I think the more defined you are, the more confident you are, and the more your clients feel that too. It's always nice to have a little reminder for yourself in writing (or ultimately your branding) for those days when you feel like you're walking backwards and don't know what you are doing - just visit your site and remember!

Table B5. Question 5: If you could start from the very beginning, is there anything you would do differently?

Respondent	Response
Interviewee 1	YES! I would I ever. I would not taken on so many pro-bono or “free-bie” discount projects in an effort to get started. Too many people take advantage on young start-ups and think they are helping by asking them to do free work for PR. I wish I had said, “no” to more people and left room to manage the business side more.
Interviewee 2	I would start with quickbooks, that has been a disaster. It doesn’t work on my computer...(after \$350 of upgrading my operating system so that it would, spending hours on the phone with quickbooks support, eta etc etc) and I still have nothing to organize my taxes. I basically have an excel spreadsheet. I will eventually get it. But right now...I kind of just don’t feel like it. (horrible...I know) Maybe start with enough money to pay someone to do it?? ha!
Interviewee 3	I would be more confident in myself and my work. Being in the creative field it’s so easy to be competitive or feel like you aren’t good enough, but it’s as important to push yourself to become better as it is to pat yourself on the back. I think people are attracted to something that they can tell someone has pride in. (that said, taking criticism and input gracefully is an absolute must!)

Table B6. Question 6: What kept you motivated to keep moving and doing all you can to grown and improve your business?

Respondent	Response
Interviewee 1	The belief I was providing a good service to so many people and I enjoyed my work.
Interviewee 2	I love making my own things. Exploring my passion and everything I can do with it is a blessing. I am so soooooo lucky that I can spend more time on this than another job. I know a lot of people aren’t as fortunate, that keeps me going. I have to take advantage of this time in my life to get this business profitable so I can keep doing it later.
Interviewee 3	I read a lot of blogs and follow many designers in all different venues (fashion, interior design, calligraphy, flower arrangement, web programming) so I stay pretty inspired by all those good folks. It doesn’t hurt to have clients be really happy with the product you created for them! That’s the best motivation.

Table B7. Question 7: What ultimately made you decide to move on from your business?

Respondent	Response
Interviewee 1	Ultimately it was a lifestyle balance. I wanted more freedom to be with my young kids and not have the stress of the day-to-day management of a business
	What are your biggest fears in starting this journey?
Interviewee 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That it won't succeed. 2. that people won't like my work. 3. that I won't be able to manage the business side 4. that I'll mess up on my taxes. <p>Starting your own business might be more scary than it is fun sometimes. I wake up every morning with a little bit more anxiety than I ever have. But it's still worth it!</p>
	What were and are your biggest fears about maintaining your business?
Interviewee 3	<p>Losing that reliable paycheck! That pit in my stomach that work will stop and I won't have any more projects is still around, but I feel more and more confident every month and know that the only cap I have financially is placed there by myself. Ultimately losing that constant paycheck has been more liberating and freeing than I ever could have imagined.</p>

APPENDIX C: USER TESTING

Appendix C exhibits a survey conducted in September of 2014. The exploratory group included the 5 participants in the user testing of ProCreative. Each participant is involved in some artistic or creative practice, and each had varying degrees of business ownership experience.

Table C1. Question 1: Were the navigation icons helpful in browsing through the site?

Respondent	Response
User 1	Very helpful
User 2	helpful
User 3	helpful
User 4	Very helpful
User 5	Very helpful

Table C2. Question 2: Does ProCreative simplify the business start-up process?

Respondent	Response
User 1	yes
User 2	yes
User 3	yes
User 4	yes
User 5	yes

Table C3. Question 3: Did you find the customizable aspects of the site helpful?

Respondent	Response
User 1	helpful
User 2	helpful
User 3	helpful
User 4	helpful
User 5	helpful

Table C4. Question 4: Compared to other business start-up tools, how accessible is ProCreative?

Respondent	Response
User 1	More accessible
User 2	Same as other business start-up tools
User 3	More accessible
User 4	More accessible
User 5	More accessible

Table C5. Question 5: Do you wish ProCreative was available to you when you started your business?

Respondent	Response
User 1	yes
User 2	yes
User 3	yes
User 4	Not applicable
User 5	yes

Table C6. Question 6: How often would you go to the ProCreative website?

Respondent	Response
User 1	occasionally
User 2	often
User 3	often
User 4	very often
User 5	occasionally

Table C7. Question 7: What pages of ProCreative did you find most helpful?

Respondent	Response
User 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book keeping • Taxes • Contracts/Forms
User 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taxes
User 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contracts/Forms • Forum • To-do List
User 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting started
User 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contracts/Forms

Table C8. Question 8: Have you seen another business start-up tool like ProCreative

Respondent	Response
User 1	no
User 2	no
User 3	no
User 4	no
User 5	no

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