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Resourceful Designer Episode 327: 10 Steps to Toward Design Business Success.

Whether you're just starting out your design business or thinking of starting 1 or you've been at this for a while, There are many things that you have to do, things to consider, things to implement, things to strive for, and so much more. Important factors that can ensure your success. And today, I wanna share 10 of these things with you. Things that you should keep in mind. You should strive to do all 10 of these.

But even if you just do a few, It can go a long way to helping your design business. Now I'm gonna get right to them, and I just wanna let you know these are in no particular order. Pick and choose, do a couple of them, or do them all. It's entirely up to you. So number 1 is skill development. As a designer, you need to continuously hone your design skills. It's up to you to stay updated on what the latest trends are, what's happening around the world of design, what software is new, what software is available, what sort of techniques people are using, and everything that goes into the designs that we make. Now you can do this by Reading blog articles, by getting magazines, following websites, or listening to podcasts.

There you go. You've already checked this one off your list. There are so many great resources out there for skill development. It's just up to you to find the ones that you like, and make sure that you Visit them on a regular basis in order to keep your skills up to date. This is a fast moving market. Think a year ago, AI wasn't even considered a thing. And now very few designers are not affected by it in some way. Now you can either let those things go by the wayside or embrace them and learn how to use them.

And that's just one small aspect of the skills that you need to hone and keep up to date as a designer. Because the more you do, the higher the quality of work you'll be able to provide to your clients. So that's number 1, skill development. Now number 2 is portfolio building. If you wanna build a successful design business, you wanna ensure that people find you, like you, and hire you, you need to show them a compelling portfolio. And in this portfolio, you need to showcase your best work. And not just your best work, but the work you want to do. Your best work may be a logo that you designed.

But if you've got no ambition to design logos, then don't include logos in your portfolio. Your portfolio should include the type of work that you wanna be hired for and not include the type of work that you really don't enjoy doing, no matter how good you are at doing it. Because many clients will wanna see your portfolio before even considering hiring you. And your portfolio will serve as a powerful tool to attract potential clients that have the type of work that you're showcasing. So demonstrate your capabilities and attract the right type of clients by what you showcase in your portfolio. Now number 3 is selecting a target market. It is so much easier to succeed in this business If you are able to identify your target market or call it a niche to focus your efforts on. Now I know you may not think that niching is your thing.

You wanna be a generalist. Well, even a generalist will have a certain target market. I just yesterday found out about a designer in my local area who is a generalist, but She also targets people in the, let's call it, the mystic space. She is a self proclaimed witch, And that is the clientele she's going after. So she designs anything they want, but that's the type of people she want. She wants people who are okay or believe in the mystic side of this world and want that sort of creative person working on their design projects. So even though she's a generalist when it comes to design, she has already picked her target market, the people that she wants to work with, and she has tailored her services accordingly. Now you can do the same thing.

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I know many female designers out there who specifically target female entrepreneurs. Or there are other designers who maybe target the tech space. They are a generalist designer, but they specifically wanna work with people in the tech space or the financial space or the automotive or the gardening space. Now maybe that's not for you. Maybe you're saying I don't want to narrow myself down like that. Well, I'm just wanna let you know that it is a lot easier to attract clients when you do narrow yourself down. And you don't have to niche down drastically. Even just a small narrowing down can really help improve your client attraction and client retention.

So take a look at the industries or the type of clients that you enjoy working with, or maybe something that you have an expertise in, and consider going after that market. And, also, keep in mind that just because you're niching down or you select a certain target market does not necessarily mean that you can't work with anybody else. I, myself, am running 2 side by side design businesses, one of them targeted at the podcast space, the podcast niche, and the other one is more of a general design. So there's nothing saying you can't do that. You can't target a certain market, but then still attract clients that are outside of that market. But targeting that market will make it much easier, and I speak from experience that it's a lot easier for me to find a client in the podcast space than it is for me to find a just general client for my all around generalist design business. So that was number 3, determine your target market. And number 4 is branding and identity.

You are a designer. It's up to you to develop a strong brand identity for your business. Whether that's your name or a business name that you're using, it's up to you to design a professional logo, a professional branding for yourself, making yourself unique. That's your unique selling proposition. Who wants to hire a designer who doesn't have a good brand for themselves? Take the time to develop your own consistent branding material. From your logo to your colors to your fonts to your wording to the impression you give, the more narrowed down your brand, the more people will trust that you're professional and will trust you with their work. So even if you're just starting out, one of the first things you should do is develop that brand and identity for yourself. And keep in mind that these things can change over time. You can start off designing under your own name and then later decide to branch off and have a business name.

But during that process, the one thing that won't change is you. And whether your logo or your name changes, the whole branding and identity of the business will be focused on you, and you wanna give the best first impression you can with that. Speaking of first impressions, I mentioned at the beginning of this episode my 4 week marketing boost. That's exactly why I wrote that book. It ensures that you get everything in place over the course of 4 weeks, 1 task per day, in order to create the best first impression you can when somebody finds you. If you're interested in reading that free ebook, visit marketingboost.net. Now number 5 on my list is pricing and contracts. One thing you have to do whether you're an established designer or you're just starting out is to ensure you have a proper pricing structure.

And you can base that on factors such as your level of experience, the complexity of the type of projects you work on, even the local market rate, although I don't suggest you do that, you should set the rate based on yourself and not what others are charging. But if you're just starting out, that is a place to look. Now I've had many episodes where I've talked about pricing. I've talked about the three tier pricing method. I've talked about value based pricing, fixed pricing. There are so many different pricing structures. You have to decide what works for you, and you have to determine what sort of range your pricing is, where your price stands. Do you wanna be building websites for \$1,000, or do you wanna building websites for 5 or 10,000 or \$20,000.

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Are you gonna charge \$200, \$300, \$400 for a logo? Or are you gonna charge \$2,000, \$3,000, \$4,000 for a logo? There are a lot of factors to consider when doing your pricing or your structure for pricing, and there's really no right or wrong way. Although, I will state that most people, when they do set their pricing, they're underselling themselves. Most people can easily charge more than what they currently are. Now as I did set say number 5 was pricing and contracts, which means that you should be working with a contract. You should have some sort of contract or agreements. And they're there to protect both yourself and your clients. Contracts are a good thing. A lot of designers, especially those just starting out, think that they're a hassle.

They get in the way. They may scare clients away. But the reason they're there are to protect both parties. That way you know exactly what your job is, and the client knows exactly what their job is. Everybody agrees to it. And if at any point there's a dispute, You can always refer back to the contract and say, this is what we agreed upon. So if you're not currently using a contract, I highly suggest you start using 1 as soon as possible. And number 6 on my list is financial planning.

Many designers go into their business not really having a financial plan in place. You need to develop something that outlines your projected income, your expenses, your savings. You also have to consider things like taxes, insurance, software subscription, marketing expenses. All this stuff is all part of running a business, Whether you're doing this part time, full time, whatever, a good financial plan can help your business succeed. Do you wanna make \$50,000 a year, \$100,000 a year, \$1,000,000 a year? Take that number and then backpedal. Figure out, well, if that's the case, how much do I have to make per month? And if that's the case, then how much do I have to make per week? And if that's the case, then how much do I have to make per day? Now what do I have to do in order to make that amount per day in order to reach that target? And take into consideration everything, like your subscriptions, and all that stuff. This financial planning will help your business succeed, or a lack of financial planning can actually make your business fail. And number 7 on my list is marketing and networking.

If you are running a business, you have to invest some time in marketing your services in order to attract clients. Word-of-mouth is great, and most designers will tell you that word-of-mouth referrals is the majority of their business. But that doesn't mean you can ignore other forms of attracting clients. Use online platforms, social media, Professional networks like BNI or other networking groups attend industry events. If you're niching down, try attending events in that niche. Build your connections. Increase your visibility. Word-of-mouth is great, but that's a one way streak.

It's like a spider web. Everything has to be connected. If you want your business to succeed, you have to find a way of attracting clients that isn't connected to that SingleWeb. I've said it many times on this podcast before. The success of your business depends not on whom you know, but on who knows you. And that's why marketing and networking is so important. And number 8 on my list is time management. This is a big one when it comes to designers.

I know we've talked about this many times in the resourceful designer community. But if you wanna succeed in this industry, you have to have some sort of time management. You have to establish some sort of practice to ensure that you meet deadlines and that you also maintain a healthy work life balance. Set realistic project timelines. Make sure you allow time for client communications because you may say I'm gonna get everything done by a certain date. But sometimes, just waiting to hear back from a client can really Slow down a project. So you have to take into consideration the time it'll take to communicate with clients, the time it'll take to get revisions back and implement them, and even time for personal development. Number 1 that I shared with you today is skill development.

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You need to make sure with when you're doing your time management that you're setting time aside for that. Every week, I read articles. I watch YouTube videos and all sorts of stuff to help myself to make sure that I'm constantly improving as a designer. Well, I have to set time aside for that, and that's all part of time management. The other thing is to make sure that you're not overworked. Personally, I work 9 to 5. I will rarely work beyond 5 PM. The odd time I will, but for the most part, I don't.

That's all part of my time management. I decided when I started that this Was a 9 to 5 job? It didn't matter if I was working from home, and I know some freelancers work all hours of the day. But, personally, That was my time management. I set myself up to work 9 to 5 every day, and I've established that. Time management is probably one of the hardest things that designers face or have to deal with. And even if you master just a fraction of it, it can go a long way to ensuring your business' success. So make sure you take the time to think about time management. Now number 9 is client communication.

It doesn't matter how good a designer you are. Without proper client communication, your business will be hard pressed to succeed. You need to develop strong communication skills and to understand client needs. You need to be able to communicate with clients to clarify project requirements. You need to be able to provide regular updates on long projects. You need to be able to communicate clearly and promptly because that sort of communication fosters trust and leads to satisfied clients. The better your communication skills are with your clients, the more business your clients will want to bring you and the more your clients will want to refer you. I can't tell you how many clients over the years I've landed brand new clients who told me that they just didn't like dealing with their last designer because they never heard from them.

They never knew what was going on. They felt like their last designer had ghosted them and so forth. It's such a simple thing to do, and yet it seems like so many designers are failing at this part. Now I know that designers, on the most part, are introverted people. But even introverted people have to learn how to communicate with your clients. They are your bread and butter. You need to be able to talk with them, update them, get information from them in a clear, precise manner that doesn't introduce confusion if you want your business to succeed. So work on your client communication skills.

And the last thing, number 10 that I want to share with you is professional development. Very similar to the very first one I shared with you, which was Skill development, where you're learning how to become a better designer. Professional development is learning how to become a better business person. You need to stay committed to a continuous learning loop of professional development. Attend workshops that talk about businesses Or webinars or conferences, I'm sure your local area has them. Around here, October is small business month. And every October, they have all sorts of workshops some things going on to help people with small businesses succeed. That's exactly what you are, a small business.

Talk to other business people. Even if they're not designers, You may learn something from other people that are running small businesses. You can also seek feedback from your clients. Don't discount that. What your clients tell you can really enhance your skills and keep you up with all sorts of things when it comes to your industry. Read books, listen to podcasts, and learn. It's not all about design. If you want to run a successful design business, You gotta remember, those 2 words, design business, are 2 different things.

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You can be a great designer, but a bad business person. Or you can be a bad designer, but a great business person. But if you are both, if you can be both a great designer And a great businessperson, you are almost guaranteed to succeed in this industry. So those are the 10 things I wanted to share with you. Ten things that when done right, can drastically improve your business's chance of success. I'll just go over them quickly one more time. They were skill development, portfolio building, choosing the right target market, branding and identity for yourself, pricing and contracts, financial planning, marketing and networking, time management, client communication, and professional development. If you take the time to consider these aspects and follow through with them, You can lay a solid foundation for your design business, which will increase your chance of success and will cultivate long term client relationships.

And that's what this business is all about. I want you to succeed. That's why I'm making these podcasts. And you want your business to succeed, well, for your own reasons. And whether that's passion, whether that's financial reasons, whether that's family commitments, or all of the above, They're all noble reasons for your business to succeed. But only you can do that. Your business will fail or succeed based on the steps that you take. And whether you follow all 10 of these or just some of them, they will help you in the right direction.