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Resourceful Designer Episode 334: Sure, You Can Do It, But Should You?

As a designer, as a business owner, as an entrepreneur, there are many things that you can do. But the question is, should you be doing them? That's what I wanna talk about today.

Let me take you back to when I first got started on my own. Now I was very lucky. The week that I announced that I was gonna leave the print shop and start my own business, another local designer reached out to me and asked if I would be willing to take on her clients. She was contemplating closing down her design business for health reasons, but didn't know what to do. And then when she found out that I was starting my own business, she thought it was a perfect match, and she offered them to me. So I was very lucky that when I left the print shop and started my own, I already had a bunch of clients handed to me. But that didn't mean I didn't have it easy. Most of our clients were maybe once a year projects, and a few of them never actually contacted me or we did a few minor things, and I never heard from them again? There was only 3 or 4 that became regular clients, and only 2 that I kept for many many years.

Other than that, every client was somebody that I had to go out and get. Now one of the, call it, joys or excitement of starting your own design business is knowing that you are in charge. You are the one in control. No longer are you answering to a boss, doing their bidding. You get to choose what you do. Your business relies on you. Now that is also a very terrifying thing, knowing that your business relies on you, on how well you can do your job not only as a designer, but as a business person. Because when you start your own business, there are so many other aspects that you have to consider.

You become a bookkeeper, an accountant, a salesperson, sometimes a collection agent. You name it. There Mark so many other aspects besides design that go into running a design business. And I think everybody who starts in this path at the beginning tackles everything on their own. It's your business after all. You need to do things. And I was no different. For the 1st few years of my business, I did everything.

And if there was something I couldn't do, I just didn't take on that task. I've shared before on this podcast how I turned down a very lucrative web design job. In fact, the budget on this job was more than I had made in the previous year. And I ended up turning down this job because I didn't know PHP coding. Now this company was actually our local library. The person working there knew me. They knew me as a great designer, and they wanted to work with me. And they were actually kind enough to give me time.

I said, I don't know. I I told them that I didn't know PHP, and they said, is that something you can learn? And I actually tried. I went and I bought some courses. Back then, it was linda.com. I bought some courses, I bought some books, and I tried to learn PHP, but I was having a hard time wrapping my mind around it. And after about 2 months, with them being patient, I turned to them and I told them that, you know, I'm just not getting this. I don't think I'm the right designer for you. You'll need to find somebody else.

And they did. And this huge project with a huge budget went to another firm. Now years later, in hindsight, I kicked myself at that. Because back then, I had the mindset that it was my business. I had to do everything. And if I couldn't do it, then it was not something for my business to do. It wasn't till maybe a year or 2 after that where I had a client who had an ecommerce sorry. And back then, I was doing all websites were hand coded.

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I wasn't using WordPress at the time. I was hand coding my website, not using PHP. They were all static websites using HTML and CSS. But this 1 client wanted an ecommerce store. He was selling all sorts of stuff. Anyways, I ended up settling on a platform called PrestaShop. And I installed it on a server. I learned how to use it.

I set up his store, and the client was very happy. He was putting products up there. He I was gonna say selling them, but I don't think I mean, I don't think he actually ever sold anything. His store didn't really have a focus. It was any product he can get his hand on, he was putting on the store and hoping that somebody would buy it. Anyways, that's beside the point. Well, one day, he reached out to me and said that he had been doing some stuff on the back end. He had been poking around where he shouldn't have been poking around, and he ended up breaking the site, and he wanted me to fix it.

And I had spent a lot of time learning how to use PrestaShop in order to set everything up and get everything just right, and I was proud of myself. But when he told me he broke the site and I went to have a look, and I couldn't figure out what he had done. He he told me what he had done, but I couldn't figure out how he had done it or how to fix the issue. And that was the first time in my career or in my business life that I decided I needed to get outside help. Now at the time, I turned to I can't remember if it was Elance or Des, Cotes the 2 that merged. They're they're now Upwork. But back then, it wasn't Upwork. I think it was Elance.

And I turned to Elance, and I found a PrestaShop expert, and I hired this expert for 10 hours to come in and fix the problem. And when I got that email saying that the website's back up and running and the issue has been taken care of, it was like the clouds opened up for me. And I realized that I don't have to do things on my own. There are actually people out there who specialize in different things and I could use them. Now this person who happened to live overseas, I don't remember if he was in India or the Philippines or somewhere out there, he had charged me \$100 in order to fix this problem. A \$100 for 10 hours of work. Now at that time, I was charging \$50 an hour. So I turned around, and I told the client that it took 10 hours to fix it.

I hired somebody, and it took them 10 hours to fix the problem. And I charged my client \$500 for that fix, and they paid it. And again, that was another light bulb moment. I realized that something that would have taken me forever because and I don't even know if I could have fixed it. This person did while I was doing other things. I wasn't worrying about the website. I was working on other projects while he was tackling this issue. And 10 hours later and \$100 of my expense towards it, I made an additional \$400 off it.

And that really, really opened my eyes to the power of hiring out. Now it was around that same time that I started kicking myself for turning down that very lucrative library website, realizing that for the parts that I didn't know how to do, I could have hired somebody to do that. I could have built the website. The only thing I couldn't figure out how to do was the library catalog, and how to get the catalog to show up on the website? And I could have hired somebody and made a lot of money off that website. And I still to this day, many many many years actually, decades later, I still kick myself on that one. But as I said, at that point, I realized that I'm not alone in this. There are plenty of people in the world that can help me, that can help my business succeed. And it's not just for the things that I don't know how to do such as PrestaShop, or in the case of the library website, p h p.

But there are people out there that can help me with things I know how to do, but maybe I shouldn't really need to do. Now if you've been listening to this podcast for a while, you know I always say, I'm not an illustrator. But that's not en-

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tirely accurate. I can draw. Actually, when I was a teenager, I used to draw all the time. I used to get together once or twice a week and play Dungeons and Dragons with my friends. And every time we play, I would doodle. I would draw the scenes we were doing in the game we're imagining.

I would draw our characters, and I got quite good. The problem was, drawing was never natural to me. There's some people I had a friend, Robert, growing up in high school. He was a natural. He can just draw anything he wanted. I had to really give it some thought, and there was a lot of trial and error. Like, I could draw a really good, say, a body, a person, you know, a head, shoulder, 2 arms, body, and Des, if they were you were standing directly in front of them. But as soon as that person would say, okay, I want him to strike a pose, I really had trouble doing those Cotes.

Even if it was something as simple as, like, you know, lifting the leg up as if the leg was resting on a rock or a chair or something like that. I had a hard time with that. I really had to think it through, because it didn't come naturally to me. And illustration is one of those things that, at least for me, if I didn't practice it, which, you know, after once I got a job and girlfriend and a wife and kids and all that, I wasn't practicing it. And now when I try to draw something, I can't, or I don't have the same ability. I look back. I still have some of the illustrations I made way back then. And I'm amazed at how good they are.

And if I try doing something like that now? I can't even come close to it, because illustration is not something that's natural to me like it is for some people. And that's not to say I haven't tried. I have done some illustration for work over the years. I remember 1 year when I was working at the print shop, I had a client that wanted a custom wedding invitation, and they wanted kind of a Romeo and Juliet style thing. They wanted an illustration of a man on his knees, calling up to a woman in a window, her leaning out, and him presenting a ring to her. And I was able to draw that, and the client really liked it. But I had to find sources, images. I couldn't just draw it on my own.

I had to find an image of a man on his knees, I had to find an image of a woman leaning over so that I got the proportions right and everything, and it took me forever to draw it. Now I was quite proud of it, but the time involved just didn't make it worth it. Now when I started my own business, and after I discovered that I could hire people, I started reaching out to illustrators. Before that, if a client asked me and said they need an illustration, I would say, okay. Well, you need to find somebody who can illustrate, and get them to do it, and then just give me the illustration, or we think of a different idea beside the illustration. But once I realized that, hey, I can get other people to do it and up charge and still make money off of it, that's when I started using other people. I remember the 1st time I hired an illustrator. It was actually a friend of my son's, somebody that, he went to school with, and he was an amazing illustrator.

He's now he's graduated, and he now works as, an illustrator for a video game company doing amazing work, back then, I needed something. I needed a cartoon, a simple cartoon of something. And I approached him and asked him if he'd be willing, and he did a great cartoon for me. It did exactly what I needed. I have another friend, a fellow designer, Dan. We originally went to school together, and we worked together at the print shop, and then he moved away, and then later I started my own business. Well, there's been a couple of times where I've needed illustration where I've where I've reached out to him, because he's a great illustrator. So even though I can illustrate, I don't like to.

I can. I'm just not very good at it. I learned that there are other people that are good, and you could reach out to them and have that stuff done. And then it's just a matter of marking up, whatever it is they're charging you. So if there's anything

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that you're not comfortable doing in your business, or even if you are, but you're just not that good at it, think about people that you can hire to do those things. And there are lots of resources. I mean, Upwork, I mentioned earlier, is one. You could hire people on Fiverr.

I hired an illustrator on Fiverr. I needed a caricature done. Somebody it was for podcast artwork. Somebody didn't want their photo, but they wanted a caricature of themselves on the cover artwork. So I went to Fiverr, and I looked at different caricature artists. Since I found one that I thought was really good, and I reached out to them and hired them, and I've used this person for multiple projects since then. Now the funny thing is at 1 project, I reached out and I asked, you know, how fast can you get this done? And they didn't respond to me for a while. And when they finally did, they said, sorry it took so long to get back to you, I had a piano recital to go to after school.

That was a weird answer, I thought. So I asked. I says, how old are you? And this was, I knew it was a girl. I knew she was from Indonesia. And she replied back that she was 14 years old. I had been working with her for 2 years already at that point. And she was an amazing illustrator. Which means I the 1st time I hired her and that she was on Fiverr, she was offering her a service.

The 1st time I hired her, she was 12 years old. And I still use her to this Des, many many years later. So anytime there's something in your business, whether it's illustration, whether it's coding, whether it's photography, anything that you need that you are not comfortable or not capable to do, you have the option to hire somebody to do it, and then you can upcharge your client on that. It should be part of the services, and it means that the services that you offer can now include those services as well. Anytime I'm doing a website now for a client, if they ask for something and my immediate thought is, I have no idea how to do that, I don't tell the client. I just say, sure. I'll get that done. Because I know somebody out there is capable of it, and I'll just find them and get them to do it for me.

Now I've been talking about things that you're not comfortable with or that you're not good at in hiring people for that sort of thing. What about things that you Mark capable of doing? Stuff that you even find easy. I've mentioned before on the podcast how I have a VA virtual assistant. Her name is Joanne. I've had her for years, and she updates my client websites for me. Look, updates, meaning the plugins. She runs the maintenance side of the website for me. And every week, she goes in and looks to see if WordPress or the the theme or any of the plugins need to be updated and she does that.

Now that's something I'm perfectly capable of doing. Just go in, you press a click of a button, and it's done. So I'm capable of doing it. I actually enjoy doing it, but it's something I don't really need to be doing. My time could be better spent elsewhere. And she charges me \$50 a month. She says it doesn't take her much time at all. She does it once a week.

She goes in, and within, you know, 10, 15 minutes, she's done. And to her, \$50 a month is a good price. Now, I've used her for other things and have paid her for other services as well, but that's the ongoing one that we have. And that's for a service that I'm perfectly capable of doing. I mean, if I wanted to save \$50 a month, I could just do that myself. But here's a big one. And this one is recent. Now I don't know how much I've shared of this in the past, but as an entrepreneur, I have many streams of income.

Yes. I have my my graphic design business. I have 2 graphic design businesses. I have recurring clients through or recurring income through website maintenance and, hosting plans with my web clients. I'm an affiliate for lots of different

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companies and resources. So anytime I say something like, you should use Backblaze for backing up your computer system, which you really should by the way. And I say, you know, to learn more, go to resourcefuldesigner.com/backblaze. That's an affiliate link.

If you click that link and you decide to purchase Backblaze, which again, I really think you should. I use it. I swear by it. I think it's something everybody should have. But if you use my link and you purchase it, I make a small commission. So it's another form of income. I also have t shirts that I sell on various different platforms. I have an Etsy shop for certain things.

And I also have a couple of websites that I've built over the years that are what are called affiliate websites. They're websites that talk about a certain topic, and they're linked to products, either on Amazon or other companies, that if you click on them and you end up buying those products, again, I make a commission off of it. And I really like that model of having a website that does that. And I've been toying with the idea of building another one. I've actually purchased many domains over the years with the thought of turning them into affiliate sites. Now I am perfectly capable of building a website. I'm a web designer. I know what I'm doing.

I know how to build a good website. I know how to build a website that works. I understand Des. I am perfectly capable of doing this. And Des, just recently, I hired a company, a company called Web Asset Builders. And they're building a website for me. Because, again, I am perfectly capable of doing it, but I just didn't have the time. Or not that I didn't have, but there were better things I could spend my time on, like growing my podcast branding business.

So I really wanted another one of these websites, an affiliate website. So I hired this company who specializes. This is what they do is build these sites. And I'm letting them take the lead. They even designed a logo for the site. And I looked at the logo and I thought, you know, I think I could do better. Actually, I know I could do better, but right now, I don't have the time. So what they did is good enough.

It wasn't a bad logo, and I decided to go with it. Now, of course, this is not my I was gonna say it's not my business. It's not client related. Put it that way. My business involves a lot more than clients. Clients just happen to be one source of income for me. I've got many or others. It's called diversification.

And in all aspects of these different parts of my business, I've learned that there are people out there that can help me. So sure, there are many things that I can Des. But do I need to be doing them, or should I be doing them? In this last case, I am perfectly capable of building a website, probably a better looking website than what this company is building for me, but I just don't have the time, or right now, I don't want to devote the time to it. So I wanted a website, so I hired them. And that's how most of business and life is. If you wanna get ahead in business and life and whatever, there are 2 forms of currency you can use. Either money or time. Do you wanna learn a new skill? You can spend a lot of time on YouTube, and I'm sure you can learn exactly what you wanna do.

But you have to find the right videos. You have to maybe watch multiple videos from different people to figure things out. You have to figure out what sort of order, especially if it's okay to task you need to figure out what order of videos you should watch, or even which videos, like, what do you need to learn? So you can spend a lot of time doing that, or you could spend a little bit of money on a course that packages everything up for you from a to zed. It'll walk you through

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from the basics right up to advanced things. And it's all packaged nicely in order. You learn this, then you learn this, then you learn this, then you learn this, and then you're an expert. So it's up to you. You can either spend time on it or you spend money.

I mean, yes, there's time involved with the course. But if you purchase a course, you spend money on a course, chances are you will learn that thing much faster than if you try to learn on your own by watching YouTube videos. And that's what this whole episode is about. Do you wanna spend money or do you wanna spend time? Sure. You can do things. But sometimes, you're better off to put money out towards it and get it done, and you use your time for something else. You know that old saying that it takes money to make money? Well, that is so true. Anybody who runs a design business that wants to be successful needs to learn at some point in their journey that hiring other people, whether it's for a simple task or an ongoing person to help them with a task on a regular basis, hiring other people to do things is one of the best ways to advance your business, to get ahead, to grow? And that's really what I wanted to share with you today that there are many things you can Des, or possibly things that you're not capable of doing, that you can hire other people for.

But you have to determine at some point, when it's the right choice to do it yourself, or when it's the right choice to spend money to get it done. And oftentimes, that money you spend to get it done will come back tenfold at you. Yes. I'm spending a lot of money to have this website done. This is not a cheap website. I'm spending a lot of money to have this website designed. But I'm anticipating that this website will bring me much greater returns in the next few years than what I'm spending to have it built. So even though this is something that I can do on my own, I'm looking at this as an investment in my future.

And I look forward to see how it turns out. It's actually kind of exciting to see what somebody else is building for me, and how they're gonna build it. So I hope you got some good takeaways from this episode. And if you are still new in your journey, or if you're at a point where you haven't really hired people, you start thinking, you know, who can I hire? And keep in mind that hiring somebody doesn't have to cost a lot of money. I mentioned my VA. I pay her \$50 a month, which is the price she asked for to do this task once a week for me. And she is very happy, and I am very happy. Because even though it's just a short task, if I had to do this every week, it would take away from my time.

And my time is valuable. I don't charge by the hour. But if I did, my hourly rate is somewhere around 150 to \$200 an hour. So even if it takes Joanne 15 minutes a week to do this for me, average 4 weeks per month, that's 1 hour of work that she gives me every month, and I'm paying her \$50. But since my rate is much higher than that, I'm actually making money on this. Because I can be putting that time to use elsewhere to make me more money. And that's what I wanted to talk about today.