

1. CREATE

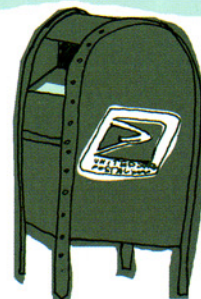


PROMO ILLUSTRATING
MY FAVORITE SHOES

2. RESEARCH



3. MAIL



4. ALTERNATIVE



5. RELEASE

ATTACHMENT TO
OUTCOME.



BREATHE IN
BREATHE
OUT.

CAREER

DRAW YOUR OWN CONCLUSION

Want to take your doodles from this morning's meeting and turn them into a sideline business? Here are five tips for kick-starting your own freelance illustration career.

The list of things that need to be done to start an illustration career seems daunting, even for those who've been doing it for years. But there are ways of simplifying the process, of making it into something that resembles an enjoyable adventure as opposed to an unyielding mountain. It doesn't have to be a full-time endeavor; you can start by breaking it down into smaller, manageable chunks. The key lies in tailoring the process to your personality.

As someone who's an avid procrastinator, I found it imperative to adopt a simple approach, setting small

(sometimes ridiculously small) goals that I could reach quickly and easily. In my experience, there are three major barriers to doing the work that's needed to launch or reinvent your career, all having to do with our perception of the situation—not the reality:

- We feel there is too much to do, and if we can't do it all now, then we won't even try.
- We have unrealistic expectations about what will happen (such as, I want to land a job with The New Yorker next week) and feel discouraged when it doesn't come to pass.

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- We feel inadequate because we're comparing ourselves to the rest of the world.

What we forget is that the goal in the beginning is to just start; forward movement in any direction is good. It's important to find that feeling of accomplishment in whatever way you can, even if it means you did one small thing to get you closer to your goal (i.e., licked a stamp). It comes down to a motto I've recently adopted: "Something is better than nothing." Here are five other tips for getting started in illustration.

1 Create a promo. Choose subject matter that speaks to you. People respond the most to things that you enjoyed creating (as opposed to things that are forced or contrived).

A few years ago, an illustrator friend of mine was having difficulty deciding what to do for a promotion; all her ideas felt tedious and she began to dread the process. I asked her what was happening in her life at the time that she felt strongly about. She said jokingly, "Right now my bra is killing me, and I would do anything to take it off." I thought, "Well, now that's interesting." On a whim, she decided to do a promotion showing how a woman takes her bra off in public without removing her shirt (it's an ancient technique that all women know, though very few men understand). The idea went on to become a highly successful and hilarious promotion because it was honest and had such life. If you really enjoy creating a promotion, you'll also feel motivated to send it out into the world.

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zines; choose them because you're drawn to their look. Find art directors' names and addresses. In magazines, these are usually listed on the masthead (near the contents page), which lists everyone who puts an issue together. For publishers, you may have to do some digging; look in "Writer's Market" or online. Always be on the lookout for places your work could be suitable for: restaurant menus, posters, greeting cards, advertising, murals, comic books, product lines, gifts.

The most important thing to remember is that the work and samples you send must be appropriate to the publication. Look for companies that already publish work like yours. For example, if your work seems to focus mainly on animals, try children's magazines, animal magazines, licensing for products, etc.

3 Mail the promo to 10 potential clients. This is the part where you put your research to good use and share your work with the rest of the world.

While some people work better by buckling down with a large bulk mailing, others need to work in smaller chunks and allow for more spontaneity. Figure out what works for you, and run with it. For me, it's been helpful to adopt an ongoing method of promoting in small batches. This especially works because I like to "customize" my mailings and decorate the envelopes. (I always felt that if I were an art director, I'd love to receive something more personal than the typical bulk mailings.) When mailing a promo, you'll usually have at least a 2% response for potential job

Don't worry about whether it would sell, what's hot at the moment, who your target market is, what a family member recommends. Be honest with yourself and the process. Look to your life.

You don't have to make it into a big production; find ways to have fun with the execution. It could be good-quality color copies or a simple printed postcard. Maybe it's a small, black-and-white comic book made out of one sheet of paper and hand-colored. Some basic techniques in bookbinding can be very helpful in producing unique promotional mailers. Make something that you'd like to receive. This strategy may go against what you learned in art school. But think about the best work you've seen; most often it was created because the artist *felt* something.

It's also advisable to stick to one style when sending mailers to potential clients so that they know what kind of work to hire you for. You want them to think, "Comic-like? Oh, I need to call Keri Smith."

Once you've nailed the subject, print multiple copies of your promotion and stack them on your desk, ready for spontaneous mailings.

2 Do the research. Set aside an hour each week to spend time in a library or bookstore. Make a date of it, and treat yourself to a fancy coffee or some other reward that gets you excited about going. Keep a notebook with you at all times for your research. Your goal is to find 10 publishers, magazines, etc., that use work like yours (in a similar style). Enjoy reading the maga-

offers (I've found it to be more like 10%). Next week, explore and send 10 more.

4 Look for alternative methods to acquire work. Put your work out into the world in as many ways as you can, and give people a chance to respond to it. Try websites, galleries, guerrilla art, charity work, product design, etc. In the last year, I've randomly written to companies that I really like and offered my services. These are places that have a similar aesthetic and philosophy to my own and range from shoe companies to charities or just people I admire. I know this isn't a conventional promo strategy, but it works. It's as simple as a letter saying, "I like what you're doing; can I be involved somehow? Here's what I do." Great projects can come from unexpected places.

5 Release your attachment to outcome. If you're rejected, do what you can to keep moving forward. It's OK to periodically feel bummed about the ebb and flow of illustration work. Even successful illustrators sometimes feel their work is inadequate. For fun, why not try creating your own award, rather than waiting for the rest of the world to recognize your talents? The right clients are out there, ready for you to find them. It just takes patience, one step at a time. **HOW**

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