

Artist

Knowing Your Worth

Creative

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Knowing your worth is one of the most common problems when developing a career as a creative entrepreneur or artist. In this document, we will wade through the thick fog of obscurity surrounding this topic and give you some insight into how you can measure the value of both you and your work. More importantly, we will look into how you can increase this idea of value and work towards a successful creative career.

Negativity Surrounding Being An Artist

There is a lot of negativity surrounding being a creative and it's easy to not realise how much of this baggage we carry around with us.

It can affect our confidence when we are down and often make us question if following a path as an artist or creative is even realistic. It's time to cleanse ourselves.

1.

Write down on post-it notes or separate pieces of paper as many things you can remember about a situation in which someone has been negative towards you. It can be about you, your work, or your career choices. You can include their name if you want.

We are looking for family members, friends, colleagues, anyone who has maybe without realising it, said something that has stuck with you.

2.

You might just have one, or you might have loads. I can usually get to about 10 if I put my mind to it. It is obvious that they have some bearing on us as what they have said has been remembered. So it's time to get rid of them. The easiest way is to scrunch them up and basketball throw them into the nearest bin. You might want to get creative and make a ceremony about it or dispose of them another way, I'll leave that up to you.

3.

Are they really gone? No, not really, but it is important to understand that nearly all of us will face this at some point in our lives. Being an artist is as much about pushing through this and not letting this dictate our future decisions as it is about making great work. Be aware of when it is said but ride above it.

One of the saddest things I have seen over my 12 year career is the huge numbers of incredibly talented artists, writers, makers, movers and shakers who give up their dream because of something someone has said. Watching as their own belief in themselves and the work they do nosedives to non existence. It can happen to anyone and even the most successful people I know can drift and doubt their own artistic worth at times. Even though it does tend to get easier the longer and more productive your career becomes- know that we have all been there and you just need to keep going!

But Let's Get Real

These ideas of an artist or creative as an unemployed drifter struggling to get by do exist. It is and always will be a difficult career choice with high levels of competition and a huge amount of work needed to be successful. It's often hard to decipher how to make money from your practice and even harder to see a career pathway or progression.

The arts are a huge value to society; they serve to explore beauty and wonder within the world and provide an outlet for creative expression and documentation of our history. Civilizations throughout time have been and will continue to be defined by their cultural practices encapsulated in the work they create.

Never let anyone tell you they are not important or do not matter. Below are a few examples of the size and opportunities we have in the UK.

2019 arts and culture contributed £10.47 billion to the UK economy,

In 2019 there were an estimated 226,000 jobs in the creative arts.

In 2021 the Arts Council invested £64.8 million in 9,666 people and organisations.

There are 10,000's of international opportunities online for funding, grants, exhibiting and residencies.

Having a career in the arts can be one of the most rewarding life decisions you can make

Where Do You Start?

Everyone is different and there is no one approach to understanding your worth as an artist or creative. It is important to stress that your value comes from you and no one else. Contrary to popular opinion you are not worth what someone is willing to pay for you or your work. This varies massively on who you are selling to and what other external factors are having an affect on you and the work you create. You are worth what you think you are worth; you just need to make sure this is realistic without being undervalued. When you and your business grows so will your confidence and the value you put on your skills and abilities. This does mean starting out can be a daunting time but here are a few ways to shape your own understanding of your value.

So we will start with your recommended value. This is the value that agencies or employment unions value your services at. This varies from career to career and website to website but they do still give some good advice and figures to get you started. These are updated each year to reflect inflation and other external economic factors.

Equity - The UK Trade Union For Creative

Login Required (Aimed at all creative practitioners)
<https://www.equity.org.uk/at-work/rates-agreements/>

AN Artist Network

I Tool by AN The Artists Information Company (Aimed at Artists)
Written by financial expert Richard Murphy and published with Arts Council England support, The artist's fees toolkit is one of a series of resources from a-n: The Artists Information Company around good practice in valuing and paying artists.
<https://www.itool.co.uk/fees/>

Without Walls - Artist Consortium

Aimed at Outdoor Artists and Performers
<https://www.withoutwalls.uk.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Pricing-summary-2017.pdf>

Is That Too Much Money?

The first thing you might be thinking is...

'That seems like a lot of money. How can I even justify charging that much? I would get no work.'

And the likelihood you might be right. These are guide figures for established creatives within their fields. You might just be staring out, testing your work or you might be ready to make the jump to full time self employment. All of these factors and many more affect how much you can charge. It is important to understand that value and your worth isn't a fixed figure and it needs to be flexible to allow your business to grow.

What Stage Of Your Career Are You At?

This is the biggest factor in deciding what it is your worth and how much you can charge for your services. Remember that people are paying you not just for your work but for your artistic ability gained over many years.

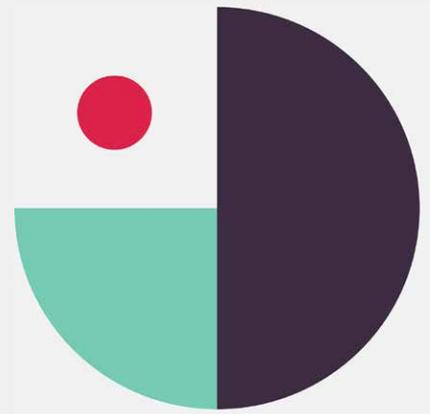
I believe every creative should put up their fees each year at least inline with inflation. Simply put, inflation is the rate at which prices are rising - if the cost of a £1 jar of jam rises by 5p, then jam inflation is 5%. The UK releases it's year-on-year inflation percentile base on the rise in costs of products. Matching this is integral to be earning at least the same amount each year. This also gives you the perfect opportunity to assess each year on how well it has gone and then judge what increases you might want to make.

- Were you happy with the standard you produced?
- Were your customers happy with what you produced?
- Have you progressed or improved over this year?
- Was this year busier than expected?
- Do you need to bring more income in to afford something that will levelup your career like specialist equipment, workshop or studio?

Making notes of these each year will gave you some idea of your progression and help you to map how you and your business are growing. It's very easy to have an end goal "I want to be a full time sculptor" but then ignore the yearly step you are making to achieve it. Each year this should give you the confidence to increase your fees and work towards or beyond the suggested creative rate on Equity (the UK trade union for creative practitioners)

What will the Job bring you?

When I started out I did a number of projects for free. A lot of artist-led organisations and trade unions actively push for artists and creatives to be paid fairly and for all of the work they do. In principle this is correct but some of my earlier free projects worked as a perfect testing bed for developing my work. They did rely on the project being self-funded usually for the benefit of another organisation but it is really important to understand the wider aspects of what a job can bring you and your career.



- Will the job give you vital experience?** This is more important for the earlier career creative trying to build a portfolio or desired business.
- Can the company afford to pay you?** Never work for a company for exposure unless you feel that exposure is integral to you being able to grow your business. If they pay other members of their team they should pay you. If you work for free for companies who should be paying you, they will rarely value you.
- Will this job offer the perfect opportunity to document your work?** This is often huge for some jobs when documenting your work in situ is needed to attract new clients.
- Where will your career be after the completion of the job?** One of my first projects was representing the UK in the World Young Artist Festival. I wasn't paid at all (not even for expenses) but I deemed the project as a real step up for my career. It never quite brought me the exposure I originally thought it would but an image I took there has been one of my most successful photos to date. It has been on Arts Council website 4 times, front cover of Bristol Biennale brochure, on BBC South West, in the Big Issue and Time Out London Magazine. As strong images were integral to growing my business at this time, taking on this project was the right decision but I still feel I should have been paid.





What Are Your Outgoings?

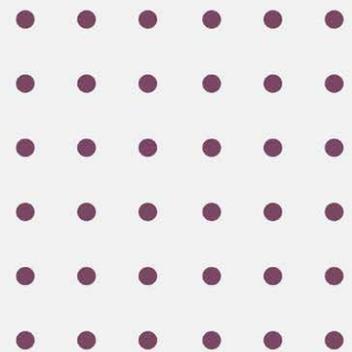
How dependent are you on your art and creative business as an income stream? When starting out or as a student you often find yourself in a position to be more flexible with the income you need to make. This naturally gives you the ability to charge a lot lower than you are worth. It's very easy to charge an hourly rate and to forget about all other expenses. It is a mistake that everyone seems to fall into when starting out. It is much better to charge by project within this cost, cover your hourly/ day rate, expenses (travel etc), studio and a contingency of 10-20% of the total. This cost might feel higher than you would expect for someone new to the game but it's important to develop a career that is sustainable and will allow you enough money to live.



How Busy Are You?

This can be a major factor on how confident you are at charging for a project. I have a rule that if I am busy I put my costs up. The main reason is that the more projects I take on over a busy period, the more it will take out of me. It also allows me the money to get others in to support the projects if I'm close to burnout. I have often been surprised that when I charge more people seem happy to pay it.

On the other side when things are looking a little light it can be the automatic reaction to lower your costs. I personally think if you have followed all of the steps above with your rate and expenses then what you will be charging will be a fair rate (as long as what you provide is of a good standard). You will always find people who will question your costs, say you are too expensive or try and get you to do it cheaper. Do not shape yourself around these people. Believe in what you offer, your creative experience and your right to a fair rate of pay.



What Does Your Competition Look Like? Do it with a Work Sheet!

Here is a useful piece of research to help you start to understand what others are doing. Through this, we can look at our own practice and see what we can improve on.

1.

Find three companies or creatives online that you believe are at a similar stage to you in your career. These can be on social media or websites.

Now list down all of the reasons that you think make them at a similar stage as you. Is it the quality of their work? Is it the number of followers on social media. Is it the size of the portfolio? Or the look or lack of a website?

2.

Find three companies or creatives online that you believe are at a similar stage to you in your career. These can be on social media or through their website.

Now list down all of the reasons that you think make them at a similar stage as you. Is it the quality of their work? Is it the number of followers on social media? Is it the size of the portfolio? Or the look or lack of a website?

3.

Now find one dream company or creative. This is the one that you aspire to be like. They are at the top of their game.

Now list down all of the things that they do online that supports your view of them being the best. Is it just the quality of their work or do they do anything else differently? How do they talk about their work? What impresses you most about them. What do they do that's different from the other companies?

4.

And finally, list the things that make up your online presence.

Don't be too harsh on yourself, just outline areas that you are currently doing or might need to do more. What could you do that could allow you to take the next step up? Are there any smaller adjustments that might be easier or quicker to implement? What long-term changes do you feel you could start to work on?

Remember it is not a race just always try to look at what you are doing and what you could improve on.

Be Versatile and Improve Your Worth

If there is one thing to take from this document it is this - be versatile. I pride myself on being able to take on many different types of work. I'm a self taught designer, marketer, photographer and videographer and I have used all of these to support the art I make. The idea that you can train and work solely within one creative discipline in the current cultural landscape is unrealistic. If you are unable to do something-learn it. You don't have to be the best but if you commit sometime to understand it, analysis what makes something good and commit to some free lessons on youtube you will be surprised at how it can impact other areas in your career. You can learn to use an SLR camera or video camera in a few hours with one of the many online free tutorials.

Document Everything

You and your work are only as good as your documentation. The people who really try hard to showcase what they do in the best possible light reap the rewards. Too many times I focused on completing a job without putting any thought or money into documenting the results. This has meant huge periods of work that may as well not exist. I have nothing to show for it. Basic camera skills are very beneficial but sometimes you will have to spend money to get the results you need. Factor in these costs at the start and find someone (or a friend) that you can trust to build a long term relationship with. Creative businesses can spend 10-20% on their marketing and it is something you should start to factor in at the earliest opportunity.

Create A Network

Your family and friends can be your biggest ally, so use them. Create a group of people who are willing to support your work. Get them to like, share and comment on all of your social media posts to boost the algorithms that get your work seen. Get them to complete google and facebook reviews that help establish an online reputation.

Alongside your friends and family you should look for professional networks that can help you meet and grow your practice of business. Online research into your chosen field and locality will unlock many opportunities to find supportive partners within your field. Networking is not for everyone but it does help to find people in the same boat as you. It can help share the load, build your confidence when it is low and give you a useful professional opinion. We also all help each other to find work and opportunities.

Enjoy It

It can really feel like a slog at times. I can distinctly remember periods in my career I did not enjoy. At times I wanted to give it up because I had convinced myself I would never be able to create an income out of my art practice.

The world is full of the people who had all the talent they needed to be successful, yet gave up or lost their place along the way. Be kind to yourself and your work, don't rush but just keep going. Look to never stop learning or adapting what you do. But most importantly never forget your worth.