

THE FUTUR

BEING GOOD AT YOUR CRAFT

DOESN'T MEAN YOU'RE GOOD AT
RUNNING A BUSINESS

CHRIS DO × MATT ESSAM
ARTICLE + EDITORIAL & BRAND-VOICE ANALYSIS

WHY THIS ANGLE?

SOURCE EPISODE

Scaling a Solo Creative Business with Matt Essam

Chris and Matt covered several challenges creative business owners face, from pricing their work to finding clients and building a company that doesn't depend entirely on them.

I was particularly interested in the gap between being a talented creative and knowing how to run a business. Someone can be an amazing designer, filmmaker, or artist and still struggle to make a decent living from their work. Nobody necessarily taught them how to price projects, manage profit, sell their services, or build systems that allow them to step away.

Ray's discussion about selling and his desire for more freedom, along with Matt's example of the filmmaker who felt he had to attend every shoot, gave the article two situations where business decisions were affecting the lives the founders wanted to build.

THE VOICE BEHIND THE WRITING.

DIRECT. CHALLENGING. PRACTICAL.

Chris has a direct way of communicating. He challenges assumptions, asks questions that make people reconsider their approach, and gets into the business decisions behind creative work.

I wanted the article to have that same energy without copying his exact way of speaking. I opened by challenging the assumption that being good at your craft is enough to run a successful business, then used the conversation to dig into pricing, sales, and the problems that arise when a founder handles everything personally.

The language stays straightforward and focused on the financial and operational realities of creative work.

WHAT I KEPT. WHAT I LEFT OUT.

I focused on three areas: understanding the responsibilities of business ownership, changing how you approach pricing and sales, and recognizing when your own involvement is limiting growth.

The interview covers more ground than one article can reasonably explore, so I left out topics that did not serve that argument. Ray's story and the filmmaker example give readers enough context to understand the stakes without needing to have heard the episode.

I wanted to bring the piece back to a practical question creative entrepreneurs face: are they building a business that supports the life they want, or one that requires them to keep doing everything themselves?

I created this editorial sample using publicly available content from Chris Do and The Futur. It's an independent portfolio project, created without their involvement.

THE ARTICLE

BEING GOOD AT YOUR CRAFT DOESN'T MEAN YOU'RE GOOD AT RUNNING A BUSINESS

You can be an incredible designer and still run a terrible design business.

You might have a portfolio full of impressive work, clients who love what you create, and more projects than you can comfortably handle.

And somehow, you're still working too many hours, struggling to pay yourself, and wondering why running your own business feels harder than having a job.

Here's something creative professionals don't always want to hear.

The skills that make you great at your craft aren't necessarily the skills you need to build a profitable business.

THE ARTICLE

THE JOB CHANGED. DID YOUR SKILLS?

In a recent episode of The Futur Podcast, I sat down with Matt Essam, author of The Creative Studio Roadmap, to discuss what it takes to grow a creative business.

We talked about the difference between freelancing and running a business.

As a freelancer, you might get hired by an agency, complete a project, send an invoice, and move on.

When you're running your own business, you're responsible for finding clients, negotiating contracts, setting prices, managing expenses, and making sure there's work coming in next month.

You still have to produce great creative work. You've just added an entirely different job.

Matt admitted he'd struggled to recognize that distinction earlier in his career. He moved between freelancing for agencies and managing his own clients without fully understanding how different those responsibilities were.

It's a lesson many creatives learn while they're already trying to keep a business afloat.

THE ARTICLE

GETTING PAID ISN'T THE SAME AS MAKING A PROFIT

One of the biggest shifts in my own business came when I moved away from charging by the hour or day and started pricing by the project.

When your income is tied directly to the hours you work, becoming more efficient can actually work against you.

If you charge \$100 an hour and complete a project in ten hours, you make \$1,000. Do that same work in five hours, and you've cut your revenue in half.

Project pricing gives you an opportunity to separate the value of the work from the time required to deliver it.

But it also requires you to understand your costs.

If a client pays \$5,000 for a project, what does it cost your business to complete? How much are you paying yourself? What's left after expenses?

Those are questions every business owner needs to answer.

Charging by the project won't automatically make you profitable. You still have to manage scope, expenses, and delivery. But it changes how you think about the money coming into your business.

THE ARTICLE

THE BELIEFS THAT KEEP YOU STUCK

During our conversation, Matt and I worked with Ray, a creative professional who wanted more freedom in his life.

Ideally, Ray wanted to spend several months making art without worrying about earning money during that time.

But as we discussed what would help him get there, he admitted that selling was difficult for him. He associated sales with pressuring someone into buying.

It's easy to see how that belief could limit his business.

If you view selling as something uncomfortable or manipulative, you'll naturally avoid the conversations that could help you earn more.

We challenged Ray to consider what might change if he priced his work by the project and created enough margin to support the freedom he wanted.

His obstacle wasn't necessarily a lack of creative ability. It was how he approached the business side of his work.

THE ARTICLE

WHEN YOU BECOME THE BOTTLENECK

Matt shared another example involving a filmmaker who believed he had to attend every shoot personally.

The business was bringing in projects, but the owner was stressed, earning very little, and preparing to welcome a second child.

Still, he couldn't imagine letting someone else handle a shoot.

Matt asked him to think about what his business and personal life would look like in three years if nothing changed.

That's a question worth asking yourself.

If every project requires your involvement, every decision comes through you, and nothing moves forward unless you're available, how much freedom have you actually created?

You don't have to build a large agency or hire a dozen employees. But you do need to decide whether you want to remain the person doing all the work or build a business capable of operating beyond your personal involvement.

That might mean documenting your process, learning to delegate, or changing how you deliver projects.

The important part is recognizing when the way you've always worked is preventing you from building the business you want.

THE ARTICLE

LEARN THE SKILLS YOUR BUSINESS NEEDS

If you're frustrated with how your creative business is going, improving your craft may not be the answer.

Look at how you're operating.

Do you understand your costs? Can you explain your pricing? Do you have a reliable way to find clients? Could someone else follow your process if you weren't available?

You don't need to master every business skill overnight. But you do need to recognize that running a company requires more than delivering excellent creative work.

Your talent might be what gets you started.

Learning how to run a business is what gives that talent a chance to support the life you want.

For more on building a creative business that works beyond the founder, listen to my conversation with Matt Essam on The Futur Podcast.

ONE EPISODE. A FRESH ANGLE. AN ORIGINAL ARTICLE.

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