

Creativity and Business

An excerpt from 'T-Shirts and Suits: A Guide to the Business of Creativity' by David Parrish



This chapter challenges the apparent contradiction between Creativity and Business and suggests how they can be combined – creatively.

It asks fundamental questions about why you are in a creative business or plan to be.

It also discusses different approaches to business and the importance of being clear about your values and goals.

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5 This is strictly true but modesty forbids me to let it go without a footnote. With one short poem published in a literary magazine, I claim to be the least-published ‘published poet’ in the world. On the other hand, having been paid five pounds for my Haiku of 17 syllables could make me one of the world’s best-paid poets – per syllable (!)

6 Masters Degree in Business Administration (with distinction). Bradford University School of Management. 1995.

Creativity versus Business ?

Some people regard creativity and business as being like oil and water – they just don’t mix. They think it’s a question of choosing between creativity or business. I disagree.

At a conference I attended on the theme of creativity, some people understood creativity to mean ‘art’, done by artists of one kind or another – all of them wearing T-shirts. These artists realised that sometimes (unfortunately) they had to speak with beings from a parallel universe, ie the business world – people in suits who think differently and speak in strange tongues – and inevitably don’t understand them. I reject the idea that business and creativity are incompatible opposites. At that conference I pointed out that I am both a published poet⁵ and an MBA,⁶ which perhaps unsettled a few people for a moment. I went on to say that my best creativity is not my poetry but my inventiveness within the business world, adapting ideas and methods to new circumstances across the boundaries of industries, sectors and cultures internationally. Other delegates confirmed that they had seen far more creativity in engineering firms than in some advertising agencies. Creativity is not the monopoly of the ‘artist’: it is much wider than that and can be found in education, science and elsewhere. Creativity is in and around us all.

Creative Alchemy

The most exciting creativity, I believe, is the alchemy of blending apparent opposites, what we often call ‘art’ and ‘science’, recognising that they are not opposites at all, from which we have to choose either/or in a binary fashion, but the yin and yang of a whole. This book is about bringing together creativity and business as allies. It’s about combining the best ideas of both ‘T-shirts’ and ‘Suits’ in the business of creativity, turning creative talent into income streams.

Successful creative entrepreneurs embrace both creativity and business. Perhaps they don’t use business jargon and maybe profit is not their primary aim. Sometimes they will proceed on a hunch, or put their success down to good luck, but there is nevertheless a method behind their apparent madness, whether they recognise it or not.

The art of business is to select from a palette of infinite choices to draw together a specific product or service, with specific customers’ needs, in a way that adds up financially. The resulting picture is a **unique business formula** for a successful enterprise.

Naturally, creative businesses tend to have a high concentration of new ideas in their product or service. Successful organisations of all kinds combine all the essential business elements creatively. Successful creative enterprises need to have a creative product or service; they also need to invent a special and workable formula which combines all the essential ingredients of business.

The Art of not ‘Selling Out’

I am often asked whether making a business out of art or creativity inevitably means compromising artistic integrity or in other words, ‘selling out’. My answer is that it *can do*, but it doesn’t *have to*. The solution is in the formula mentioned above which refers to *specific* products/services and *specific* customers who, if chosen carefully, are essential ingredients in the formula for success. If you combine the wrong customers with your product or service there will be a mismatch leading to a choice between selling out or going bust. You cannot sell all of your products to all customers all of the time, but if we apply some creativity to **selecting the right customers**, choosing appropriate products from our portfolio, whilst making the books balance at the same time, we can devise a feasible business formula.

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Success

The meaning of ‘success’ is for you to define, not me. There are no value judgements here about what exactly ‘success’ might mean. Bigger is not necessarily better; often small *is* beautiful. You must decide where you want your creative enterprise to be in the future. As they say: “if you don’t know where you want to be, then you will never figure out which road to take”. So your road to success depends on your destination – where you want to be in the future – your **Vision**.

Profit ?

Profit is not always the point – though even not-for-profit organisations cannot survive if expenditure exceeds total income. As well as spanning 13 sub-sectors,⁷ there are different economics models adopted in the creative and cultural industries sector: commercial businesses seeking profit, not-for-profit or charitable organisations and social enterprises. That’s why I refer to ‘the desired financial result’ rather than necessarily ‘making profits’. Many arts organisations are constituted as charities and their income includes grants and subsidies. Social enterprises define success with the **Triple Bottom Line** approach, measuring success on three counts: financial, social and environmental. Some creative entrepreneurs are also ‘social entrepreneurs’.

Lifestyle

‘Lifestyle businesses’ succeed by delivering both a healthy income and a rich quality of life for their owners. For others, success means building a profitable business that eventually doesn’t need them, so they can sell it and move on. And some people want their creativity to sit alongside another career as a hobby rather than a business.

Why do it ?

For those about to embark on a journey into creative enterprise, the first question must be: Why do it? Why build a business around your creative passion? The obvious answer is to express your creativity and make a good living at the same time. But is it that simple? This book outlines a range of challenges affecting businesses and offers some pointers towards solutions. There are many hurdles to overcome, compromises to be made and tough decisions to make along the way. So first it’s worth taking stock of what’s at the heart of your creative enterprise and why you do it – or plan to do it.

Though the intention is to allow your creativity ‘free rein’ by doing it full-time as a business, some people complain that now they are in business they have *less* time for their creative passion, not more. Others have considered changing to a conventional job to earn money so as to be able to indulge their creativity in a pure way, free of the constraints and pressures of business.

Perhaps it is better to separate earning a living on the one hand and creativity on the other so as to do each one to the utmost, rather than doing neither one properly. Is there a risk that your creativity will be curbed by business? You may consider this suggestion inappropriate in a book like this, but it is better to deal with this issue frankly now if it is a matter you are facing – or likely to face in the future.

Yes, there is a risk of compromising your creativity with business – and compromising your business profitability by indulging your creativity – if you don’t get the **business formula** right. For example a financial formula that works for a hobby usually does not work for a business when higher prices need to be charged to cover the real costs of labour and other expenses.

⁷ The 13 sub-sectors of the creative industries are: advertising; architecture; the art and antiques market; crafts; design; designer fashion; film and video; interactive leisure software; music; the performing arts; publishing; software and computer games; and television and radio.

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Where ?

Where do you want to be in the future? Pick a significant future date or milestone in your life (it doesn't have to be 'in five years time', though it could be). Describe what your business will look like. Who will be your clients? How many people will be involved? What level of income will you achieve? Draw up a blueprint for your goals. Be ambitious. Select a destination which is out of reach but not out of sight. This is your **Vision**.

What ?

What business are you in? The best people to answer this are your customers. You might think you're in the website design business but your customers see you as their marketing consultant; you might describe yourself as a theatre company but what your customers are buying is a medium for communicating messages about social issues.

Listen to customers to find out what they *really* value about you. What is the value to add for customers and your contribution to a better world? Answer the customer's question 'What's in it for me?' to find out what it is you really do for them. This is your **Mission**. You don't need to have a 'mission statement' (especially not a glib one), but you *do* need to understand what customers value about your business and what they really pay you for.

How ?

How do you do business, ie what are your beliefs, morals and ethics? Your **Values**. Sometimes these are so much a part of us we cannot see them, or just take them for granted. For example, my clients pointed out that my ability to listen, respect others' views and help them achieve their goals in their own way were my special values; but they were so much an integral part of me that I couldn't see them. I had missed the point and my publicity highlighted

my professional qualifications instead. Ask other people: associates, friends, colleagues and especially customers in order to see yourself and your business more clearly.

Vision, Mission and Values

Vision describes *where* we are going – the 'promised land'. The Vision is the enterprise's 'dream' of the future, a picture painted in words (and numbers) which is intended to inspire people by appealing to the heart as well as the head.

Mission describes *what* we are going to do to achieve our Vision. A mission statement is simply a specific description of what the organisation actually does – its contribution to the world and society – so that employees, customers and other stakeholders understand what the business needs to excel at.

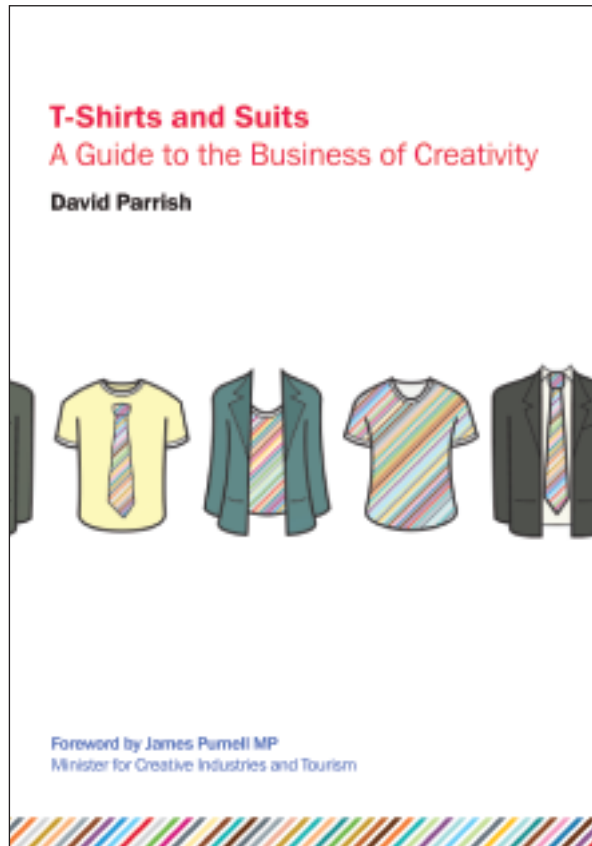
Values describe *how* we are going to conduct ourselves along the road to success.

When ?

Is the time right? Are you ready to go into business now or should you wait until a better time? **Sharon Mutch** left her photographic art under dust covers for nine years before setting up in business.

When you have put together the answers to the Where, What, How and When questions, the next matter to consider is whether or not it all adds up into a workable business formula, a business model that's realistic and achievable.

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The website associated with this book provides additional information, new material and further case studies, details of training and consultancy projects, a framework for a business plan, a glossary of terms and links to other useful websites.

www.t-shirtsandsuits.com

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