

Artist Business Plan

Building a Road Map to Professional Career Success

Setting goals and actionable steps to grow your artistic business

“Artist”. If you work in Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI), you are a part of the Creative Economy. **Artist as Entrepreneur.** If you have expectations of having a successful career as a professional artist, it's time to begin thinking of yourself as a small business. This doesn't mean changing who you are as an artist, and it doesn't mean becoming an expert in finance or marketing. What it does mean is taking responsibility for your career choices, and the creative decisions and actions that support (or do not support) your professional career as an artist. Remember, as an entrepreneur of a small business you, *and only you*, are the Artistic Director of your creative destiny.

Artist Business Plan. Great ideas don't always start out with a “plan”. In fact, most of the best ideas never came out of having one. But, when a small business wishes to grow or change it needs a road map to follow. Every successful business develops a business plan at some point. Business plans are about setting goals, taking actionable steps to meet business objectives, and creating milestones as a way to measure success along the way. You don't have to be a business professional to do this effectively. Creating an action plan is really just about being clear about what you want and making the commitment to go after it.

Even in the business world, traditional business plans have changed a great deal in the last decade from detailed, lengthy documents to snapshots of your business (see Lean Canvas or Business Model Canvas).

It does not matter what style you use to create your business plan, but what every plan *does* require is a way to communicate what your business is all about.

Unique Artist Description. When entrepreneurs are asked to deliver their fresh ideas to the people they want to collaborate with, or to people who will invest in their ideas, they are expected to present a **General Company Description**. The purpose of this description is to clearly communicate why your business is unique, describe the landscape that surrounds your business, explain the philosophies that drive your company, and present the goals you expect to achieve.

On the following page you will find an exercise that guides you, the artist, through questions (with examples) to help you develop your own ‘General Company Description’. Renamed to fit the CCI profile, we call this the **Unique Artist Description**.

Unique Artist Description

Knowing who you are as an artist and what you want from a professional career,
Communicating to others what your business is all about

The first step to building a framework for your career success is to clearly understand who you are as an artist *right now*, and to identify and clarify what kind of artist you *would like to be* tomorrow, next month, next year, or 10 years from now. This clarity will not only help you build the framework of your Artistic Business Plan, but it will also give you the confidence to talk clearly about your business to others who may want to collaborate with you, invest in you, and hire you.

Unique Artist Description Objective: Clearly communicate why your business as an artist is unique, describe the landscape that surrounds your business, explain the philosophies that drive your company, and present the goals you expect to achieve.

After completing this exercise you should have a better understanding of what drives your career and the creative lifestyle you desire. You can expect the following outputs:

1. **Know the creative business you are in, and the role you will play in it.**
2. **A description of your creative industry, its current trends, and your impact**
3. **A clear description of what makes you unique; Know your competitive advantage**
4. **Clearly defined short and long term goals and career objectives**
5. **Your 'Business Philosophy'**
6. **Identify the people that will want to hire you and/or sell your work**
7. **A clear, concise, and memorable 'Artist Mission Statement'**

Creative people have many talents. It is practical that most artists are pursuing multiple creative careers. Especially since many creative industries hire on a freelance basis, or jobs and gigs are for short periods of time. Additionally, creative people generally have the ability to be good at many things. Therefore, you not only have more opportunities, but you also have more business to manage.

As you begin the following exercise for the first time try your best to focus on your deepest area of interest - Your Artist Dream. Keep in mind, you can do this exercise several times focusing each time on various talents or professional careers, which you are pursuing in different phases, or simultaneously.

Unique Artist Description

Guidelines, p.1

Under each question, or set of questions, you will find short explanations and examples. The example “answers” given are only examples. They are not choices. There are no right or wrong answers to this exercise. Remember, your qualities, goals, and philosophies are unique to you as an artist and as an individual. *Let's get started!*

What business will you be in? What will you do?

This identifies your occupation, field, or trade. Keep it simple and specific. The objective is to narrow down the creative industry you will be working in, competing in, and creating in, and the role you will play (or wish to play) in it.

Examples:

- I am in the music business. I will play violin.
- I am in the [modern] dance business. I will choreograph.
- I am in the film business. I will edit films.
- I am in the theatre business. I will design costumes.
- I am in the cartoon business. I will make animated character designs.
- I am in the arts education business. I will teach painting to K-12 students.

Although many fields of business overlap in creative industries, try keeping it simple and focus on the area you are most deeply interested in or committed to. You will have opportunities to dive deeper in to the details of your work in other sections of the exercise.

Describe your most important strengths. What will make your company (you!) succeed? What are your competitive advantages? What background experience, unique skills and talents do you bring to your industry? Don't be shy. This is your chance to brag about yourself and your talents, and to recognize that even your quirks and “weaknesses” are sometimes the things that stand out the most and act as your greatest weapon against fierce competition.

Unique Artist Description

Guidelines, p.2

Describe your industry. *What is happening in your industry? What changes do you foresee? How will they effect your business in the long term (3-5, 5-10 years) and short term (6 months – 2 years)? How will your business impact these foreseen changes or trends?*

Examples of industries and their 'happenings' that effect your business:

- Fashion industry: pollution concerns, recycling, new business models, etc.
- Music industry: streaming, music distribution channels, real-time personalization, etc.
- Art: Increase in worldwide Art Fairs, Galleries are dying, online art sales, etc.

You may also want to include 'Who's Who' in your industry right now, and ask yourself "Why?"

Also, pay attention to changes that are happening in the world that effect all industries. How will they affect your business? How will your business impact these foreseen changes or trends?

Examples of world 'happenings' or trends that effect your business:

- The Freelance Economy is growing.
- Rapid advancements in technology changing the ways we live, work, and have experiences
- Virtual Reality, Drones, Gaming
- Social Media, Big Data, Information overload - their impact on communication and community development
- Globalization offers more opportunities to work internationally. Does this also mean more competition?
- Education is evolving. What is happening in arts education? How can the arts have an impact on newly developed educational systems?
- Environmental concerns

Unique Artist Description

Guidelines, p.3

Goals and Objectives. Goals are like destinations—where you want your career and business to be. Objectives are the steps you take along the way to achieving those goals. Objectives are also used as a measurement of your progress.

Example:

- **Goal:** Publish three short stories within the next year and get paid market value.
- **Objectives:**
 - investigate the market (research publishing opportunities and pay rates)
 - networking targets (connecting with editors),
 - writing and editing milestones (finish editing the third story),
 - Objectives can also speak to specific measures of artistic satisfaction (like dusting off that story you are really passionate about!)

Be as specific as you want to be. You may have several goals. Each one should have its own list of objectives.

Of course, it is always a good idea to dream big. And, it is also effective to make feasible goals. That is why there are short-term goals (less than 12 months) and long-term goals (3, 5, or 10 years from now). The most important, is to look at what you want to achieve and truly own it. Then, wrap your head around the objectives you have to meet to reach your goals.

Examples of long and short-term goals:

- Short-term (less than 12 months):
 - Writer: Write the first 3 chapters of my novel
 - Actress: Get an agent, and go to at least one audition per week
- Long-term (2-5 years):
 - Writer: Finish my novel, and get a literary agent
 - Actress: Join AEA, perform professionally in at least 3 shows, work with Director 'X'
- Long-term (5-10 years)
 - Writer: Publish my first novel and do a book tour
 - Actress: Get cast on Broadway

Remember, it takes time to build a well developed career as an artist. Certainly, there are various circumstances, strokes of “luck”, or once-in-a-lifetime chances that can propel your plan forward faster than you expected. That is fantastic! Be prepared to take those opportunities. The reality, however, is that most successful artists had to build momentum through a lot of hard work.

Unique Artist Description

Guidelines, p.4

Who is your audience? Who will you market [your product, services] to?

In today's world of technological advancements artists have many opportunities to self-publish and produce. However, most artists are still working within the systems, institutions, and organizations that have long been used to build a professional career in the arts.

If you are not self-producing you are most likely selling your products and services to some of the following "audiences":

- Broadway Producer
- Talent Agents
- Casting Directors
- Editors, Publishers, Literary Agents
- Design Firm, Ad Agency
- Fashion Buyer
- Music Producer
- Art Gallery

If you are self-producing or publishing and are directly marketing to your audience, some examples may include:

- Design clients (Freelance Graphic Designer)
- Young audiences (Children's Theatre Production)
- Private students (Private Vocal Coach)
- Private collectors (Painter, Sculpture)
- "Fans" or Investors (Crowdfunding a personal project)

It is important to understand who you are "selling" your work to because you will communicate to each of these audiences differently, and the steps you will take to meet your goals and objectives with these various audiences differs greatly. (More in Exercise 3: 'Road Map to Success – Setting a framework of actionable steps')

Unique Artist Description

Guidelines, p.5

Business Philosophy: What is important to you [in business]?

Your philosophy is your core belief system of why you are in this business. Your business philosophy is the driving force of your business, and directly effects your profit center.

Are you creating work for recognition or fortune? Does social impact drive your business?

Additional Examples:

- I want to connect with people through my art.
- I want to use my talents to change the world.
- I want to be famous.
- Working with top talent is most important to me. I don't care how much money I make, or who sees me doing it. No matter how much money I make, I always want to be an artist with respect, integrity, and authenticity.
- I want to provide children with opportunities to dance.
- I want people to recognize me and my unique talents.
- I want to be rich, and I can use my creative talents to get rich.
- I want to change my creative industry by introducing something new to the scene.
- Being rich is important for the lifestyle I desire.
- Becoming famous means I have "made it"
- Simple. I just love what I do, and can't imagine doing *anything* else!
- I want my work as an artist to make a difference or an impact on the lives of people around me.

There is no "right" or "wrong" business philosophy and no shame in any answer. Most important is to be honest with yourself. Write something that truly resonates with you, and use your own language to express it. Try to narrow it down to one or two beliefs that are most important to you.

Take as much time as you need to reflect on your business philosophy. We will use your business philosophy again in Exercise 2: 'Time & Money'.

Unique Artist Description

Guidelines, p.6

Artist Mission Statement. *This is a short statement, usually less than 30 words, which communicates your reason for being and the principles that guide you. Good mission statements are **clear, concise, and memorable, and very often inspiring.***

Forget industry jargon or buzzwords and speak in your own concrete language. Be creative! This statement can be for you to use as your own artist's mantra, or placed on your company website or social media. It could also be used to introduce yourself or as a response when industry professionals or others ask, "So, what do you do?"

Below is an example from the YouTube video 'How to Write a Mission Statement That Doesn't Suck' by Fast Company

- **sonicbids:** "We want to help musicians get gigs, and promoters book the right bands. We're a bunch of people who think that music can change the world and make it smaller and better." (32 words)

Below are examples from both non-profit and for-profit companies. You will see, not all of these are clear, concise, memorable, or inspiring.

Examples from several non-profits (with word counts):

- **New York Public Library:** To inspire lifelong learning, advance knowledge, and strengthen our communities. (10 words)
- **The Humane Society:** Celebrating Animals, Confronting Cruelty (4 words)
- **San Diego Zoo:** A conservation, education, and recreation organization dedicated to the reproduction, protection, and exhibition of animals, plants, and their habitats. (20 words)
- **TED:** Spreading Ideas. (2 words)

Examples from several for-profit companies (with word counts):

- **Microsoft:** We work to help people and businesses throughout the world realize their full potential. This is our mission. Everything we do reflects this mission and the values that make it possible. (31 words)
- **Nike:** To Bring Inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world. (11 words)
- **Aflac:** To combine aggressive strategic marketing with quality products and services at competitive prices to provide the best insurance value for consumers (21 words)

Unique Artist Description

Worksheet, p.1

What business will you be in? What will you do?

This identifies your occupation, field, or trade. Keep it simple and specific. The objective is to narrow down the creative industry you will be working in, competing in, and creating in, and the role you will play (or wish to play) in it.

Describe your most important strengths. What will make your company succeed? What are your competitive advantages? What background experience, unique skills and talents do you bring to your industry?

Describe your industry. *What is happening in your industry? What changes do you foresee? How will they affect your business in the long term (3-5, 5-10 years) and short term (6 months – 2 years)? How will your business impact these foreseen changes or trends?*

Goals and Objectives. *Goals are like destinations—where you want your career and business to be. Objectives measure your progress along the way to achieving those goals. What are your short-term goals (0-12 months), and your long-term goals (2-5 yrs., 5-10 yrs.)?*

Who is your audience? Who will you market [your product, services] to?

In today's world of technological advancements artists have many opportunities to self-publish and produce. However, most artists are still working within the systems, institutions, and organizations that have been long used to build a career in the arts. Who will you be "selling" to?

Business Philosophy: What is important to you [in business]?

Your philosophy is your core belief system of why you are in this business. Your business philosophy is the driving force of your business, and directly effects your profit center.

Mission Statement: *This is a short statement, usually less than 30 words, which communicates your reason for being and the principles that guide you. Good mission statements are **clear, concise, and memorable, and very often inspiring.***

Unique Artist Description

Worksheet, p.2

What business will you be in? What will you do?

Describe your most important strengths. What is your Competitive Advantage?

Describe your industry. Trends, changes, Who's Who. What is your impact going to be?

Goals and Objectives. Short-term (0-12 months) and Long-term (3-5, 5-10 yrs.)

Unique Artist Description

Worksheet, p.3

Who is your audience? Who will you market [your product, services] to?

Business Philosophy: What is important to you [in business]?

Your philosophy is your core belief system of why you are in this business.

Mission Statement: *This is a short statement, usually less than 30 words, which communicates your reason for being and the principles that guide you. Good mission statements are **clear, concise, and memorable, and very often inspiring.***

Congratulations! You have just successfully completed the first steps of developing your Artist Business Plan. Stay committed to your professional career success, and follow the next steps with these two exercises:

- **Exercise 2: Time & Money** – *Understanding your most valuable resources*
- **Exercise 3: Road Map to Success** – *Setting a framework of actionable steps*

Unique Artist Description

A Snapshot. Print this out and post it in a place where you can see it.

My Business & My Role

Artist Mission Statement

My Competitive Advantage

My Impact on the Industry

My Audience

My Business Philosophy

My Short-Term Goals

My Long-Term Goals