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Seminars for Arts Professionals

## SEPTEMBER SEMINAR SUMMARY

### **SELLING YOURSELF: SIMPLE MARKETING TECHNIQUES FOR ARTISTS** in partnership with Information + Cultural Exchange (ICE) held at Riverside Theatres, Parramatta

Chair: Kevin Golding, SAMAG Committee Member  
Moderator: Emma Kirby, Marketing and Sponsorship Analyst, Australia Council for the Arts  
Speakers: Monica Davidson, Creative Director, Freelance Success  
Jenny Cheeseman, Founder, Affordable Australian Art  
Jess Cook, DJ, Poet and Designer

Monday 24 September 2007

by Lauren Smelcher.

As a writer myself, I'm caught between a rock and the poor house: how does one make a living from paper and pen? While Linda Evangelista claimed she wouldn't wake up for less than \$10 000 a day, I often find myself offering to write for magazines, newspapers, and websites for nada. Yes – I truly put the 'free' in freelancing.

It was heartening, then, to see so many people like myself – all keen to make a living from their art at the September SAMAG meeting, held in conjunction with Information Cultural Exchange.

Panellists Monica Davidson, Jess Cook, and Jenny Cheeseman – three very different women approaching this problem in varying ways – offered their collective knowledge. While they each hail from divergent backgrounds, three common themes emerged from their freelance expertise – the need to market oneself, the importance of planning, and the value of being passionate about your work.

#### ADVERTISE YOURSELF!

According to Monica, branding is one of the easiest and most effective ways of succeeding as a freelancer. With so many artists out to do the same thing (and pitching their ideas to the same galleries, theatres, and magazines) your brand will allow you to stand out from the crowd.

Davidson points to Virgin as the epitome of the modern brand. Richard Branson's empire is an instantly recognisable extension of himself - brash, cheeky, youthful, unconventional. Ergo, Virgin is a global version of Branson.

While some artists might be reticent about injecting corporate jargon into their creative pursuits, Davidson points out that artists are inevitably branded by others anyway – it's best to get in first, and develop your own brand.

Branding, then, is a way of showing people – succinctly and memorably – who you are, what your work is, and what you produce. Davidson suggests choosing an image, colour and a word that best describe what you do (or at least, what you strive to do). If this is problematic, enlist some honest friends or family members for advice.

The benefits of branding, says Davidson, far outweigh the possible drawbacks.

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“Promoting yourself as a brand – like Virgin has done so successfully - offers you lots of opportunities that may otherwise be closed to you.

“Branding allows you to venture into commercial activities without having to compromise your vision.

“When you brand yourself, you call the shots.”

### SUIT UP!

Jenny Cheeseman claims she cannot overstate the importance of planning when it comes to your freelance career.

First up, she suggests studying a small business course at TAFE or a similar accredited institution to arm yourself with basic business knowledge. As a lone ranger, she says, you’re already against the odds. Boost your skills and credibility with a small business course and you won’t be stuck on such an uneven playing field.

This is a sentiment echoed by Davidson, who advises freelancers to establish a business and marketing plan. Having clear goals and timelines in mind (not to mention on paper) is incredibly useful. Once this is done, it’s also helpful to take stock every few months and evaluate your progress against the benchmarks you’ve set.

Davidson also argues that, in 2007, it’s impossible to market yourself effectively without a website. A relatively inexpensive tool, it’s an instant creative passport: people the world over can contact you, read or view your work, and (if you’re canny enough) even buy it.

Just as small business classes are beneficial, you might also think about completing a short course in web publishing software, such as Dreamweaver or Flash. Alternatively, there are lots of eager web monkeys out there – hire one to create a site for you. Remember – the website should reflect your brand!

Cheeseman, who works with visual artists, is a font of knowledge for aspiring Kandinskys. She warns against taking any action unprepared.

“Don’t make cold calls to galleries, and don’t show up unannounced – the gallery is a business and by interrupting that, you look unprofessional. What’s more, you’ll take time away from the customers.”

Instead, she says, artists should update their CVs and portfolios, organise all legal and tax requirements (such as an ABN), consider the pricing of their work (based on research – look on the web and other galleries, and remember that you’ll probably have to deduct commission from the end price) and have work ready to sell (just in case!) before even considering making a call or visit to a gallery. Also, artists should tailor their portfolios to specific galleries – just as you wouldn’t pitch a diet story to *Rolling Stone*, you probably wouldn’t pitch installations to a conservative gallery.

When you do reach this stage, try to prepare a thirty second soundbite about yourself. Think of it like a television ad – in half a minute, you have to capture someone’s interest. It’s not necessarily about telling them everything about yourself, it’s more a matter of piquing their interest.

As the old adage goes, if at first you don’t succeed, try, try again. But before you take your easel back out there, take heed of the feedback provided. This will be an infinite help.

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### LOVE YOUR WORK!

Finally, don't lose sight of your passion. Jess Cook, who exudes the kind of quirky vivaciousness and zeal for her work we all need, advises artists against toning down their creative flair. As she (quite rightly) says, "The last thing people want to see is something pedestrian."

Part of this is documenting all of your work and spreading the word about it – don't be embarrassed to tell people about your craft. As she says, "Your craft is your best business card."