

Simone Downey



Crafting a Business - Simone Downey

Outline interviewed Simone a few years ago about her early illustration career. Today we catch up with Simone, and hear about her now full-time illustration business, her progress and learnings.



Outline: In the past year you have made the transition from part-time illustration work to building a full time business. We'd love to hear about this decision - what inspired you to make the leap when you did, and what practical steps you made before this time to ensure your business would be a success.

Simone: There was a few things that made that inspired me to make that decision. The first thing was that I was working as a web/multimedia designer before this and I only just had dabbled with illustrating, and yet I noticed how illustrating came a lot more naturally to me. Drawing sweet little characters came more easily to me and yet with web design I always felt like I was forcing myself to design. The difference was like night and day.

The other issue was I was getting a lot of migraines at work, because I have issues with my eyes. I have vitreous floaters

in my eyes, but they are quite bad. They are dark grey and I have hundreds of them floating in my eyes each day, so it can be hard to see sometimes. So I thought it best for me to be able to work my own hours. But would you believe as soon as I left my job, I became really ill, I got some allergic reaction to probiotics (which took me and the specialist 6 months to figure out) and it totally stuffed my immune system up, I became intolerant to all foods, nausea every day, aching bones, I was so weak. So it was an absolute blessing to be able to work from home and being able to rest when I need to, and it gave me time to heal. It's taken about a year, but thankfully I am so, so much better. I'm very grateful to have a business that supported me through this.

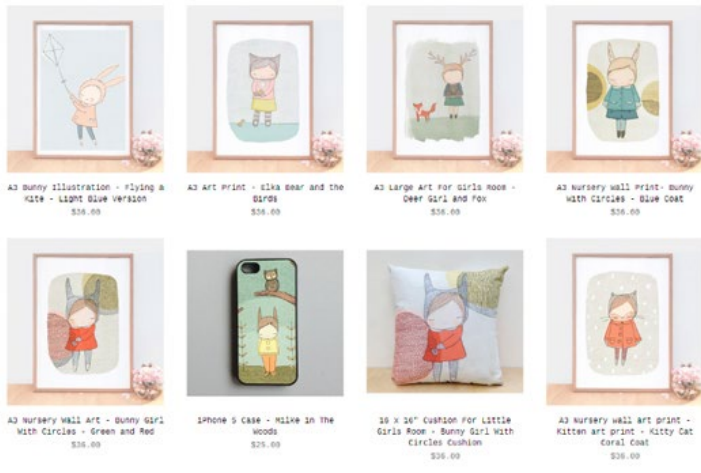
I did take some sort of practical steps...before leaving my full-time job, I was also building up my art business at night and weekends. The art business was doing quite well, so I knew I could kind of survive on what I was making through the art business. I also saved up money from my full-time job, so I had a safety net. I think this was pretty important to do.

If you are thinking of branching out on your own, I would take a job where you can save for a year, or even work a casual/part-time job while building your business, just so that you have something steady to fall back on to. I suspect it would be quite overwhelming if you started your business with hardly any money in the bank, and I think what would happen is you would be worrying more about paying the bills and surviving than building up your business and being creative.

Outline: In setting up a primarily online business, who do you believe is your "typical customer"? what marketing techniques have you found the most successful to reach this audience?

Simone: Well I have two types of customers, as I have two ranges. I have my Nomuu children's art, but I also an abstract art range, called AMMIKI.

The customers for my Nomuu range, are primarily are mothers doing up their children's bedrooms and nurseries. Based on Facebook stats, they are primarily 25-34 years of age and female.



an order has come in. Lately I have been trying to do orders almost as soon as I get them, and send them out the door, but sometimes I will wait a day or so and prepare a number of orders at the same time. I just take it how it comes. I don't stick to a strict regime when preparing orders, I just base it on what seems best at the time.

My day-to-day operations could be a bit better. I don't really have a set routine. It's really dependant on orders and emails/requests I get. I don't create illustrations every day, in fact lately I just haven't had time to lately. I have been quite busy with orders and keeping up with inventory. I have also been doing an online illustrators course. The nice thing is when you work for yourself, you can fit in things like courses into the routine.

Outline: What have you found difficult about working for yourself?

Simone: Probably worrying about the future. Even though this business is going ok, like any business it's not always consistent. It's the uncertainty of not knowing how it will do each month. I am not very good with uncertainly and risk, so it has been quite hard for me to adjust to not knowing I will get X amount each month. That's the beauty of working for someone else, you get a nice pay cheque each month and you know the exact amount you will get.

Outline: Could you tell us about your studio? What is a day in the studio like for you?

Simone: I actually just moved out of my art studio, which

My Ammiki range is more for adults, although having said that, now this was a real surprise, people buy my abstract work for their children's nurseries too. I have been lucky enough to have one of my abstract pieces selling on 'The Land of Nod' and I didn't quite understand why they wanted to sell my abstract art. However, now understand that even though they are selling children's decor, they are also trying to tap into the adult market, so artwork can be both for adults and children. So I have learnt something new there.

In regards to marketing, I think I am very lucky that my following has been quite organic. I don't do huge marketing campaigns or anything like that. I primarily use Facebook, because that seems to be most popular with my audience. I try and post regularly and I do offer giveaways of my products usually every few weeks. I mainly giveaway pieces that are imperfect/flawed, and I would normally have to throw them in the bin...but my audience doesn't seem to care if they are imperfect and they just love participating. Because I get so many people participating directly on Facebook, their friends also see the giveaway and join in and tend to like my page to.

Occasionally I will approach big children's blogs to see if they are interested in featuring my work, but I may do this once or twice a year. I really should be more diligent with this. They usually have to have over 20,000 Facebook followers for me to do this.

Outline: How do you manage your online orders and day-to-day operations?

Simone: Basically, I get a notification on my phone when



All my work is digital after the initial ink drawing. So basically once I have drawn a character (normally with a black fine ink pen). I will scan it into the computer. I then bring it into Photoshop, and I begin painting over the design with different colours in Photoshop. I can then play around with colour hues and saturation. I then start bringing in more textural elements to overlay over the top of the illustration. So I use things like, linen, velvet, wool. I also hand paint textures using anything from watercolour, oils to acrylics and then either scan or photograph them, and use those in the design as well.

I have recently learnt a new technique though from a course I just took called 'Make Art That Sells', and in the course the creator suggests creating 'icons' which means you break up the artwork into little bits, rather than making one big scene to begin with. So you might design a certain flower that you want to use in your design, and you will just really concentrate on that, and use different mediums to create different versions, then you pick the best one, you then go on to the next item. It helps you to break down the task into bite size, manageable pieces.

With my abstract work is a lot more experimental. Sometimes, I just want to work with shapes and abstract ideas and not think about things too much and it really is like a big experiment. I don't think too much about the concept, I just see shapes and then play around with them.

Outline: Who are your art or business and/or art heroes?

Simone: My business heroes, well I can't say anyone in particular, but I love, love entrepreneurialism. So I lap up any entrepreneurial talks. I like learning from tech start-up businesses, they totally fascinate me. I listen to mixergy.com a lot, which interviews a lot of entrepreneurs. I loved the interview from the guys that started Airbnb (the travel accommodation website), or Julie Aigner-Clark, the lady that created the 'Baby Einstein' series.

My art heroes, I don't have one particular favourite. I love Dick Bruna, Quentin Blake and Beatrix Potter for children's book illustrations.

I also enjoy modern art such as Matisse, Dali, Miró, Magritte and for more recent contemporary artist I would have to say I really like Ashley Goldberg. I also saw recently some work from Campbell La Pun who is up-and-coming street artist from Melbourne, his work really caught my eye in a gallery recently. ●

was in Fitzroy. I am actually back at my house. It was too much of a commute and although I loved it when I went there, I wasn't using it as much as I wanted. I was tending to still do all my main work from home, as I have some expensive equipment. I think if I was to get a studio again, I would like a more communal, collaborative space.

My home studio, is so small it's ridiculous, and it does tend to move out to the lounge (which I don't like doing). The good thing is, because the space is small everything is in close proximity, the printer, the scanner, the cutting table etc, so it makes it easy to move from one task to another.

A typical day in my office is, get up have a coffee, read emails, reply to important email, see what orders have come in. Based on orders I will decide if I should prepare them there and then or wait. Preparing orders can take me quite a while and can take a big chunk of the day up. With the art prints, I print them out only when an order has been made (I print in-house). I then package them up.

Outline: What is the process you use to create your lovely prints?

Simone: Sometimes I sketch out a design that I want to work on there and then, but most of the time I do sketches and leave them in a drawer and come back to them at a later date. Sometimes something I have drawn I won't instantly connect with, but a few weeks later I might. If I do see something I like, I will then start working on it, and just plug away with the design.

{CLICK!} Simone Downey

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Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/nomuu>

Shop - Abstracts <https://www.etsy.com/shop/AMMIKI>