

Spring 5-16-2014

Finding a Niche as a Visual Communicator

Megan Tan

Western Kentucky University, megan.tan159@topper.wku.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/stu_hon_theses

Recommended Citation

Tan, Megan, "Finding a Niche as a Visual Communicator" (2014). *Honors College Capstone Experience/Thesis Projects*. Paper 498.
http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/stu_hon_theses/498

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors College Capstone Experience/Thesis Projects by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.

FINDING A NICHE AS A VISUAL COMMUNICATOR

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Bachelor of Arts with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

Megan Tan

Western Kentucky University
2014

CE/T Committee:

Josh Meltzer, Advisor

Mac McKerral

Nathan Phelps

Approved by

Advisor

School of Journalism and Broadcasting

Copyright by
Megan Tan
2014

ABSTRACT

Through a personal narrative, photojournalism student Megan Tan confronts the problems of finding work as a photojournalist in the traditional news industry and seeks to find alternative solutions to sustain herself as a visual communicator. During her search, she begins to focus her storytelling interest toward the Native American and Indigenous niche. To test if her skills as a photojournalist translate to larger non-traditional news markets, such as the non-profit market, she creates an experiment. While Megan is in Ecuador she pitches a short-documentary promotional video to a non-profit organization. After working alongside the organization and creating a product that was positively received, Megan decides to take what she has learned from her experiment and create a business plan. The purpose of the business plan is to help her sustain herself for her life post-graduation working for a variety of markets in the Native American and Indigenous niche.

Keywords: Native Americans, Indigenous Peoples, Photojournalism, Business Plan, Niche, Visual Storytelling, Nonprofit Organizations

Dedicated to my mother, Susan Tan and father, Vincent Tan

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Josh Meltzer, my advisor, who has written numerous recommendations for grants, scholarships and jobs for me, and who has supported me throughout my entire academic career at Western Kentucky University. I would also like to thank Mac McKerral who met with me one-on-one during the initial phase of my Honors CE/T when the focus was based in Cherokee, N.C. He has witnessed numerous transformations with the project and has continued to support me through each one. I also want to thank Jeanie Adams-Smith, my first advisor, for the encouragement she has given me during my time at Western Kentucky University and for helping me through the initial phases of my CE/T.

VITA

August 29, 1990	Born-Columbus, Ohio
2008.....	Fort Hayes Arts and Academic Columbus, Ohio
2008.....	Study Abroad Pondicherry, India
2010.....	Study Abroad Quetzaltenango, Guatemala
2011.....	Photographer (Intern) Chautauquan Daily Chautauqua, New York
2012.....	Photographer (Intern) Minneapolis Star Tribune Minneapolis, Minnesota
2013.....	Program Assistant (Intern) NRP - Radiolab New York City, New York
2013.....	Project Director/Producer Timber & Frame Findlay, Ohio
2013.....	Study Abroad Quito, Ecuador

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Photojournalism

Minor Field: Spanish

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Abstract	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Vita.....	v
Chapters:	
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Statement of Problem.....	3
3. Finding a Niche.....	5
4. Working with a Nonprofit.....	11
5. Lessons Learned	16
6. Business Plan	18
7. Conclusion	36
Appendices.....	37

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When Mike Davis, a previous editor of photography at National Geographic, visited the photojournalism department at Western Kentucky University in 2011, he offered advice about becoming a self-sustaining photographer in the digital age. He said:

- Always have ideas. “Editors are knee-deep with good photographers, but ankle-deep with photographers that have good ideas.” This is a well-known phrase in the photojournalism industry that Davis reiterated during his presentation. In addition, Davis said that having a portfolio that illustrates your ability to take photographs of a broad subject matter is no longer marketable.

- Find a photographic niche and then market to that niche. It’s easier for an editor to assign a specific assignment to a photographer who is known for a specific subject matter than for an editor to give that same assignment to a photographer who is a jack-of-all-trades and can shoot photos of sports, portraits and daily features, said Davis. By marketing yourself as an expert in one niche, editors trust that you are knowledgeable about a specific subject and that you have a thorough understanding of what they are looking for. You will also have previous work that meets their needs.

- Once you find your niche, utilize all of its vertical markets. What does that mean? If you are an underwater photographer, market yourself toward that specific niche across a

variety of platforms and mediums. By seeking markets beyond the “editorial” market, you can diversify your cliental and be able to continuously find work.

As a student who just finished her second year in the photojournalism program, I had no idea what vertical markets meant or what kind of niche would fuel my work. But I was listening to Davis’ advice and writing down every word he said.

CHAPTER 2

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

At the time of Davis's presentation, I didn't know anything about business, how to market myself, or what job opportunities existed beyond being a newspaper photographer. Until recently, we were taught that you intern at a small paper, then a regional paper and then after five years of working in the industry you may think about launching yourself as a freelance photographer and create work for larger markets. But that's not the case anymore. An online article written in 2013 by the Pew Research Center stated that from 2000 to 2012, the newspaper industry cut the number of staff photographers by 43 percent, illustrating an employment number that dropped from 6,171 to 3,493 in the past 12 years. Major news outlets offer testimonies to this. A couple outlets that made the news: in May 2013, the Chicago Sun-Times laid-off all of its 28 staff photographers; in 2011, CNN eliminated 50 positions and laid-off 12 photojournalists; and in 2008 when National Geographic laid-off its last two remaining staff photographers.

This "reality" also applies to recent photojournalism graduates who have received numerous awards and have strong portfolios. However, they have been laid off from staff positions after less than a year of work. Lance Booth, a recent photojournalism graduate of Western Kentucky University, has won the Jimi Lott Scholarship, placed second in the Hearst Journalism Awards Program for a multimedia story, won multiple Kentucky News

Photographers Association awards and had a photograph featured in National Geographic. He was laid off from the Nashua Telegraph after working there for 11 months. Maddie McGarvy from Ohio University is also a recent photojournalism graduate who won Luceo Student Project Award, Ohio Student Photographer of the Year 2011, was a finalist in the Hearst competition, placed in College Photographer of the Year and was also laid off after 11 months of working at Burlington Free Press in Vermont. This is an obvious problem for students graduating with a photojournalism background who seek job security in the industry. The trend in the photojournalism industry is causing recent graduates and professionals to launch themselves into other job markets and find alternative avenues of income. Davis' advice on pitching ideas, finding a niche and utilizing verticals markets, spring-boarded me toward a possible approach to becoming a self-sustaining photojournalist. In my thesis, I will explain my approach to sustaining myself in the visual storytelling industry through the explanation of finding my niche, a personal experience working with a nonprofit organization in that niche, and through an outline of a possible business plan to help me find work within that niche.

CHAPTER 3

FINDING A NICHE

While some 18 year olds spend their summer days at home with their family and friends and try to absorb everything that is familiar before launching themselves into college, I spent my post-high school graduation days 6,388 miles away from home. After graduation, I had the opportunity to travel to Mongolia with a teacher and two other students. Our month-long travels allowed us to spend weekends riding camels in the Gobi Desert, swimming down rivers in the countryside and watching horse races right outside the capital. This short period of time set the tone for my natural curiosity and would help me discover my niche — five years later.

After a month of eating with local Mongolians, listening to their stories and driving on unmarked roads without a map, I realized I had absorbed Mongolia's genuine culture and bypassed tourist traps. Nothing during our trip was set up or artificial. Everything was real. We never felt like guests imposing on our hosts because we always were treated like family. During our travels, we listened to students play the morinhor, a Mongolian string instrument that often imitates the sounds of a horse, we watched the slaughtering of a lamb for an evening's dinner, we ate meals on the side of the road over small, hand-built fires, and we spent nights sleeping underneath the sky in the Gobi Desert. Because of my close contact with the locals, I felt the richness of the culture and

the genuine spirit of the people. Even though the Mongolians we encountered were not living a fancy lifestyle compared to American standards, they were happy, warm and joyful. That was when I started to question the qualities of life that were missing in the American culture.

There was one night in particular that made me not want to be an American anymore. After spending 12 hours in a 1970s van, inhaling dust, falling asleep on and off, and driving along a dirt road with no signs for miles, our driver Naarah, who we had found in the “black market” and had hired to take us to the Gobi Desert, finally told us we had reached the sand dunes. We had lost all hope of finding it five hours beforehand. After walking up the sand dunes and running down them, I appreciated the long car ride to reach them. As we departed from the sand dunes, our Mongolian friends started singing a song. It was an ancient song that had been passed down from their grandparents, and their grandparents’ grandparents. It was beautiful to hear three people who didn’t know each other before our travel adventure, sing the same rhythm, melody and lyrics all in unison. After singing a couple of songs, they turned to us — four Americans sitting in the back enjoying their cappella spontaneity — and asked us to sing a song that *we* all knew. We were silent. We couldn’t think of any songs that we all knew, aside from Christmas songs and the “National Anthem.”

Nothing passed down from our grandparents or our grandparents’ grandparents came to mind. At that moment, I didn’t want to be an American. I wanted to be Mongolian. I started looking at what characteristics of culture united us and defined us as Americans, and I realized that compared with Mongolians, we didn’t have much. But I continued to question. What happened to our culture in the United States? Where did it

go, and does it still exist?

When I walked back through U.S. customs, it was difficult for me to accept my “American-ness.” I kept comparing our shallow culture with Mongolia’s ancient culture, and it pushed me to further question our roots, our identity and why we don’t have an ancient lineage of customs that we still reference today. Why couldn’t I and four other Americans sing a song in unison?

Unconsciously, my photographic work also began to reflect my natural curiosity about identity and culture, and it encouraged me to pursue projects about Native Americans, the people who I found most similar to Mongolians. Why did I think this? While we were in Mongolia, I remember an indigenous tribe called the Reindeer People, who live in nomadic houses that looked similar to Native American tepees. To me, it made sense that the traditions from Mongolia crossed over the Bearing Strait into North America, and are somehow related to the Native Americans of North America. These connections I started to build, began my journey to find an ancient cultural identity within my own backyard.

During my second semester in the photojournalism department at WKU, I met the Barbour family, a Native American family that lives outside of Bowling Green, Ky. After spending time with them, I produced my first multimedia piece about their identity as Native Americans who are not recognized because they do not have a registered tribal card. Through my conversations with the Barbour family, they revealed underlining modern-day Native American issues that were oblivious to me, especially the issues concerning ones identity both legally and personally. For instance, Paul Barbour, now 75, didn’t start participating in Native American events or recognize himself as a Native

American until 10 years ago at age 65. And even now that he personally embraces his identity as a Native American, he can't register himself with a tribe because the reservation that had his paperwork lost it. Also, while Paul may look like the typical dark-skinned Native American, Patty, his wife, is pale-skinned with short white hair and doesn't have any "Native American" physical traits. However, she identifies herself as a Cherokee. She is also not recognized as a Native American by the U.S. government because she doesn't have a card. Before meeting the Barbour family, I didn't know someone had to "prove" his or her race or that people who didn't appear to look like the typical Native American have native blood. This preservation of an ancient culture that I wanted to find in my backyard was looking more complicated than I first thought.

After meeting the Barbour family, I started pursuing more projects that dealt with Native American identity and started looking for communities where I could ask more questions. As a junior, I did a portrait series about the local Native American people who were friends or were part of the Barbour family. I also attended their local "Bury the Hatchet" meetings and engaged them in conversations about the complexities of being a modern-day Native American.

After doing more research, I started laying down the groundwork to connect with the closest registered tribe. During Spring Break of my junior year, I spent five days in Cherokee, N.C., to launch my original Honors CE/T about the identity of Native American youth. The project's intention was to be a portrait series of Native Americans of the Eastern Band of Cherokees and have each of them write a letter to America explaining how they viewed their native identity. After making contacts and spending time in Cherokee, the tribal council rejected my project proposal and discouraged me

from coming to the reservation to take photographs.

Despite the rejection, I continued fueling my curiosity in order to understand what happened to North American culture and how it is defined. Every time I did an internship in a state that had a Native American presence, I would spend my days off meeting native locals, asking them questions, listening to their stories and visiting numerous tribal-funded museums. During this time, I was able to travel to Salamanca, N.Y, home of the Senecas and talk to Native American locals in Minneapolis between photography shoots for the local newspaper. With each conversation, I understood more about what had happened to America's culture and where it stands today.

As I was seeking to further understand the layers of modern-day Native American identity, I also got the opportunity to explore this topic during one of my internships. While I was interning with the New York Public Radio show "Radiolab" in New York City, reporter Tim Howard started working on a radio show about the Supreme Court case *Adoptive Couple v. Baby Girl*, which challenged whether a Native American child could be adopted without the consent of his/her parents under the Indian Child Welfare Act. After explaining to Howard my personal investment in learning about the case, he allowed me to help him produce and report the story. For three months, I helped edit and transcribe interviews, called numerous subjects, fact-checked accounts and supplied Howard with whatever research needed to be done at the time. It wasn't until after this period, that I realized that no matter what kind of energy I was exerting toward telling a compelling story about the identity of Native Americans or Indigenous people, I was enjoying myself. I recognized my innate passion to tell stories that encompass Native American and indigenous issues. I found contentment in telling stories specific to this

niche. *To listen to the “Radiolab” piece visit: <http://www.radiolab.org/story/295210-adoptive-couple-v-baby-girl/>*

After working at “Radiolab,” I distanced myself from working on Native American and Indigenous stories and instead spent a couple of months working alongside Timber & Frame, a video production company based out of Ohio, to help refine my cinematography skills. During that time, I produced and directed a video for a nonprofit client and had a taste of what owning a small production company can look like. I also learned how to work with clients to meet their needs while having creative freedom. What I absorbed and processed during the months I worked alongside Timber & Frame, would help lead me into the project I would pursue in Ecuador that pertained to my Native American and Indigenous niche.

CHAPTER 4

WORKING WITH A NONPROFIT

After the summer of 2013, I bought my ticket to Ecuador with the intention of attending a foreign university and becoming fluent in Spanish. A couple weeks into my program, I realized that the majority of exchange students pursued programs that helped them become involved in the community. But my direct exchange program did not. As a photojournalism student, I had an itch to become part of the community, and I wanted to utilize my ability to create stories, but I didn't know where to begin. After talking with my friend about the uncertainties of post-graduation, I heard myself saying to him that I wanted to work for organizations that support Native American and indigenous communities to help them preserve their cultures. "So then do it," was my friend's response. It wasn't until I reiterated aloud, once again, what my niche was that I could start constructing my own opportunities.

That same week that I spoke to my friend, I went online to idealist.org and started researching nonprofits located in Quito, Ecuador, that worked with indigenous people. After generating a "first edit" list of organizations, I started looking at each more closely. I looked at their websites, decided whether the organization would benefit from having a short, documentary-style promotional video, whether they were committed, progressive and serious about their work. After I narrowed my list to three, I emailed the first: The Yanapuma Foundation. The next week I was in contact with Andy Kirby, the founder of

Yanapuma, and within a week we organized a meeting to talk about the services I could provide the organization.

When we spoke, I explained my background to Kirby and my ability to make short promotional videos. I also explained that upon completion, the piece could be placed online and could be taken to various conferences to promote the organization. Kirby could use the video as a marketing tool to pursue grants or additional outside funding. At the time, I didn't realize that in the midst of me trying to find an organization that could help me build my portfolio, I also was becoming a saleswoman.

After talking a couple hours, Kirby and I had mapped out various stories we could tell to illustrate Yanapuma's mission in a way that best utilizes the short documentary format. I also explained to Kirby that because I had approached him and I was looking to build my portfolio, it would be a pro bono project (later, we arranged that Yanapuma would pay for some of my expenses). One of the stories that we mentioned was featuring a student from Thinking Beyond Borders, a U.S. based gap-year program that participates in a community service and home-stay experience through Yanapuma. Needless to say, after my first encounter with Kirby and the Yanapuma Foundation, the idea became a committed project just a week later.

The promotional video would show Yanapuma's ability to merge two cultures, 18-year-olds from the United States and the indigenous Tsa'chila families in Bua, Ecuador. It would also highlight the reforestation project that involved TBB and the community. Kirby and I decided the video would focus on the experience of a student, her perspective before going, her perspective after she arrived and the inner realization or change that would take place while she was there. Of course, it's easier to write a pitch

and discuss a plan than it is to follow through with the design of the project.

Along the way, I faced and learned from numerous obstacles and setbacks. For example, early on while the creating the video I was losing control over certain design elements of the video because of a miscommunication between Yanapuma, Thinking Beyond Borders and myself. After speaking with Kirby, I directly contacted TBB and worked alongside TBB, even though they had not been present during the initial planning of the video. This led to confusion about how the video should be approached and the access I would have to the students and their families.

To create a strong video that follows the journey of one student you need to have an articulate student who understands the expectations of creating the video. One of the first obstacles was finding the “best” student to represent TBB and Yanapuma. When I spoke to TBB about who would be the best student to represent the program, it decided at the last minute to have all their students vote on the “best” candidate. According to TBB, empowering their students to make decisions aligns with the mission of the program. But as a director/producer it meant losing control over a large element of the project. Choices from the start were not being made for the sake of the video but were being dictated by the motivations of the students. At the time, I realized that the video was not going to be as strong as it could be.

Another issue that occurred as a result of miscommunication was TBB’s inability to view me as a serious professional director/filmmaker producing a marketing video for a Yanapuma. For instance, when I explained to all of the TBB leaders that I needed access to a crucial good bye ceremony between the students and their families, TBB ignored my request for the access and gave the power back to the students. They voted

against me documenting this scene. Both of these situations could have been prevented if I had explained to Yanapuma how important it was for them to communicate the importance of my presence to TBB and the importance of the video.

In addition to the problems that were happening on site, I was also experiencing communication issues with the client, Yanapuma. Before my last trip to the Tsa'chila community, I went to Yanapuma's office to discuss any ideas or concerns they had about the video. At the time, instead of meeting with Kirby, I met with Angela Winston, who was the director of communications at the time. During our last meeting (that I had initiated), Winston suddenly suggested inserting other ideas and concepts that were not present at the beginning of the project. She wanted a female Tsa'chila voice in the video to explain the long-term presence of Yanapuma, and she wanted to make sure that the video was highlighting the benefits of the Yanapuma foundation and not just its partnership with TBB. I realized that even after establishing the purpose of the video, a client might want to make last-minute changes to the video. During this conversation, I was open to the changes and tried my best to meet the needs of the client — even if it meant weakening the story structure.

During my last trip to the Tsa'chila community I conducted four interviews, one was with the TBB student and three with various Tsa'chila community members. Through these interviews, I tried to reach the points that I wanted the piece to creatively communicate while at the same time promoting Yanapuma and meeting Winston's requests. This was the first time that my storytelling skills learned at Western Kentucky University transitioned into the marketing realm and met the challenge of meeting the needs of the client.

After collecting all of the footage, transcribing the interviews from Spanish to English, sending a variety of edits to numerous producers that also make videos for nonprofit organizations, and spending more than 100 hours of editing and taping, I finally created a video piece that I felt was ready for the client. Attached are the hours that I kept track of in addition to the contract I created with Yanapuma.

Despite the problems and setbacks that occurred during the production of the piece, almost every other weekend I took a four-hour long bus ride to Santo Domingo, Ecuador, and documented the students working, spending time with their families, participating in festivities and learning about the Tsa'chila people. I also became close to the Tsa'chila families and the community. I continued to ask the people about the modern-day conflicts that strain their people and their culture. Through this experience, I was able to make a video piece that illustrates one of the mediums I want to work within a vertical market in my niche. I also was able to take my curiosity sparked in Mongolia about the ancient cultures and apply them to Ecuador.

CHAPTER 5

LESSONS LEARNED

One of the lessons I learned occurred over time. I learned that when you do work for free, clients and the people you are working with are less likely to: be heavily involved; take you seriously; and meet your needs. During my experience working with Yanapuma, Angela Winston never initiated follow-up meetings or emails to follow my progress and did not mention any concerns — until the last minute. That illustrates poor planning because there was no monetary investment to make the video a priority.

I also learned the importance of communication when working with numerous organizations. A clear understanding of your role between the organizations needs to exist and a clear understanding of the importance of your role and your work. This will help with access and will make it easier for collaboration between both entities without a lot of hassle. This will help me access real-time moments that need to be captured to strengthen the video.

Another lesson I learned was the importance of having a team to work with when doing video projects and long-term pieces. Fortunately, I was able to collaborate during the post-production phase. But I would have created a more successful product if I had someone to assist me during the interviews and documenting events in the community. As a result of not working in a team setting, I missed key emotional

moments that could have strengthened the video.

Even though the learning curve during this experience was steep, it illustrates my capability to work in a particular niche as a visual storyteller. In order to become self-sustainable and achieve post-graduation goals, I need to create a business plan that maps out my vertical markets and allows me to decide if I can fully sustain myself over the long term.

CHAPTER 6

BUSINESS PLAN

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

CommonTwine is a multiplatform storytelling company. It specializes in creating marketing tools for Native American and Indigenous nonprofit organizations through short, documentary-style videos. The company is currently in its beginning stages, branding itself, finding clients and establishing itself in the industry. Right now, there is no physical location for CommonTwine. The company is looking to locate to San Francisco, Seattle, Denver, Portland, Ore., Chicago or cities that surround the New York City area. The decision about location will be based on access to clients, appropriate foundations and the progressive trends. The company will be a sole proprietor, owned and operated by Megan Tan. A sole proprietorship is the simplest and most common structure chosen to start a business. It is an unincorporated business owned and run by one individual. That individual is entitled to all profits and responsible for all debts, losses and liabilities.

Mission/ Vision

Utilizing powerful media to create compelling narratives and advocate for the Native and Indigenous voice.

The mission of CommonTwine is to use audio, still photography and video to help promote organizations that globally work alongside Native Americas and Indigenous people. The belief is that by supporting organizations that support Native and Indigenous peoples, CommonTwine can indirectly support and advocate for the life philosophies of Native and Indigenous people. For instance, if a nonprofit organization is seeking to help educate non-native and indigenous communities about how different tribes live in relation to the earth, CommonTwine would create a video that illustrates these practices and shows the cultural exchange that takes place between the groups. The goal of CommonTwine is act as an alternative marketing agent for nonprofits specific to this niche. With powerful visual marketing, organizations can enhance their chances to find funding and will be able to launch fundraising campaigns to sustain their mission.

Objectives

The company plans on building a network of return clients, connecting with organizations, foundations, small businesses and nonprofits globally, and working with various publications to tell the stories of its clients. The goal will be to keep the company small enough to utilize a timely response traveling team and to be able to delegate work equally. The strategy is to keep the company small and pass it on to a future director after the owner retires. The company is not looking to be absorbed by a larger company, to go public or to buy out investors.

History and Current Status

Even though CommonTwine has not been established as a production company, the

owner of CommonTwine, Megan Tan, has worked with numerous organizations using a variety of platforms to promote small businesses and nonprofit organizations under the name “Megan Tan Media.” The objective will be to continue the actions of “Megan Tan Media” under the new brand, CommonTwine, and to seek out a specific target audience.

II. PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

CommonTwine will target nonprofit organizations and foundations that advocate and support Native and Indigenous issues, and are in need of visual storytelling services to launch various fundraising, recruiting and educational campaigns.

Making shot documentary style promotional

CommonTwine will focus its energy toward making short, documentary style promotional material for foundations and nonprofits to reach their target audience. The purpose of the each video is to communicate the mission of the organization through a personal story that will encourage outside viewers support financially the client’s mission.

The package for this service is extensive and will involve numerous steps to create a beneficial marketing product.

- First the company will work with the client to create the best design for the video. This may involve finding a specific person to focus the video on, interviewing numerous people, etc.
- After the conceptual planning is done, the CommonTwine team will produce and create the piece.

- Then the company will be in constant communication with the client about edits until a final piece is created. Then CommonTwine will make the presentation for the nonprofit, which will include promotional designs for a website.

Visual Skills

In addition to providing a video marketing service, CommonTwine will also provide a service as a subcontracted videographer or producer for larger production companies that are working with Native Americans or Indigenous clients or highlighting Native Americans or Indigenous issues.

Stills

Producing a collection of images for a client will accompany the video package. Taking photographs for a client will be an added feature and will not be marketed as a separate service.

Consultation

CommonTwine also will provide clients with an extra consultation service that will walk clients through the best ways to utilize visual storytelling. This service will be marketed as a separate service and will be added as an additional service to a video package. For example, after a CommonTwine creates a video for a nonprofit organization, a CommonTwine consultant and the client will be able to discuss where the video should be presented, what social media platform it should be presented on, how it should be presented and alternative opportunities the client can use to help its fundraising.

During the Next Five Years

During the first five years, CommonTwine will focus on building a relationship with repeat clients, testing its services to observe the reaction of clients, branding the company and the work associated with the brand, and presenting its work to receive various opportunities for exposure. The first five years will focus on networking, entering contests/competitions, working with foundations, publications, organizations that focus on Native American and Indigenous issues. After gaining recognition, credibility and a stable list of return clients, the goal of CommonTwine is to focus on creating five major projects a year and being able to focus on one product with a team. In the future, the goal is to transition from producing a large quantity of small projects with small billings to producing fewer but larger projects for larger billings.

The Prices

During the first five years, CommonTwine will charge clients between \$2,000 - \$15,000 per video project depending on the length and the production costs. However, there are numerous factors that will determine the cost of each project. As the company grows and changes its quality, the cost for the product will most likely change.

The price of the product will also depend on where the client is located. For instance, CommonTwine's price for a client in New York City will be different than a client from Elizabethtown, Ky., or from Portland, Ore. This is a result of the living expenses that dictate the expected prices in each city.

In regard to subcontracting services to larger production companies, CommonTwine plans on charging those companies a day rate instead of a project rate. As of right now, the day rate will most likely fall between \$500-\$800. However, this may also change as a result of where the company is located and negotiations.

Unique

The unique quality of CommonTwine's product is its short, documentary video style. With a photojournalism style, CommonTwine's product will value intimacy and will focus on personal narratives. Also, CommonTwine's brand will feel cozy, welcoming, personal and homemade. Many video production companies market a traditional, minimalistic brand without a lot of warmth. CommonTwine is seeking to market itself with the opposite mood. CommonTwine wants each video piece to feel like home and radiate a quality of coziness developed only after creating personal relationship with the clients and the subjects.

The company also sells its approach to storytelling and how it creates relationships with clients and subjects. The foundation and the relationships created will, in essence, be reflected in the final product. CommonTwine distinguishes itself from competitors by selling storytelling expertise and the ability to find the interconnectivity of telling compelling narratives across three different mediums.

The benchmarks for comparison will be seen through the results — maintaining contact with clients after our product is delivered and tracking how much money each organization raised as a result of the video.

For instance, we'll ask the client to track website and social media metrics, what financially support it attracts, and the feedback received at presentations, etc. That way we can tell if our specific services have tangible impact.

Another benchmark would be to submit our products to national/international competitions to measure the work against other companies and video products. For instance, there's an annual contest called, "The Do-Gooder Award," which looks at a range of videos for nonprofits throughout the country.

Produced and Delivered

The products will be produced in-house with a team. They will be distributed online through media transfers such as wetransfer.com, dropbox.com, etc. The videos will come with a brief explanation of the video, possible still image/behind the scenes shots of making the video and a brand for the product. The company will only be performing online exchanges. The same will be true for audio stories or stills.

Benefits

The purpose of CommonTwine is to show a specialization in one niche, which is in Native American and Indigenous communities. By illustrating the company's focus, clients can trust CommonTwine based on its previous work, its ability to gain the trust of

subjects, and the team's ability to adapt to people and places that are not apart of their everyday lifestyle.

The benefit with working with CommonTwine is its ability to communicate with a large audience across the Internet/Web, a skill enhanced by a journalism background. Also, by having the third component — personal consulting — clients receive a service that will make them more competitive. Instead of being an organization that just takes a promotional video and places it online, CommonTwine's clients will use visuals stories to strategize a marketing plan that will promote fundraising campaigns and mission.

Proprietary Rights

The company will own all the rights to the footage and the final products. It will be using a license agreement with the clients, explaining that it is licensing the material to them for a specific period of time.

Stage of Development

Right now the company has created three video products for nonprofit organizations.

One out of those three pertains to the company's niche. The goal of CommonTwine is to find more clients that work with Native American and Indigenous people and to find clients that are need of CommonTwine's services. Another goal is to maximize all of the company's possible vertical markets. For instance, CommonTwine will provide future services to a variety of publications, conferences, radio programs, organizations, children's books, collaborating authors or writers who work within this niche.

Obstacles

The major obstacles that remain are finding the clients **who have enough money to sustain projects**, creating the team that has the skills and agrees with the mission of the company, and maintaining enough steady work to allow the company to grow and continue producing quality work.

III. MARKETING AND INDUSTRY ANALYSIS

Market Size and Growth

The nonprofit and foundation markets are two of the best markets that can utilize the skills of CommonTwine. Nonprofits and foundations always seek to use strong communication platforms for fundraising, recruitment and educational campaigns. Using strong video storytelling can easily immerse outside viewers into their mission, grab their attention and encourage them to become involved and financially contribute.

The majority of Native American and Indigenous nonprofits are located along the West Coast, the West or the East Coast of the United States. Sponsors, grants, universities or foundations most likely fund them. After looking at a variety of websites from organizations such as The American Indian Business Leaders, American Indian College Fund, American Indian Policy and National Indian Child Welfare Association, it appears the majority of them have a board of directors, receive outside funds and are progressing toward using media content to strengthen how they communicate their mission. Some also express the need to dedicate more effort toward expanding their media. For instance,

The Center for World Indigenous Studies has a category on their navigation bar that reads, “Media,” but they only display one interview video. This kind of organization could utilize a video on their website that markets their mission and will attract more sponsors and outside funding.

Trends

Within the nonprofit and foundation sector there has been a recent trend that embraces visual storytelling, particularly in the video platform. As a result of online crowd sourcing, nonprofits are seeking to utilize different forms of online marketing and social media, and are beginning to gravitate toward online videos. Craig Newmark, the founder of Craigslist, said crowdfunding has raised about \$5.1 billion worldwide in 2013 and the growth of charitable donations by fundraisers has increased by 50 percent. Newmark also states that in order to have a successful fundraising campaign, nonprofits need to tell personal and engaging stories that connect to donors in an authentic way. The majority of crowdfunding websites also use videos to communicate their messages, encouraging nonprofits to utilize the kinds of services provided by CommonTwine.

Competitive Environment

The competition depends largely on where CommonTwine is located. For instance, if CommonTwine is located in New York City, the amount of competition is higher compared with CommonTwine in Denver, where the video production competition is relatively low.

Research shows CommonTwine only has one competitor, Longhouse Media. Longhouse Media is identified as a nonprofit organization that creates motion media for the Native American community. They are located in Seattle. Their website reflects that Longhouse focuses on working alongside Native American youth to produce fictional video projects that are an expression of youth identity. In the past, Longhouse has been commissioned to produce a piece for a Native American nonprofit, but based on work posted on its website, it does not appear to be the company's main mission or focus. That would make CommonTwine more competitive because CommonTwine has a specific niche within a niche. The company will not be focusing on creating fictional films and entering film festivals but would be focusing on using videos as a marketing tool. Also, Longhouse Media is based out of Seattle and depending on where CommonTwine is located, Longhouse Media represent a may strong competitor.

IV. MANAGEMENT TEAM

Initially, CommonTwine will function with one filmmaker who will create a foundation and build solid relationships with repeat clients. Then CommonTwine will have a strong portfolio and cliental to begin hiring a small staff. Below is projected company growth during a five-year period.

Research/content/audio gather and producer

CommonTwine will need two filmmakers to gather content. They will be conducting one-on-one interviews with subjects, constructing the story, designing the story and executing the final video product.

Artistic web/multiplatform designer

Content will most likely be viewed if it is complimented by strong design and presentation. Another characteristic that will differentiate the company is the success and appeal of CommonTwine's video product through its presentation. Therefore, hiring a Web designer that understands the functionality of design will, help with the final presentation of each product. Finding a person who understands code and has the foundational knowledge to experiment with different presentations is a priority. This person would be hired on as a full-time employee who has a passion for storytelling and people.

Producer

This person will work alongside the filmmakers to create a design for video pieces and edit footage. She/he will also be heavily involved in designing and writing story structures.

Composer

This person will be responsible for creating original music for each piece.

Company Manger

This person will be responsible for organizing the meetings, finding clients, and serving as the liaison between the company and clients. He/she will also be in charge of finding sponsorship, grants and alternative funding for projects. This person will also serve as a

direct visual communications consultant for the client. She/he will explain how the client can best utilize the video product for the most beneficial fundraising results.

V. OPERATIVE STRATEGIES

Workflow

- The manager will find clients/foundations/nonprofits/sponsors/grants interested in commissioning CommonTwine's services.
- The manager will communicate all of the needs of the client to the team.
- The Producer, Filmmakers, Composer and Designer will strategize an approach toward design and execution of the product. They will design multiple drafts of the video and execute it.
- The manager will pitch the storyboarded design to the client. Receive the client's approval or workout any problems or concerns of the client.
- The team will execute the piece.
- The client receives the piece and discusses numerous ways they can utilize this medium to launch a successful fundraising/recruiting/educational campaign.

Location

CommonTwine will need to rent work space. For the first couple of months or years the company may work in an out-of-home space where overhead costs are low and the number of people on the team is minimal. The location for this space is undetermined but will be in a progressive metropolitan location where numerous Native American and Indigenous organizations operate in close proximity. Close proximity to Native American

and Indigenous organizations will give CommonTwine the opportunity to meet with clients in person and develop strong relationships.

Advertising

The primary avenue of advertising for CommonTwine is going to be its website, the use of social media, attending conferences and events hosted for Native American and Indigenous organizations and referrals from previous clients. After speaking with a variety of self-sustaining media companies, the majority has said that the number one avenue of receiving clients or being introduced to new clients is through personal connections and referrals. CommonTwine plans to place in the contract, in exchange for its services, the client is encouraged to refer the company to another organization.

Income

CommonTwine will be generating revenue from a variety of avenues:

- **Videos for Native American and Indigenous Organizations**

This will be the primary income of CommonTwine. These organizations will illustrate the need for a short, documentary style video because they are in the process of launching a fundraising/recruiting/educational campaign. Foundations or universities that have money to support these organizations and encourage them to invest in a promotional short, documentary style video will most likely commission CommonTwine.

- **Partnering with Other Production Companies**

Larger production companies creating projects that focus on Native American and Indigenous Issues will also subcontract CommonTwine. This will allow the company to contribute its skills and services to projects the company supports as well as continue to build relationships within the Native American and Indigenous niche.

- **Grants**

Receiving and writing grants to pursue long-term documentary projects or be able to sponsor an organization that is in need of a video but cannot afford to pay for it, will be another avenue of income.

- **For profit industries**

There may be potential to work within the Native American community and be hired by tribes to do marketing campaigns or help change how their image is presented to the public.

- **Providing content to Native news outlets**

- **Creating wedding videos**

If CommonTwine cannot generate a consistent income working with the Native American and indigenous niche, it may seek alternative means of income. For instance, it may target the wedding market and create wedding videos for private clients. While the Native American and Indigenous niche may not generate a consistent flow of income, the wedding industry is consistently demanding products that CommonTwine is capable of producing. If CommonTwine produces wedding videos for private clients three months out of the year, the company may be able to

generate enough income to help sustain itself for the remaining nine months while it produces work for clients in the Native American and Indigenous niche.

- **Teacher/ Instructor**

CommonTwine may also market itself as a teacher or storyteller instructor and collect another form of income through paid annual workshops or classes.

VI. CRITICAL RISKS

The critical risk for CommonTwine is its inability to guarantee consistent work and the loss of investment of the initial start-up costs for the company. However, CommonTwine will address this issue by taking steps toward building its brand, its cliental and its quality of work. In the beginning, CommonTwine will focus on becoming recognized in the Native American and Indigenous nonprofit organization community as a media company that can produce beneficial marketing material. During these initial stages, the company will most likely underprice its product. The clients that do receive this initial treatment will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement regarding pricing and will also agree to refer CommonTwine after the product is released. With these two components, CommonTwine will eventually attract more clients and maintain a consistent degree of work.

VII. INCOME STATEMENT

According to the income statement of the first year, if CommonTwine meets its goal of \$5,000 of its monthly sales goal, the company should generate a total of \$53,817 and a subtotal of \$43,053 after deducting its expenses. With more work, referrals and

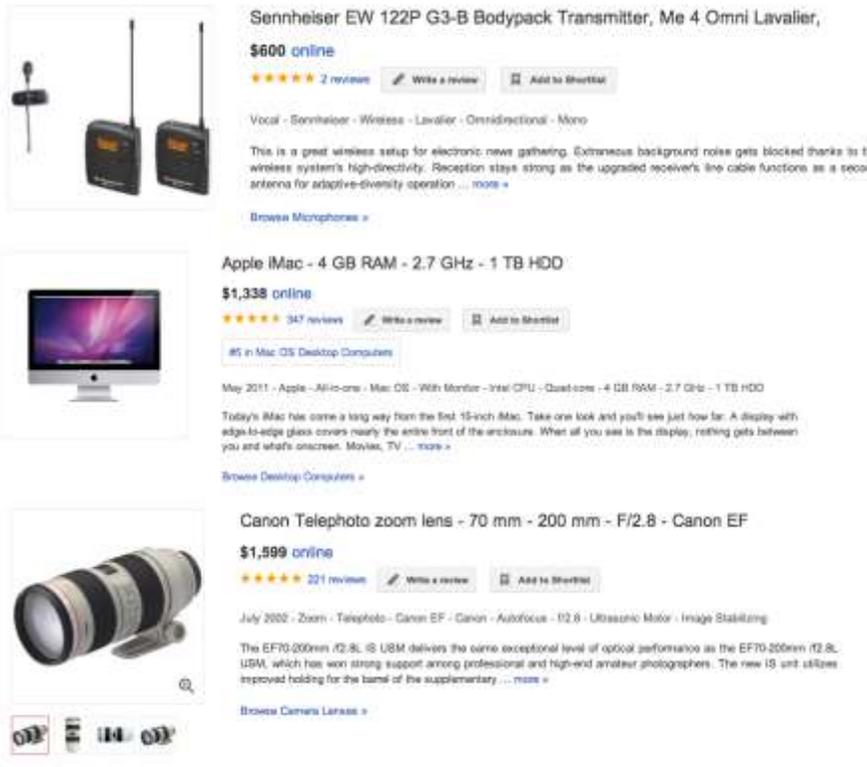
credibility, CommonTwine will increase its subtotal amount the following year by approximately \$7,000. By the third year, it will have increased its to \$78,996.

Balance Sheet

CommonTwine will not be taking out any loans, therefore there is nothing to balance.

Funds Required/Used

The majority of the funds will be used for equipment:



Sennheiser EW 122P G3-B Bodypack Transmitter, Me 4 Omni Lavalier
\$600 online
★★★★★ 2 reviews [Write a review](#) [Add to Shortlist](#)
Vocal - Sennheiser - Wireless - Lavalier - Omnidirectional - Mono
This is a great wireless setup for electronic news gathering. Extraneous background noise gets blocked thanks to the wireless system's high-directivity. Reception stays strong as the upgraded receiver's line cable functions as a second antenna for adaptive-diversity operation ... [more](#)
[Browse Microphones](#)

Apple iMac - 4 GB RAM - 2.7 GHz - 1 TB HDD
\$1,338 online
★★★★★ 347 reviews [Write a review](#) [Add to Shortlist](#)
#5 in Mac OS Desktop Computers
May 2011 - Apple - All-in-one - Mac OS - With Monitor - Intel CPU - Quad-core - 4 GB RAM - 2.7 GHz - 1 TB HDD
Today's iMac has come a long way from the first 15-inch iMac. Take one look and you'll see just how far: A display with edge-to-edge glass covers nearly the entire front of the enclosure. What all you see is the display, nothing gets between you and what's onscreen. Movies, TV ... [more](#)
[Browse Desktop Computers](#)

Canon Telephoto zoom lens - 70 mm - 200 mm - F/2.8 - Canon EF
\$1,599 online
★★★★★ 221 reviews [Write a review](#) [Add to Shortlist](#)
July 2002 - Zoom - Telephoto - Canon EF - Canon - Autofocus - f2.8 - Ultrasonic Motor - Image Stabilizing
The EF70-200mm f2.8L IS UBM delivers the same exceptional level of optical performance as the EF70-200mm f2.8L UBM, which has won strong support among professional and high-end amateur photographers. The new IS unit utilizes improved holding for the barrel of the supplementary ... [more](#)
[Browse Camera Lenses](#)



Creative Cloud Membership
Everything you need to create anything.



US \$49⁹⁹
per month
[Join](#)

The start-up costs of the \$15,000 will be approximately, which includes \$5,000 for equipment, \$3,000 for computers and software. Also, \$2,000 will be used toward accountant expenses.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

When I walked into the photojournalism department at Western Kentucky University in 2010, I had no idea what path would form during my time as a student. During the first two years of school, when professional photographers would ask, “What do you want to do after college?” my reply was always, “Well, I really like people, I really like long form storytelling and I really like taking photos.” I never really answered the question because I didn’t have one. It wasn’t until I started absorbing the words from professionals like Mike Davis, who told me to find a niche, and photographers like John Moore, who told me that it’s easier achieve your goals when you know what your goals are, that I was able to begin to reveal the passion that has always existed within me. After four years of the photojournalism program, I can confidently say that I have gained the skills I need to market myself as a strong storyteller, and I have found a niche in which I can utilize those skills. If someone told me that when I graduated from WKU’s photojournalism program, I would be able to use my visual storytelling skills to support Native American and Indigenous organizations and contribute to a cause that is bigger than myself, I wouldn’t have believed them.

APPENDIX A:

“30 NIGHTS LIKE HOME”
SHOT-DOCUMENTARY PROMOTIONAL VIDEO

(DVD Insert)

APPENDIX B:

FOLLOW-UP TO BUSINESS PLAN FEEDBACK

To create the business plan I presented in my CE/T, I used a template called “Writing a Successful Business Plan” by Stephen Lawrence and Frank Moyes of the University of Colorado at Boulder, which I received during an entrepreneurship class at WKU.

Without much prior knowledge of how to structure and write a business plan, I pursued the challenge. After presenting my business plan to my defense committee, they encouraged me to invest more time and research in developing a thorough plan and to utilize various business consulting resources in the area to help with the process.

Upon receiving feedback, I met with Larry Oden, a member of Bowling Green’s SCORE , a non-profit organization that provides business consulting free of charge.

During my meeting with Larry, we spoke about the initial costs of launching the company CommonTwine and what key elements in the business plan need attention.

Larry predicted it would cost no more than \$10,000 to start the business. He advised that during my first years of business I could cut costs by using Quick Books instead of hiring an accountant and I would not need a lawyer.

Larry also advised me to dedicate time and research to the marketing section of my business plan. He suggested that I make a thorough marketing strategy that targets the editorial market (in radio, print, and online-journalism), the for-profit market and the nonprofit market. He also suggested that in order to accumulate clients the work that

CommonTwine produces would need to receive award or national recognition in order to illustrate the credentials of the company.

Before our meeting was over, he also talked about the risks that would be involved in creating CommonTwine. He explained that the only risk involved would be opportunity costs, the annual salary I could have made if I had decided to take a job working with a company. But besides opportunity costs, there were not many other risks. The last piece of advice that Larry gave me was to 1) Know the craft 2) Know the players in the industry 3) Make a list of their names 4) Contact them 5) Keep in touch with them. After our first meeting, Larry has volunteered to look over any drafts of my business plan in the future and help answer any questions that I have about launching my own company.

After receiving feedback from my defense committee and Larry Oden, I recognize that my business plan is in its first stages of development. Before I graduate from Western Kentucky University, I plan to meet with Miller Slaughter, the director of the Small Business Development Center and Matt Whitaker, Management Consultant at the WKU Small Business Development Center, to talk about what steps I can take toward developing my business plan and what steps I need to take to launch CommonTwine and sustain it. My plan is to utilize my resources to create a thorough business plan during the summer months post-graduation and launch the company by the end of 2014.