

Hannah Fleetwood / Co-Founder and Designer Slice Creative Studio

If You Build It - They Will Come

The phrase ‘out of the frying pan and into the fire’ springs to mind when I think about the summer of 2013. I had just completed my BA in Visual Communication and was eager to jump on the graphic design career ladder. There were incredible internships available, such as the 3x3 internship which sees 3 design graduates participate in 3 month internships in 3 esteemed design studios in Dublin. Although I applied again and again for internships such as this, my attempts were fruitless. After my degree show I began a graphic design internship at a large branding agency and pottered away within pre-designed brand guidelines for 6 months.

Though I valued my time as an intern greatly and learned so much from the team I worked with, I returned home some evenings feeling somewhat deflated; the professional world of graphic design wasn’t what I had expected. There is not much freedom afforded to interns and junior designers and as a design hungry graduate I wanted something more.

My housemate, Treasa, a long-time friend and fellow designer was in the same position. She felt like a tiny cog in the corporate design machine. We both shared a love of design, craft and illustration and dreamt of working at progressive design studios such as Hvass & Hannibal or assisting typographer Jessica Hisch who both have a similar taste in design to ours. After careful consideration over a 6 month period and several malty beverages one evening, we decided to leave our internships and set up *SLICE*, a creative studio that encompassed everything we wanted in a studio.

Over a period of several months we grew a client base, acquired a studio, and invested most of our initial earnings into the company.

But what I would like to stress at this point is that it was not easy. Every year that I attend *OFFSET* creative festival I’m dumbfounded by how easy the speakers make starting your own studio look. Treasa and I worked full-time jobs in hospitality and retail to keep ink in our printer and coffee in the jar. Our departure from the customary design career ladder was met with apprehension

from some fellow graduates. But we knew the kind of design we wanted to create and if we couldn’t work at a studio that practised it then we would make our own. If we built it, the clients would come.

For the first two months we worked from our tiny kitchen, pitching for projects and working on our identity. We sought advice from the Enterprise Board and applied for several grants. We were eventually able to afford to rent a studio space in Dublin 7.

I have never attempted to glamorize setting up my own business and like to think I am honest about the struggles encountered on a daily basis. There are good weeks and bad weeks, highs and lows. For one of our very first meetings with a considerably large client, Treasa and I put on our best business attire, pitched our idea to the client and secured the job. I was elated going into work at my evening bar job, but was slightly less enthused to see my new client sitting at table four looking at the menu.

As we were initially building interest for our company through social media, a cake café by the same name opened about 50 yards from our studio and so our campaign became somewhat convoluted with us receiving ‘*fantastic cake today @SLICEdublin*’ tweets.

In June 2014 Treasa set off travelling for a year. I moved to Hong Kong for 6 months and continued to work on *SLICE* projects while abroad, I even had the opportunity of showcasing *SLICE* work to the creative



Clockwise: Ban Beag Packaging;
Gourmet Kitchen Livery;
Slice Conceptual;
Founders Hannah Fleetwood
and Treasa Burns.

community in Hong Kong with an exhibition last summer. Treasa returns this June and I'm excited to reform our team. Even in her absence, the company has retained the ethos and tone of voice we developed together.

We founded *SLICE* as two enthusiastic graduates who wanted something more. Two years later I can happily say that our enthusiasm continues to grow. Two years after first dreaming up the concept for our company in our tiny kitchen, *SLICE* continues to be a thriving and exciting venture. I work part-time as a freelance designer in a studio in Dublin as well as juggling my *SLICE* clients.

Our clients are varied; some are exciting and contemporary, others corporate and rigid and some pro bono. I learn from each and every job that I undertake and *SLICE* continues to grow because of this. We never turn a project down, no matter how big or small. I have gained invaluable experience in client

relations, accounting and copy writing, skills that I hadn't encountered before embarking on this journey. I am proud to say I love what I do. I can honestly say that I am doing something different to carve a path out for my career.

Starting *SLICE* gave me the confidence and experience I lacked when I left college and I encourage all young designers to embark on their own ventures and embrace the unknown. If I'm going to spend 18.5% of my life working, then I want to be happy and fulfilled. *SLICE* is not just a job; it was and always will be the right choice. Starting a business as a graduate has not been easy, but it is achievable.

To view the work of *SLICE*, visit www.SLICEdublin.com