SMALL BUSINESS, BIG PICTURE

When UTS design and international studies graduate Anna Zhu officially launched her freelance photography business at the beginning of this year, it was a one-woman operation. Now, thanks to some sound advice from the Creative Industries Innovation Centre (CIIC), she’s adding a part-time assistant and has long-term plans to take on more staff and move into a larger business premises.

“It’s really exciting,” says Zhu. “And it’s just in the last couple of months I’ve been able to see that far. It’s taken a while to build up the confidence to say, ‘That’s my goal’.”

Having attended two consultations through the CIIC’s Biztro program, Zhu credits business advisers from the UTS-hosted centre with helping her grow her business and shape her vision for the future.

Biztro gives creative businesses the chance to book free one hour consultations to discuss their business. The sessions are held once a month in capital cities around Australia, with occasional sessions also held in regional areas.

“People don’t often have the time, or make the time, to think about their business and plan what they should and shouldn’t do,” says CIIC Business Adviser Tony Shannon.

“I know when I’ve run businesses, if you were sitting there with your feet up on the desk, leaning back in your chair, and the owner asked what you were doing and you said, ‘I’m thinking about the business’, you’d be sacked on the spot.”

Yet Shannon emphasises such planning and reflection is crucial to growing and sustaining successful businesses. Part of his role within the CIIC is assisting people who work in the creative industries to step outside their business, to “look at it and think about it from a bigger picture perspective”.

As part of the Australian Government’s Enterprise Connect program, one of the key functions of the CIIC is delivering a business review service. However, businesses need to turnover more than a million dollars per year to access this advice.

With 93 per cent of Australian creative enterprises turning over less than that threshold, the CIIC recognised the need to deliver business advice to these companies and businesses missing out. The Biztro program was the solution.

To date, Biztro has provided advice to 131 creative businesses Australia-wide, including 65 in NSW. Clients have come from backgrounds including advertising, design, marketing, film, TV and radio, the arts, software and interactive content.

Zhu first used the service in July 2010 and found it invaluable in making the transition from part-time photography and some design work to a full-time photography business. The initial Biztro consultation helped her access information and develop her skills in marketing and running a small business.

In April this year, although her business was gaining clients and turning a steady profit, Zhu felt she wasn’t “taking control, being proactive and chasing opportunities — I was just saying yes to everything”. She attended another Biztro session to help clarify her goals.

This time, the CIIC business adviser helped Zhu become more systematic and log how much time she was spending on different tasks each day. She gained a sense of control that ultimately allowed her to develop her business.

“Before the session, I knew what I had to do this week and maybe next, but the long-term planning just wasn’t there,” she says.

“Now I can see the big picture more clearly.”

The CIIC Biztro consultation is available on the last Friday of every month and is offered in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth to creative businesses. To find out more, visit creativeinnovation.net.au.

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