The entrepreneur’s size limiting strategy: micro design businesses in London’s design cluster

Rachel Smart
Birkbeck College
DIME Conference May 23rd 2008
London 1852
Hatton Garden 1790
Fitzrovia 1790
Defining the design industry

(Walker 1989)
Research framework
Why do some design entrepreneurs limit the size of their business?

How does the entrepreneur run a micro design business? How do they judge success if not by growth? How do micro design businesses operate externally?
Stage one: initial analysis

• Design practice
• 722 hour long one to ones with designers from all disciplines
• 1072 designers in seminars
• In London and North West (Manchester, Liverpool, Macclesfield and rural Cumbria)
• Plus others
Stage two: research design

- Architecture - the commission process
- Designer maker jewellery - the product process
- Experts, observers and policy makers
- Semi structured interviews in 2005 + analysis of data (30 hours transcribed)
- Firms founded 1960-2002
Stage three: research design

• Further testing with micro design entrepreneurs cross discipline
Design concept

• The form of design delivered by the eventual firm is shaped by the entrepreneur’s individual resources and their attitude to design:
  • Skills
  • Assets
  • Network
Kate Maestri
Kate Maestri
Business model

Intended delivery of design to clients and market

Creativity and innovation

Personal design concept

Vocation
Jo Gordon
Jo Gordon
Strategic intention

• personal design concept +
• personal business model
• = personal strategic intention

• to be implemented in the firm
John Evans Design
John Evans Design
Design entrepreneur types

- Successful design entrepreneur
- Professional designer maker
- Freelancer
- Conceptual idealist
- Lifestyle
- Hobby
Are they really so small?

urban planners
transport planners
structural engineers
mechanical and electrical engineers
façade engineering
lighting designers
landscape architects
quantity surveyors
planning supervisors / planning advisors
technical sales suppliers of specialist building elements
building contractors / specialist contractors
graphic designers
public artists
professional bodies ARB / RIBA
specialist research societies such as Concrete Society
local government - legislation
national government - legislation
non government organisations
quangos such as English Heritage, CABE
special interest groups such as Georgian Society, Victorian Society
Health and Safety Executive
magazines and trade press such as RIBA Journal, Building Design
exhibitions and trade shows such as 100% design + detail

suppliers – bullion / gems
casters
engravers / chasers / repoussé / enamellers
stone cuters / stone polishers
gem cutters / gem polishers
stone setters
diamond mounters
goldsmiths / silversmiths / platinum specialists
gold / silver / platinum polishers
mould makers
outworkers / apprentices / part time assistants
factories - producing elements of work or findings
agents
distributors
retailers
galleries
professional bodies such as Goldsmiths / Crafts Council
specialist services such as Assay Offices in London Birmingham + Sheffield
local government such as London Borough of Camden + Hatton Garden
national government laws
non government organisations
quangos
Health and Safety Executive
magazines and trade press
exhibitions and trade shows
galleries and museum collections
specialist collectors
Conclusion