How to Make It as a Maker

Maximizing Customer Experience to Increase Brand Value in the Saturated Marketplace of Paper Goods & Gifts

A Master of Fine Arts Thesis from Hannah Kathryn Lynch
How to Make It as a Maker

Maximizing Customer Experience to Increase Brand Value in the Saturated Marketplace of Paper Goods & Gifts

HANNAH KATHRYN LYNCH

Master of Fine Arts Thesis Project
Liberty University
School of Visual & Performing Arts
Department of Studio & Digital Arts
In memory of Emma Ruth Byus, for her legacy of creativity, craftiness, and charm.
Table of Contents

09 Final Signatures
11 Chapter One: Problem
19 Chapter Two: Research
37 Chapter Three: Application
93 Chapter Four: Conclusion
95 Bibliography
100 Appendix
Final Signatures

Professor Stacy Cannon, Chair

Professor Kelsey Phillips, First Reader

Professor Monique Maloney, Second Reader

Todd Smith, Department Chair

Actual signatures removed for online privacy purposes.
Chapter One: Problem

Observational commentary and critical support of the saturated conditions of the paper goods and gift industry, presenting the purpose of the thesis endeavor and its intent to resource rising creative entrepreneurs with strategies for success.

One glance through the Target stationery aisle reveals an intoxicating assortment of pineapple-speckled planners, metallic striped notebooks, and desk décor in every animal form. In a similar manner of excess, one Google search of “greeting cards” incites endless links to big brand names; some simply focused on cards, others focused on cards and accessories, and even more focused on a broader spectrum beyond paper goods and gifts alone. The vast extent of products available to consumers creates complications for fresh entrepreneurs entering the industry, inspiring thesis research into the problem as a means to reveal strategies for success. Establishing a basis for further investigation, the proceeding introductory chapter defines the target industry, assesses standard distribution processes, explains the problem introduced by saturation and presents overall objectives of the study. Directed towards creative entrepreneurs, this thesis affirms that while competitive saturation creates an issue of exposure in a market of many options, the influence of the Maker Movement and an attention to customer experience fosters profound opportunity for success in the paper goods and gift industry.

Paper Goods & Gift Industry

It remains unwise to enter into any industry without first curating an understanding of the marketplace as a whole. The following section defines key terms within the paper goods and gift industry, along with standard processes surrounding distribution to consumers. Strengthened awareness of these topics equip aspiring entrepreneurs to better understand the context of the thesis problem, and to develop more informed business strategies.

While the basic definition of paper goods and gifts may appear common knowledge to those within the industry, clarity of terms remains imperative prior to further thesis progression. In definition of the paper goods and gift industry, this thesis holds primary concern for purposefully designed paper
products. This parameter includes greeting cards, notebooks, calendars, planners, prints, wrapping paper, decorative boxes, and other stationery elements. The “gift” component of the industry title signifies small gifting products, such as pins, patches, tote bags, mugs, phone cases, T-shirts, and other accessory pieces. For further clarity, this thesis does not account for common industrialized items, such as paper towels for sanitation purposes or reams of blank paper for office use. Due to relevant synonyms, this thesis utilizes resources that provide research on the target marketplace by alternative names, such as the “stationery and gift industry,” and simply, the “paper goods industry.” While many types of products qualify for consideration within the marketplace, an understanding of the basic definition guides the parameters of those included within the thesis problem and resulting solution.

An introductory awareness of standard distribution processes allows entrepreneurs to more effectively grasp the proceeding concepts of customer experience. Within the paper goods and gift industry, brands may either sell directly to consumers through their own e-commerce sites, craft markets, brick-and-mortar locations, or wholesale to retailers in larger quantities. Wholesale orders are commonly placed online, or at trade shows, such as the National Stationery Show and LA Mart. These events invite buyers from around the globe to view and to place orders from hundreds of different brands in one location, both well-established and recently launched. In preparation for the National Stationery Show in particular, each brand must reserve their own exhibitor space, with a standard package rate of $3,365 for a 10-foot by 10-foot booth, to be customized and merchandised as suitable for their individual product line (National). Considering the steep rental cost and financial strain necessary to present an appealing pop-up shop at prominent venues, entrepreneurs may opt to attend smaller trade shows with lower pricing, while also offering online options to retail buyers. Despite temptation to sell exclusively online, Frank Joens, Senior Vice President General Manager of LA Mart, affirms that, “nothing replaces being able to touch and feel products to get a first-hand view of the quality and craftsmanship.” He then asserts that, “discovering lines at a mart will always be part of the buying process” (Where 146). Although e-commerce creates convenience for buyers, physical trade shows remain standard within the industry of paper goods and gifts. Attendance by new brands

Despite temptation to sell exclusively online, Frank Joens, Senior Vice President General Manager of LA Mart affirms that, “nothing replaces being able to touch and feel products to get a first-hand view of the quality and craftsmanship.”
promotes exposure to potential wholesale partners who may not know about or interact with a particular newcomer otherwise. Due to the physical nature of the products included in the paper goods and gift industry, standard distribution to consumers and retail buyers continues to occur across both online and in-person platforms. The number of product types associated with the industry, as well as the presence of numerous distribution channels, indicates saturated conditions of competition between qualifying brands within the marketplace for paper goods and gifts.

**Problem of Competition**

As the over-arching problem of the thesis, competition remains high in the paper goods and gift industry, creating difficulty for start-up brands who strive for success. Related products appear prevalently across assorted brand types within niche and mass marketplaces, with rising resources available to new businesses who continue to increase options available to consumers.

In consideration of corporate competition, consumers possess high accessibility to paper goods and gifts through prominent brands, which remain household names in their level of notoriety. Qualifying products are easily located at local superstores, such as K-Mart, Walmart, and Target, as well as discount stores, like TJ Maxx and Ross. Reaching clientele with a more specific aesthetic, Anthropologie, Kate Spade, and other lifestyle brands offer a broad variety of fashion, fitness, home, and personal care items, with paper goods and gifts existing as supplemental categories. In the case of Kate Spade, these products are all designed in-house to best match the vision of the seasonal collection; however, this practice is generally not true of all brands. Other commonly known companies, including Francesca’s and J.Crew, purchase these items at wholesale from specialized brands of complementary aesthetics, in order to limit the need for in-house design teams or manufacturing vendors. When seeking products for wholesale purposes, Rifle Paper Co., Sugar Paper LA, Ban.do, Meri Meri, and Packed Party are simply the beginning of a long list of options (Paper). Each of these options represent competition within the marketplace, due to their prominent presence and consumer attention. Saturation remains vast and extensive at the corporate level, creating difficulty for start-up brands who have yet to establish wholesale partnerships or consumer recognition.
Even in regard to independent brands alone, competition continues to flood the marketplace. Supporting entrepreneurial makers and craftsman as they join corporate players in the fight for attention, Etsy quickly rose as a top e-commerce platform for independent brands. The renowned distribution channel created opportunity for everyday individuals to launch personal businesses through the formation of simple online shops, only charging a few cents per item listed and withholding a small fraction of profits per sale. Speaking to its success, the Etsy Annual Report 2016 indicates that the number of active sellers grew from 830,000 in 2012 to 1,933,000 in 2017, over doubling the initial metric in five years (Etsy 36). While sellers on Etsy do not necessarily offer paper goods and gifts exclusively, the platform continues to represent a saturated marketplace of handmade and designed items that fulfill a similar intent. Providing even further resources for independent sellers, e-commerce websites like Society6 and Threadless not only allow designers to create online shops to facilitate consumer purchases, but also manage the manufacturing, shipping, and best of all, customer service. For a fee, of course. Products offered by these distributors include prints, notebooks, T-shirts, phone cases, mugs, and a wide assortment of other items certainly qualifying as paper goods and gifts. According to Twitter Counter, Threadless in particular ranks as the 13th leading retail and consumer merchandise brand on Twitter, as of January 2018, with 2.12 million followers (Top). This following offers high exposure to featured designers, if chosen amongst the more than 100,000 other designers who also opened artist shops on the site from 2015 to 2017 (Robey). Threadless encourages designers to promote their work and to grow as brands, however, exposure to consumers remains difficult for newcomers on this popular platform. Even though services like Etsy and Threadless offer vital resources that significantly streamline the manufacturing and distribution process for small brands, the large number of other entrepreneurs also using these resources continues to highlight the problem of competition in the paper goods and gift industry.

As discussed throughout the previous section, the thesis problem of over-saturation significantly limits exposure for rising creative entrepreneurs, due to the number of competitors in the marketplace. Corporate brands with reputations as household

Even though services like Etsy and Threadless offer vital resources that significantly streamline the manufacturing and distribution process for small brands, the large number of other entrepreneurs also using these resources continues to highlight the problem of competition in the paper goods and gift industry.
names already captivate the attention of loyal consumers, while channels to discover new talent remain flooded with high quantities of that new talent. Although some entrepreneurs and investors may choose not to enter an industry with such high saturation, the thesis recognizes that opportunity for success continues to exist when using appropriate strategies, as affirmed in future chapters.

**Thesis Objectives**

As the capsule thesis of a Master of Fine Arts in Studio & Digital Arts, the endeavor solves the problem competition poses for rising creative entrepreneurs by identifying strategies for success, with visual application and exemplification through the launch of a personal business.

Research objectives throughout the entirety of the thesis converge on the identification and explanation of strategies for success. Each piece of commentary and case study is intentionally chosen to reveal potential for brand growth, highlight positive marketplace opportunities, analyze anticipated trends, and explore the influential impact of customer experience. All selected material connects to applicable strategies for creative entrepreneurs, with a focus on actionable concepts. As the foundation of the study, scholarly research focuses on concrete facts, while logical observations of prominent brands dissect theoretical implications useful to start-up companies. The core research objective investigates the paper goods and gift industry as a whole, with primary concern for the current factors that support the entrepreneurial success of new creative businesses.

In order to visually communicate and defend asserted strategies, the development and launch of a personal brand of paper goods and gifts acts as the core objective of the thesis deliverable. The study does not exist for the sole purpose of information alone, but for action and application. As a means to test hypothesized strategies discussed in the research component of the thesis, the thesis applies suggested principles to a new business venture, freshly designed from ideation to execution with conclusions of the research at the forefront. The visual deliverable includes the initial product line, overall branding, in-store and e-commerce packaging, social media marketing, and e-commerce platform. Reaching beyond mere suggestion of awareness, the application of identified strategies for success gives credibility to the research, by practicing what the thesis promotes.
The thesis objectives, pertaining to both the scholarly research and visual deliverable, provide creative entrepreneurs in the paper goods and gift industry with strategies for success to combat the problem of over-saturation in the marketplace.

**Conclusion**

As the introductory chapter, the previous sections identified the initial inspiration of the thesis topic, defined key terms, presented the primary problem, and communicated overall objectives. Observation of large assortments of paper goods and gifts available at everyday retail locations motivated investigation into the nature of competition surrounding the marketplace. Revelation of the definition of paper goods and gifts exposed the wide selection of items found within the product category, further perpetuating the extended number of available articles. Significant levels of saturation continued to surface throughout the explanation of standard distribution channels, as related to both direct sales and wholesale orders. The presented background information culminated into the clear communication of competition created by well-known corporate names and independent sellers. While the rise of e-commerce shops and companies that facilitate manufacturing support start-up brands, the vast number of artists taking advantage of these opportunities limit exposure in consumer searches. Overall, the problem of steep competition creates difficulty for creative entrepreneurs in the paper goods and gift industry, leading to the thesis objectives to not only research strategies for success, but to also apply these strategies to test and to visually communicate documented theories.
Chapter Two: Research

A critical examination of scholarly sources, revealing the impact of the Maker Movement, market preferences towards customer experience, and the resulting roles of brand, product, packaging, social media, and point of purchase.

Although the thesis problem affirms that saturation within the paper goods and gift industry limits exposure for rising entrepreneurs, consumer behaviors driven by the Maker Movement and the appeal of customer experience foster hope for success. While competition remains high, the allure of Main Street USA encourages consumers to support independent entrepreneurs, celebrating individual makers over corporate mass-production and creating positive market factors for continued investment. Research demonstrates that attention to consumer experience throughout the buying process creates opportunity to establish emotional and authentic connections with customers, promoting furthered potential for success. Directed towards creative entrepreneurs, the thesis affirms that while competitive saturation creates an issue of exposure in a market of many options, the influence of the Maker Movement and intentionality in customer experience fosters profound opportunity for success in the paper goods and gift industry.

Impact of the Maker Movement

Despite apparent competition, opportunity for independent creative entrepreneurs to succeed continues within the paper goods and gift industry, as affirmed by consumer appreciation for handcrafted goods and the continued rise of the “Maker Movement.”

Advancing momentum of the Maker Movement creates opportunity for small creative businesses to succeed. Adweek’s Joan Voight defines the entrepreneurial wave of the Maker Movement as, “the umbrella term for independent inventors, designers and tinkerers,” whose “creations, born in cluttered local workshops and bedroom offices, stir the imaginations of consumers numbed by generic, mass-produced, made-in–China merchandise” (Voight). After decades of attention to industrialized manufacturing, consumers now hold increased value for handcrafted artisan goods and the unique stories behind their creation. They prefer goods with a heart, set apart from those available on every
Within five years of operation, the label joined Inc 500’s list of fastest-growing private American companies, while co-owner Nathan Bond joined Forbes Magazine’s 30 Under 30 list (Rifle). Through social media strategies that actively share the hand-painted aspect of their illustrations, followers are able to experience the creative world of Rifle Paper Co. and imagine obtaining a piece of art in every purchase. Now in partnership with brands like Keds and Paperless Post, Rifle Paper Co.’s product line and opportunity for success continues to thrive. Supporting the lifestyle design process of the Maker Movement, Rifle Paper Co.’s style and marketing maintain the handcrafted quality of their products. Appeal to consumers as a maker brand, as well as honesty in sharing the process, promotes opportunity for success when curating a personal touch throughout a product line, even after brand growth leads to mass production.

Although the issue of saturated in the paper goods and gift industry may lead entrepreneurs and investors to avoid entering the industry, the impact of the Maker Movement on success encourages freedom in pursuit. While competition fosters the
need to use distinct strategy when planning the business model, it does not negate the potential of maximized brand value.

**Influence of Customer Experience**

While the Maker Movement facilitates opportunity for success in the paper goods and gift industry, possibility is even furthered by an awareness of the consumer demand for experience. Joey Kercher, President and CEO of Air Fresh Marketing, identifies how “a study from the Harris Group reported that 72% of Millennials would rather choose an experience over a material item” (Kercher). If given the choice between an experience or a physical good, such as the choice between traveling to France or owning a watch collection, most Millennials would choose the plane ticket. There is a shift in value placement, increasing appreciation for the intangible thrills of music festivals and cooking classes, while decreasing interest in owning homes and antique dish sets. In order to fulfill this craving and maintain a desire for available products, merchandisers increase brand value when infusing a felt experience into the buying process of material goods.

Customer experience is defined as the associated feelings and perceptions resulting from the entire buying process, from initial product interest to purchase, receipt, and continued engagement. Simply addressed, customer experience embodies the consumer feelings about the process of obtaining a product, not just feelings about the product itself. The evolution of experience-driven buying patterns causes key terms to emerge in order to better define the commercial application of shifting market concerns. Customer experience is defined as the associated feelings and perceptions resulting from the entire buying process, from initial product interest to purchase, receipt, and continued engagement. Simply addressed, customer experience embodies the consumer feelings about the process of obtaining a product, not just feelings about the product itself (Khan). Due to the proximity of the product and the process, associations are naturally made between the two. Positive experience equals positive product perception. Negative experience equals negative product perception. For example, if a consumer struggled to locate a particular dress on a retail website, encountered glitches on the check-out forms, received the wrong size, reached out for an exchange, received the proper size later than expected, and had to wipe dust away from the basic air-sealed packing bag, their customer experience level probably ranked fairly low. No matter how much the consumer loved the dress in the beginning, it would be difficult to
maintain the same level of perceived value after the chaotic buying experience. In contrast, if a consumer easily navigated a retail website for the perfect red sequin cocktail dress, flew through check-out by simple systems, received their order early, and found the dress nestled between lush layers of tissue paper with a customized thank you card, their customer experience level probably ranked fairly high. Value in that dress may increase due to positive feelings surrounding the buying process and anticipatory excitement for continued purchases. As the core concept of customer experience, buyers strongly connect experience with their level of satisfaction, rather than basing appreciation for purchases on the product’s quality and function alone.

When entering over-saturated consumer marketplaces, customer experience reigns as an effective strategy to capture consumer attention and increase brand loyalty. Recognizing the extent of well-established competition in the confectionery industry prior to launching Dylan’s Candy Bar, Dylan Lauren understood that her “candy itself – even the best candy she could find – would take her only so far. She had to make the experience of buying candy just as sweet” (McCorvey 56). With a love for retail spaces and inspirational atmospheres, Lauren envisioned a lifestyle world of sugary goodness that vastly transcends the grocery store candy aisle. Reminiscent of a real-life Willy Wonka factory, Lauren’s land of brightly embellished candy towers and vibrantly merchandised displays invite consumers to live like Charlie without even finding a golden ticket. Through attention to the environmental shopping experience and the cultivation of a lifestyle brand, her single-store operation opened new venues slowly and carefully. Rather than launching stores in every town mall across America, Lauren instead cultivated boutique-style escapes in airport vendor spaces to ensure a sense of exclusivity and charm. Despite the stringent competition of big names like Hershey’s, Mars, and Nestle, strategic attention to the experience of her highly curated world of candy allowed Lauren to stand out. With her product line does not necessarily fall within the paper goods and gift industry, Lauren’s example demonstrates the impact of customer experience on her brand’s revolutionary success in an over-saturated marketplace.

As the core concept of customer experience, buyers strongly connect experience with their level of satisfaction, rather than basing appreciation for purchases on the product’s quality and function alone.
customer experience, independent entrepreneurs should not allow the presence of well-known competitors to prevent them from pursuing personal brands and businesses.

**Experiential Application**

Simple awareness of customer experience’s impact on consumers is not enough to incite success within start-up brands. Entrepreneurs must pursue direct and actionable strategies of the concept in order to maximize brand value.

Although customer experience varies with each consumer and situation, steps can be taken to guide these feelings more effectively. While customer experience relates to the actual feelings of the consumer, “experiential marketing” identifies the act of implementing strategies that intentionally mold these feelings. Senthil surmises experiential marketing as simply “connecting customers with your brand through one or more meaningful and relevant experiences while appealing to both rational and emotional behavior” (Senthil 93). Merchandisers understand that both feeling-based and logic-based reasoning affect customers throughout the buying process. Using packaging as an example, high-end packaging rationally influences high-end perceptions of product value. Even if a customer logically believes they do not need a particular item, merchandisers implementing experiential marketing realize that attractiveness of the product’s presentation and belief in associated product value may be enough to override rational inclinations to pass on the purchase. This is why beauty box brands, monthly subscriptions of vibrantly packaged cosmetic samples, are able to convince “customers to pay hundreds of dollars a year for products they could otherwise get for free” (Tamsin). Logically, consumers could collect these items for zero cost at local make-up counters, however, the premium presentation rationally convinces consumers that the product is worth the price. Once purchased, the emotional experience of unboxing their monthly order encourages continued subscription. With attention to specific strategies that manipulate both rational and emotional behavior, merchandisers are able to guide consumer experience in a positive manner that promotes sales.

Rising creative entrepreneurs must practice intentionality when developing business plans to effectively guide customer experience. While this concept encapsulates every unique point of contact between consumer and brand, for the purpose of the thesis, the term separates into five key components for visual application; brand, product, packaging,
social media, and point of purchase. Each element relates to one another; however, each element also holds individual characteristics for unique consideration. Yuri Krumman, CEO and founder of Master Talk Consulting, states that “early-stage startups, restricted by their lack of funds and time, must choose which element to focus on and which to leave aside for later” (Krumman). Although it remains difficult financially and practically to excel in every area of customer experience when launching independently, intentionality in even a couple fields raises the potential for success in comparison to neglecting the concept altogether. An understanding of each component when developing their business plan allows entrepreneurs to assess their individual resources in order to choose their primary points of focus with greater discernment.

The following commentary on the individual elements of customer experience, including brand, product, packaging, social media, and point of purchase, allows creative entrepreneurs to glean applicable strategies for success, actively combating the problem of over-saturation in the paper goods and gift industry.

**The Brand Experience**

Brand development allows businesses to craft distinct identities, which ultimately affect every other aspect of the organization. Entrepreneurs must clearly define who their brand is, prior to making any firm decisions about what it sells. A strong identity provides a unique voice for new businesses, and attention to customer experience sets the tone.

While a company can actively influence its public persona through the communicated mission, values, culture, aesthetic, and marketing, the resulting brand is led by consumer perceptions. Jerry McLaughlin, contributor of Forbes, explains that “your ‘brand’ is what your prospect thinks of when he or she hears your brand name. It’s everything the public thinks it knows about your name brand offering – both factual (e.g. It comes in a robin’s-egg-blue box), and emotional (e.g. It’s romantic)” (McLaughlin). While marketers may invoke strategies to facilitate a particular brand narrative, each consumer possesses the ability to create his or her own impressions of the label. For example, TOMS promotes itself as a humanitarian brand that gives away aid with every purchase, expanding from shoes to other methods of support for struggling communities, such as eyewear, medical attention, water, and even bully

Although it remains difficult financially and practically to excel in every area of customer experience when launching independently, intentionality in even a couple fields raises the potential for success in comparison to neglecting the concept altogether.
Because of its influence on customer buying patterns, entrepreneurs must seek to develop, communicate, and promote brand identities that engage the consumer’s ability to express his or herself through brand alignment and to experience relationship through that alignment.

prevention (Toms). Despite targeted efforts to communicate a brand synonymous with care for the needy, many consumers continue to view TOMS as a con, manipulating the promise of aid to sell products for a profit. No matter the efforts taken by TOMS to control their message through giving campaigns and communication about the aid provided, perceptions of brand are ultimately determined by each individual customer.

Reflecting on the opportunity to curate positive customer experiences, brand allows buyers to personally align themselves with labels that express their own identities through brand association and relationship. In his study titled, Experiential Retailing as a Strategic Tool for Retail Store Differentiation and Brand Association, M. Senthil asserts that, “today’s consumers demand an emotional experience from shopping, one that will allow them to express who they are” (Senthil 92). Using the aforementioned example of TOMS, customers who view the brand as deceptive most likely do not invest financially through purchases, avoiding association with a con. In contrast, customers who believe in the TOMS mission celebrate their purchases, desiring a oneness with the brand and its perceived character. Through social media posts and casual conversation about the story behind the product, these consumers actively communicate their value of humanitarian aid through their decision to support the business.

In the same study, Senthil reveals the understanding that, “retailers know experiential retailing allows them to empower a consumer to connect physically or emotionally with a product or service,” and “as a result, consumers buy lifestyle associations and not products, thus encouraging them to spend more” (Senthil 95). Brand remains a vital component of the customer experience, because it forms the persona and lifestyle that customers will then choose whether or not to align themselves with. Levels of admiration and/or compatibility made when perceiving a brand’s persona either intrigue customers or push them away, thus affecting the profitability of the bottom line. Because of its influence on customer buying patterns, entrepreneurs must seek to develop, communicate, and promote brand identities that engage the consumer’s ability to express his or herself through brand alignment and to experience relationship through that alignment.

With the concept of brand associations in mind, creative entrepreneurs should continue to
promote their identity as makers and craftsman, maximizing the previously discussed influence of the Maker Movement. Similar to how TOMS allows buyers to associate with humanitarian relief, independent maker brands allow buyers to associate with the sponsorship of Mainstreet USA, through the financial support of one’s fellow man. In future chapters, the thesis will apply this concept to the branding principles of graphic design, practically demonstrating how to communicate one’s maker status in visual form.

**The Product Experience**

Product acts as the primary deliverable consumers keep after completing a purchase. Aside from packaging, which is often discarded, the product itself continues as the functional and/or decorative reminder of the buying experience. In the case of paper goods and gifts, products tend to exist in standard units with unique surface designs, such as patterns, lettered quotes, and illustrations, that ultimately set them apart from other items in the marketplace. For example, greeting cards typically meet standard proportions in sizing and paper weight, however, clever words and comical images found on a particular card allow it to stand out from competition. In a similar manner, mugs, tote bags, and phone cases feature fairly common proportions, but once again grasp consumer attention based on featured designs. Within the paper goods and gift industry, strategic attention to product design promotes positive customer experiences through the emotions and reactions created by the design itself.

When brainstorming product design choices, creative entrepreneurs must consult industry trends to determine product types with high potential for success. Awareness of buying patterns allows thoughtful development in the creation of goods that align with consumer interests. While typical paper goods and gift brands offer greeting cards, “48 percent of retailers and vendors believe stationery will decrease most in importance in the next 10 years” (Gift 148). It remains beneficial to carry stationery, due to low production costs and continued sale as impulse purchases, however, creative entrepreneurs should not focus on printed items alone. As a means to supplement a print-heavy product line with more desirable goods, DKNG studios encourages the sale of other gift items as well, such as pins and patches with a fashionable function (Goldman). Confirming their strategy, “the wearables category is predicted by 38 percent to grow the most, followed by home
decor with 34 percent” (Gift 148). Consumers desire the ability to wear purchased items, experiencing products more personally by identifying with them physically. For this reason, creative entrepreneurs should investigate possibilities of products like tote bags, hats, T-shirts, and other items that fulfill this consumer preference. Overall, when designing their initial product line with attention to consumer experience, entrepreneurs should examine what consumers actually want prior to making decisions.

The process utilized in product manufacturing also possesses potential to promote positive consumer experiences. Returning attention to the Maker Movement, products with a handcrafted or personal touch continue to grasp customer interest. In a survey revealed in The Gift Industry Through the Next Decade, “fifty-one percent of gift retailers and vendors anticipate that handmade and locally made gifts are the key product lines with the most growth potential in the next decade” (Gift 148). The personal connection to the artist experienced in the possession of handcrafted goods causes consumers to value these products over mass-produced counterparts. Even though original artwork created by hand requires time and limited editions, quality reproductions with emphasis on the initial creation continue to appeal to consumers. Furthering the potential for positive consumer experiences through strategies of product development, in the same survey previously mentioned, one particular retailer predicts that, “personalized gifts will allow small, independent retailers to set themselves apart from the internet and big-box stores” (Gift 148). While personalization again requires time and limited editions, the impact on consumers remains effective. Creative entrepreneurs, especially in the early phases of start-up with intention to gain consumer exposure, should investigate strategies to

| The personal connection to the artist experienced in the possession of handcrafted goods causes consumers to value these products over mass-produced counterparts. |

infuse personalization into the product line, offered with appropriate pricing.

In close connection to the product experience, consumers are impacted by the price point and residual monetary assignments of worth. Aware of the benefits of both a direct and wholesale presence, many brands of paper goods and gifts choose to participate in both, pricing their products appropriately based on standard market scales. Using a common model, DKNG Studios advises that entrepreneurs standardize their pricing by doubling their manufacturing cost as their wholesale price and doubling their wholesale price as their price for consumers (Goldman). For example, if a particular planner costs $5 to manufacture, the wholesale
price doubles to $10. The retailer would then double the price once more to $20 for consumer purchase. This ensures that the item can go on sale for 50% off without the retailer losing the original investment in the product. If selling directly to consumers through a branded website, entrepreneurs would maintain the $20 metric, in order to match the retail price and to subsidize the costs of direct distribution. Creative entrepreneurs must maintain an awareness of pricing to best navigate product design and manufacturing decisions, which guide the eventual price point and success of the business. If the execution process leads to a product price point that goes too far beyond the perceived worth of the item, consumers may be less interested in making purchases or feel guilty after making a purchase impulsively. To effectively promote a positive customer experience, entrepreneurs must consider the feelings associated with financial costs, promoting feelings of positive value rather than feelings of regret.

Even though the quality and desirability of the product itself still matters, other components of customer experience require further attention. This does not discount the impact of the product, but acknowledges that the importance of other areas needs elevation to support the appeal of the product. According to McMahon, “if there’s one thing the Apples of the world have taught us, it’s that if you create the experience, people will subscribe to the experience more so than the product itself.”

(McMahon 47). While Apple’s products are high quality, there are certainly other high quality technological goods in the marketplace with far less traction or consumer loyalty. Because of the innovative lifestyle experience promoted by Apple, as applied using other components found in the following sections, a cult-like following surrounds the company. With a similar sense of consumer appreciation, Rifle Paper Co.’s initial product line remained fairly low in its launch start as an official business. Although they always envisioned growth beyond the primary offering, Anna and Nathan Bond, “focused their energy and time on establishing a strong visual brand identity and building consumer loyalty with a small collection of 50 mostly paper products, sold online” (Welch 22). While the Bonds certainly cared about their products, they understood that other components of the business required additional attention to encourage growth.
While makers may be tempted to simply make more as a way to expand consumer options, other aspects of the business cannot be dismissed or ignored. New products are not necessary on a weekly basis, since the original product line will still appear fresh to each new customer.

Consistency in the style of their collection led to strong cohesion in high quality goods, but attention to the brand identity, as previously discussed in the earlier section, gave those products a voice. Creative entrepreneurs do need to consider how products affect customer experience, however, this cannot remain the only concern.

Stemming from Kruman’s suggestion to focus initial efforts on select components of customer experience, once a solid original product line is established, entrepreneurs should apply attention elsewhere when building small businesses. While makers may be tempted to simply make more as a way to expand consumer options, other aspects of the business cannot be dismissed or ignored. New products are not necessary on a weekly basis, since the original product line will still appear fresh to each new customer. Lean into efforts that engage new buyers, and focus on other components of customer experience that will maximize potential for success.

The Packaging Experience
Packaging continues to rise as a growing opportunity for creative entrepreneurs to create positive customer experiences. This category is not merely concerned with the functional preservation of product quality until purchase, but also with the decorative presentation of goods to increase perceived value on arrival.

Within e-commerce specifically, standard packaging typically focuses on practicality alone, while premium packaging dramatizes the experience. Standard packaging typically limits presentation to a simple cardboard box or basic envelope that houses the product during shipment, with a basic order form included to record the purchase. In stark contrast, premium packaging often features custom branded shipping mailers, decorative filler, such as tissue paper or colored crinkle paper, personalized thank you cards, promotional coupons, extra samples, and interior gift boxes that beautifully conceal the actual purchased products. There is a distinct difference between the care and attention demonstrated by premium packaging, thus promoting more memorable feelings in unboxing scenarios. Creative entrepreneurs possess the opportunity to significantly increase brand value when implementing unique packaging design strategies that illicit positive customer experiences.

Unlike the psychological experience created in
branding, the packaging experience acts as a visual and tactile component. While every interaction between a business and consumer contributes to the experience, online retailers possess less opportunity to influence customer perceptions due to the lack of face-to-face interactions with products or service associates. Aware of the limitations, Richard Lazazzera in his article titled, How to Create a Memorable and Shareable Unboxing Experience for Your Brand, notes that, “in e-commerce versus physical retail, merchants have less touch points to impress and wow customers with, so it’s important to utilize every touch point you do have to create a branded experience that sets you apart from competitors as well as one that creates a memorable experience for your customers” (Lazazzera). The packaging of a product within e-commerce often remains the strongest physical connection made between brand and customer. Attention to package design, crafting a uniquely memorable experience with positive re-enforcement of product value, highly contributes to whether the customer will choose to interact with the brand again. According to a 2017 Dotcom survey, “forty percent of shoppers say they would be somewhat more likely or much more likely to purchase from a retailer again if they ordered a package online and it came in a gift-like or premium package” (Dotcom 11). This is an increase from statistics observed in 2015, where only 29% of respondents indicated similar intentions, demonstrating rising correlations between the packaging design and consumer desire to re-order. As the most tangibly interactive element of the customer experience, packaging remains a vital concern, especially within e-commerce distribution.

Attention to packaging maximizes perceptions of value in handmade products and furthers the holistic customer experience. While premium packaging can require extensive financial investment, simple touches such as personalized thank you notes and basic tissue paper work together to create lasting impressions. Even these small inclusions reveal a sense of pride in the seller’s work and appreciation for consumer purchases. Strategic design of the unboxing experience allows makers to optimize the tangible touch point of packaging, fostering a more authentic connection between buyer and seller. When planning to launch an independent business, creative entrepreneurs should identify feasible strategies to package their product line, which work within their resources and individual budget.

Attention to package design, crafting a uniquely memorable experience with positive re-enforcement of product value, highly contributes to whether the customer will choose to interact with the brand again.
The Social Media Experience

In an ever-changing climate of technological and social advancement, social media remains an influentially fluid resource to creative entrepreneurs. Each year, new platforms arise with potential to market new brands and products, with each generation preferring one over another. For example, Vine launched in 2013 as a way to allow users to post six-second videos, leading to a “vine-famous” community of creatives with followers counts in the millions. For the purpose of exposure, brands began to partner with these social celebrities to promote products and services featured in created content. In 2016, however, the social platform shut down, recording previous posts in archived galleries, but ending the effectiveness of Vine marketing strategies. This example demonstrates the inconsistent nature of social media, and the need to remain aware of changing networking opportunities. While creative entrepreneurs need to assess which form of social presence best suits their products to plan strategies accordingly, they must also remain flexible and adaptable to respond to shifting trends.

Social media continues to acts as an essential component within the customer experience, as it creates potential to develop authentic, relational engagement with consumers. While social media accounts such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have become a staple for many businesses, statistics indicate that a mere presence on these platforms does not automatically guarantee influence. A study titled, Brand Advocacy and Brand Bonding: New Parameters in Consumer Purchase Decision Journey in the Digital World, reveals that “for the majority of consumer respondents, social interaction is still primarily about friends and family, not brands.” Defending the assertion, commentary indicates that “around 55 percent of consumers surveyed said they do not engage with businesses using social sites” (Gupta 93). Social media users tend to follow people they know or at least feel like they know, rather than faceless brands. With an awareness of these implications, brands must apply some form of human element or voice to their social strategy in order to find success on these platforms. Application of narrative elements improves this perception of humanity. Jeanniey Mullen, author of Using Experiences for Storytelling in the Era of Digital Distraction, asserts that “regardless of what company you work for, success in marketing starts when you can create the right story” (Mullen 6). Connection is historically made through story, bringing people...
together since the dawn of pre-Netflix caveman campfires. Within the paper goods and gift industry, individual should consider sharing the process of product creation, the inspiration behind ideation, testimonials of customer purchases, and even the face behind the brand. No matter the channel of social media utilized to expose consumers to available products and promote purchases, creative entrepreneurs must focus on story development to captivate attention.

In order to find success on social media, independent creative entrepreneurs should once again highlight their maker status, maximizing the story behind their products. They should not be afraid to show their face or personality or hands at work, since this visual presence equates to a more authentic viewing experience when following the brand. People connect most with fellow people, and social media, regardless of which platform is most appropriate for the target audience, creates prime opportunity to promotes this relational connection, furthering increase perception of brand value.

**The Point of Purchase Experience**

Whether in-store or online, specific strategies of application surrounding the point of purchase experience vary based on distribution type, however, the concept behind these applications remains the same. A brand’s point of purchase must offer more than products alone to capture customer attention, creating a dynamically memorable experience, rather than just the average, everyday shopping routine.

In regard to in-store distribution, creative entrepreneurs and makers possess the opportunity to maximize customer experience through presence in local venues and the promotion of workshops. While some may argue that physical retail spaces are dead, Cindy Morris, President and CEO of Dallas Market Center boldly states, “we’re confident that the future of brick-and-mortar retail is strong. By 2037, retailers will realize that e-commerce and brick and mortar go hand-in-hand just like movie theaters found that Netflix did not harm their revenues” (Where 146). Presence within actual retail locations gives consumers the opportunity to experience maker goods firsthand, which is currently not available through online channels. While customers may not necessarily make purchases in-store, this in-person encounter with the merchandised product introduces consumers to the brand, for eventual purchase at a later date or online purchase from the convenience of their home. Especially when

| A brand’s point of purchase must offer more than products alone to capture customer attention, creating a dynamically memorable experience, rather than just the average, everyday shopping routine. |
working with local venues that already celebrate the Maker Movement, customer experience is further maximized by artist-led workshops and meet-and-greets held on site (Where 146). Encouraging consumers to interact with the maker and personally answer questions about the product furthers the connection between buyer and seller. As the original social network, in-person interactions allow consumers to see the face behind the brand, and to establish a sense of trust in the quality of goods. Tangibility of customer experience is amplified through in-store points of purchase when strategies facilitate actual in-person contact with the product and the maker.

Reflecting on online point of purchase options, the globalization of e-commerce opportunities strengthens openings for worldwide introductions within the consumer marketplace. With a rise in technology and innovation, the process of creating a website is more streamlined than ever before. For those who do not possess skills with web design or knowledge of coding, numerous platforms exists to supplement these deficits through interactive templates and customization tools. Most easily recognizable as a platform for independent makers, Etsy remains a prominent solution for creative entrepreneurs with limited understanding of coding or funding to out-source web services. Despite the previously indicated saturation of this platform, its popularity and ease of use continues to act as a resource for start-up brands. With a new feature called Pattern, Etsy allows sellers to establish standalone websites with increased customization that appear more official than typical Etsy shop accounts. Not only creating opportunity for direct sale to consumers, Etsy also connects sellers with wholesale retailers interested in purchasing products for distribution in-store. With the ease and options provided by Etsy, creative entrepreneurs and makers have the chance to maximize customer experience by creating convenience for both individual customers and wholesale retailers who prefer to shop online rather than in-store.

No matter how entrepreneurs establish their online shops, they must remember to incorporate the previously mentioned concepts of customer experience within the context of the point of purchase. Similar to commentary of social media and how having an account does not guarantee a following, opening an online shop does not

Encouraging consumers to interact with the maker and personally answer questions about the product furthers the connection between buyer and seller. As the original social network, in-person interactions allow consumers to see the face behind the brand, and to establish a sense of trust in the quality of goods.
guarantee sales. Consumers need additional reasons to visit e-commerce shops, beyond the chance to boredom browse the listing of available goods. Creative entrepreneurs must incentivize visits to their websites through the curation of memorable experiences. The application of this concept does vary due to the nature of the online atmosphere, however, this variation comes with the benefits of publication not afforded in the retail experience. While in-store workshops provide interpersonal interaction between with the artist and the consumer, the reach of this engagement is limited by a single location, the consumer’s time, and the artist’s availability. Through published lifestyle blogs, outlined tutorials, video workshops, and even complementary digital downloads, consumers are provided a memorable experience without limitation. In this manner, the same concepts from the in-store application of customer experience are translated into the online format, giving consumers a reason to engage with the shop.

Emphasizing once again the humanity behind the business, creative entrepreneurs are encouraged to develop interactive opportunities in their points of purchase, whether applied in-person or through digital methods. In a generation that shies away from advertisements and strives towards relational authenticity, the shopping experience must offer more than product alone to enforce the experiential benefits of engagement.

Conclusion
The marketplace for paper goods and gifts is highly saturated, making it difficult for rising creative entrepreneurs to compete against currently reigning brands. Addressing the potential created by the Maker Movement and trends towards customer experience, the thesis affirms that entrepreneurs still possess opportunity for success when applying the elements of customer experience. Although this concept may appear broad at first, presented research reveals individual layers of consideration when developing and implementing strategies for start-up brands. When intentionally planned and executed, attention to brand, product, packaging, social media, and point of purchase accelerate exposure and promote sales. When strategically connecting with customers through the curation of memorable experiences, makers can absolutely make it in the paper goods and gift industry, no matter the extent of apparent saturation.
Chapter Three: Application

Using the previous content as the basis of understanding, the visual deliverable of the thesis exemplifies each area of customer experience in the development of a start-up paper goods and gift brand, supplementing the research through application.

Moving into the development of visual examples to communicate the application of customer experience, the following chapter presents the narrative of a start-up brand from ideation to final execution. The resulting sections present the visual representations of the five areas of brand, product, packaging, social media, and point of purchase. While the previous chapter outlined and discussed these concepts, the following chapter applies the principles of design and the creative process to demonstrate these concepts in action.

Filling the gap for those unfamiliar with the creative process, the development of visual assets progresses in three phases: ideation, drafts, and final execution. Within ideation, the designer assesses the needs of the project, asks questions to further this understanding, conducts research to supplemental pre-existing knowledge, writes potential copy information, and records initial visual ideas in thumbnail sketches. Progressing to drafts, the designer selects the ideas with the most potential for visual success, and transforms these thumbnail sketches into more refined versions, referred to as roughs. These roughs are intended to explore possibilities in the specific treatment of layout, typography, illustration, color, base materials, and other elements necessary for the design. Within this phase, critique occurs at various points to assess the quality of the visuals, with revisions completed as needed. When the chosen direction is determined, the designer will conduct the final execution using the selected assets. Critique of the final piece(s) may result in the need to return to the drafting phase, until a suitable visual is created. After approval, the final design is printed on the chosen materials and presented in a manner that meets the project needs.

The proceeding sections follow the application of research in the development of the brand, product, packaging, social media, and point of purchase for a start-up paper goods brand, with first-person narrative of this creative process from ideation to final execution for each component.
Driven by an awareness that Millennials value authenticity in engagement, the vision for my brand is to create opportunities for customers to experience a personal relationship. When developing the brand identity, which functions as the persona of the business, I carefully examined who I am as a person and how my own personality could naturally flow through business. I held to the belief that if I crafted the brand’s personality around my own, maintaining authenticity in customer interactions would be much more likely to remain consistent over time. In the ideation phase, I asked myself key questions about who I am, in order to discover the primary traits that set me apart as an individual, which could then set my brand apart as well. After brainstorming various business names, symbols, and thumbnail sketches that could possibly represent me, I moved into the drafting phase to refine these initial thoughts into a visual brand identity system with appropriate logo design, colors, patterns, and typefaces. Critique of the benefits of each option led me to the final execution phase, resulting in a visual brand that truly resonated with my own personality and aesthetic. While I believed this particular logo to be the most successful option, for reasons to be discussed in the product section, it proved inconsistent with the chosen style of the product line. Through a distinct need for greater cohesion, I pivoted back to the drafting phase in order to develop a more harmonious visual identity. Due to the time and efforts taken to develop this brand throughout the creative process, the resulting visuals successfully communicate the intended message of personal relationship with customers.
To create a relational experience, I resolved to incorporate my own personality into the brand. In the ideation phase, I first listed my most notable personal traits that could translate into a business persona, including expressiveness, chattiness, playfulness, and creativity found in craftiness. In order to apply these qualities as the core essence of my brand, I fused them into every visual aspect possible, starting with the name. I focused on my first and middle names, Hannah Kathryn, as a way to launch the personal aspect of the brand from the very first impression, realizing that the knowledge of one’s middle name is typically reserved for close relations and friends. I chose “studio” as a way to further personalize the experience, inviting consumers into the design space of the creative process.
Starting the drafting phase, I explored visual symbols with meaningful connections to the previously identified traits. I thought about using butterflies and ladybugs to depict my fun side, but they felt a little too child-like. I also considered tadpoles and caterpillars to represent change and growth, but these simply didn’t resonate with my personal preferences. Without a suitable option at this point, I set aside the wish for an illustrative symbol, and simply focused on incorporating my own hand lettering to establish a personal connection in the logo. The initial digital drafts explored a badge-like style, which is currently trending across creative platforms. While the circle logo looked pleasing, it did not include the “studio” part of the brand name and lacked much personality. Continued drafts remedied these deficiencies.
Entrepreneur Tips:

As the primary visual representation of your business, you must choose a logo that captures the heart of your brand’s persona. Reflecting on the research, remember that your brand essence allows consumers to express themselves through an alignment with your mission, so craft an identity that invites relationship. Before the actual design is even considered, begin with a clear personality you wish to convey.

Not sure how to begin? Simply ask questions to reveal what makes your brand special. For example, is your brand fun? Is it flirty? What would your brand do on the weekend? Would your brand eat pineapple on pizza? Questions like these allow you to establish a more specific foundational knowledge of the brand, as if it were an actual person.

After the core essence is discovered, you will then use the principles of design to translate these ideas into visuals. Line, shape, texture, value, and color are the very basic considerations, and communicate through their usage. For example, curved lines tend to express gracefulness, while jagged lines tend to express distress. Symbolism is also a powerful tool, especially when using common visuals with understood meanings. These principles guide the design process and require definite attention, due to their impact on success. For example, if a logo for a wedding-based floral shop featured rough textures and skulls, it would communicate the idea of death, which would most likely push away the typical target audience of elegant bridal consumers.

If you’ve never designed a logo and are unsure of your brand persona, consider hiring a professional who possesses greater experience. Your logo is like your brand’s outfit on a first date, and if you wish to go on a second, then I suggest you dress it accordingly.
The final execution phase occurred twice in the area of branding, due to a change in style that took place in the product component, to be discussed in the next section. Even though I initially dismissed the hope of a visual symbol, after critiquing the previous digital drafts, I decided that the logo needed more than hand lettering alone to set it apart from other brands. Exploring the visuals of my childhood, I chose the tulip as a meaningful flower to represent my Dutch heritage and formative years living in Germany. I realized that my time visiting Holland, Austria, Switzerland, Poland, Luxemburg, Denmark, France, and other European places had an influential impact on my colorful aesthetic, and the tulip functioned as a subtle symbol of communication. While I really connected with this initial branding and color palette, the smooth lines did not contribute to a handcrafted feel, and the amount of colors provided almost too many options in application. When the eventual style shift in product design invited a change in branding, I was able to address these concerns through the new identity system.
The final logo, colors, patterns, and typography possess the same meaning as the previous version, but with greater connection to experiential branding. More apparent hand lettering invites a personal relationship from the first impression, while playful typefaces for additional content communicate a light-hearted appearance. As seen in future sections, my brand continues to promote a relationship through its conversational tone, openness with bloopers, and encouraged consumer engagement across social media and the point of purchase.
In order to craft positive perceptions of value, the vision for my product line is to create opportunities for customers to experience pieces of art. Despite researched commentary from MacMahon that product is not necessarily the most important aspect of a business, I personally encountered distinct problems when initially affording it less time in the creative process than other areas of concern. I rushed the ideation phase, moved into the drafting period too quickly, and lost ground due to a shaky foundation. When I attempted to move into final execution with digital illustrations that lacked personality or charm, feedback from my thesis committee confirmed that the designs needed additional development prior to continuation. Through a return to ideation and an exploration of studio mediums in a state of play, the resulting direction provides customers with designs that maintain a handcrafted feel, even though they remain intended for mass production. After discovering newness in ideation through watercolor and ink, the drafting phase allowed me to convert the imagery from previously deficient designs into works with more life, visual interest, and overall harmony in style. Throughout this developmental process, I continued to work on multiple pieces at a time, ensuring cohesion and consistency when exhibited as a collection. Research of consumer preferences then guided the final execution phase, determining which types of products were chosen for the surface application of my designs. The resulting product line achieves the initial intent, providing customers with the chance to obtain and to ultimately experience pieces of art.

PRODUCT

An invitation for customers to experience art
Chapter Three: Application

The product process began with a plan to create a variety of patterns and lettering for application on cards, notebooks, mugs, totes, and more. During ideation, I brainstormed content with potential for specific occasions, such as birthdays and weddings, while also considering ideas applicable to any day of life. Knowing that my brand was fun and clever, I strived for unique concepts that exhibited wit and charm. From cleaning mermaids to pregnant avocado bellies, ideation pushed possibilities and funneled all the thoughts from my mind to the page. I ultimately decided to move forward with content that could apply to any day of life, so that my initial product line would not be limited by a particular time frame or occasion. This provided flexibility in the content, and longevity in consumer interest.
The drafting phase for pattern design provided opportunity to consider a variety of topics and illustrative visuals. I initially planned to produce five unique patterns, but struggled to decide whether to focus on one category alone, or five different categories. Should I design five patterns all related to the topic of food, or should I create one pattern of food, one of animals, one of florals, one of fashion accessories, and one of geometric shapes? Sketching and placing rough drafts of all the visuals in proximity to one another allowed me to make the decision with greater discernment. In the end, I decided to explore five unique topics, in order to provide customers with greater options in the product line. I applied this principle to my cards as well, exploring a variety of visuals to address different aspects of life.
Thanks for never guilting me into joining your network marketing team.

I have ZERO idea why we’re still single...

But I’m kinda excited about our crazy cat lady!

Since all our friends keep getting pregnant, can we start celebrating our food babies?
I explored many different layouts for the windmill card to best organize the overall visual. The inked draft had personality, but it became very busy and overwhelming when translated into the colorful digital version. I then simplified the design by removing the ribbon and excessive type decorations, while shortening the phrase from, “I’ll always be your biggest fan,” to, “forever your biggest fan.” The final outcome still did not resonate in my gut, and that struggle continued into future designs. I do not believe feelings should dictate creative approval, but for this brand, I need to adore my products if I hope to sell them with honesty.
Similar to the process of the windmill design, I struggled to fully appreciate the final outcome of the pregnant avocado card. I believe that the concept and message behind the phrase is really what makes this particular piece special, rather than the actual shapes, layout, and uniqueness of the visual. At an age where many of my friends are beginning to have children, the relatability of the work carries the design more than the illustration style itself. Visually, I do believe it is stronger than the windmill card, because of the playfulness in the colors and the personality of the booted avocado character, however, this draft still required revision to satisfy my gut impression.
Even though the design direction did not align with my personal preferences, I continued to push forward due to the pressure of thesis deadlines. I believed that eventually the style would sort itself out, rather than intentionally allotting time to define my aesthetic through exploration and play. In these donut pattern drafts, I adjusted the use of color and texture, however, I did not apply enough variation to truly maximize opportunity to explore different styles. I failed to test new forms, color palettes, textural techniques, or mediums, so these options appear too similar to one another to qualify as genuine attempts to find my vibe. I still used digital illustration for the drafts on the right, but I at least began to vary the visuals through stripes, stippling (dots), and more interesting line work.
After creating five primary patterns with ten matching geometric options, five cards, and one “plant lady” lettering piece, I considered the surface designs of my product line complete. This assumption proved wrong, and I did not settle for long. Sure, the collection looked okay in a basic sense, but I did not love it. As a whole, the offering lacked total cohesion and did not represent my best work as a designer. I had allowed the fear of deadlines to propel me forward with a direction I did not adore. Review of the work with my thesis committee confirmed these concerns, and each member challenged me to make strategic visual choices to unite the collection, using the appealing aspects of the orange pattern in particular. For example, I could apply the stippled dots from the oranges to the shapes found in other patterns, while mimicking the usage of solid and empty shapes, as seen in the oranges and their leaves. Although my thesis committee did not necessarily encourage me to scrap everything, I believed it necessary in order to start fresh in a better direction. I set aside my computer and began to play with different mediums, including watercolor and ink. The results of this exploration yielded an orange pattern of far greater personality than anything created previously, with a more handcrafted and personal appeal. Upon approval, I pivoted the entire collection, using the visual elements of stippling, positive and negative space, and broken black line work as my signature choices for cohesion.
Entrepreneur Tip:

Learn from the experience I just described. Yes, the research indicates that if you have a solid brand, you can sell pretty much anything, but this principle does not mean you can rush the process of product development. Know who you are and let your strengths guide your product line. Restricting myself to digital illustration limited my ability to present the fullness of my skill, because it simply is not my strength and does not represent me as a maker. My strength is in the studio, and I needed to apply more traditional mediums from the very beginning. As a lesson to prospective entrepreneurs, lean into your strengths and do not settle for less. Be willing to scrap everything, but perform ideation in a way where you won’t have to.
Drafts
With renewed vision, I launched into new drafts that applied the identified visual choices of stippling, positive and negative space, and broken black line work. These three considerations dramatically simplified the process, as they provided a structure for each new visual. For further simplification, I utilized one color palette for the entire collection, using the floral pattern as my opportunity to mix each hue that would appear in future designs. I carefully planned my palette, ensuring an option for each color on the wheel, which included a red, magenta, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. Using layering techniques, I was able to apply lighter and darker values of each color in the proceeding designs. Learning from the past, I explored different forms with each new pattern prior to the final execution, as seen in the provided process images.
Drafts

[Images of various pattern designs]
Drafts

After completing five new primary patterns and ten matching geometric patterns, I experienced difficulty creating a new lettering style for the updated card designs. Once again learning from the past, I explored my options before making any final decisions. I practiced lettering in watercolor, occasionally adding broken black line work, however, the outcome always appeared bulky and heavy. I did not feel in control when lettering in watercolor, and understood that greater refinement in movement would require additional time to perfect the necessary techniques for execution. I also explored variations in color, continuing with the previously mixed color palette. I found that some additional colors were necessary, particularly for the avocado, and embraced the need to mix a more options for that particular design.
Continued exploration revealed that the lettering appeared best when drafted in black ink alone. Variation in line weight and lettering style achieved the intended personality and level of charm, without need for color. Black lettering allowed the illustrations to stand out, removing any potential competition or busy-ness that would be created if color appeared in the phrasing. I also made the decision to keep all of the backgrounds white, in order to create definite cohesion in the five-card collection. This removed issues of contrast seen in previous versions, which refers to the way colors appear on top of one another, based on differences in lightness and darkness. Illustrations used for the cards feature the same design choices made in the patterns, maintaining cohesion in the product line as a whole.
The “plant lady” lettering piece did not necessarily need to change based on the style of the new direction, however, the shift provided opportunity for evaluation. In the end, I did choose to update the piece, knowing that the initial design did not represent my best work and possessed potential for application on multiple different product types. I drafted fifty or so additional thumbnail sketches, exploring a variety of lettering styles, flourishes, and line weights. The final choice, pictured below, more accurately represents the voice of my brand, as well as my vision for future lettering pieces. Even though this final version remains a vectorized digital form for production purposes, I maintained a roughness on the edges to ensure a sketched aesthetic consistent with the maker movement focus of the brand.
Rebrand:

As the first impression of the brand, I needed to update my logo after the major shift in style. The previous version featured very different lettering forms, and appeared inconsistent with the new handcrafted approach. Applying the same visual layout and concept, I created new drafts using the two primary mediums featured in the collection, including watercolor and ink. I chose to move forward with the inked version, mainly because it mimics the lettering style of the cards and maintains strong unity. The solid use of line also makes the logo highly practical, since the texture and color variation of the watercolor version would complicate printing.
Final Execution

The final execution phase involved the research of manufacturing partners and the preparation of files for print, based on the requested design settings. For my wrapping paper in particular, I investigated partners who sold single sheets or full rolls, and found difficulty locating an option that would print my designs at a low price point in an appropriate quantity for my initial product line. Many manufacturers have relatively high minimum quantity requirements, due to the nature of machine setup and efficiency. When I did find a printer with low minimums, the price point was too high to justify the eventual sale price to consumers. Eventually, I discovered a manufacturer that produces singles sheets at 20x27 inches, with no minimum order size, at a price market that aligns with market standard after my profit margin increase.
Entrepreneur Tip:

In relation to final execution and manufacturing, I have two primary suggestions; consider the interests of your target market, and find trustworthy manufacturing partners early in the product process.

Reflecting on the research from the previous chapter, paper goods and gifts do not include greeting cards and stationery alone. While it is valuable to offer these items due to their typically low price point and high profit margins, it is important to elevate consumer interest through the availability of additional goods. Remember that recent trends indicate an increase in items related to home goods and fashion accessories, so consider relevant products, such as pillows, mugs, T-shirts, and tote bags. Also, pay attention to your target market and their practical needs. For example, my target market includes college students and young professionals, who often share washer/dryer units or visit momma every few weekends to clean their clothes. Assessing their needs, I created a large canvas laundry bag in the floral pattern, to ease the transportation process and to brighten up the typically mundane chore.

Once you establish which product types will appear in your brand’s collection, you will need to identify appropriate manufacturers. I suggest ordering samples EARLY in the product design process, since this step can take a significant amount of time for printing and shipping. Even if your final designs are not complete, create a sample file with multiple color swatches that will allow you to discover how each printer and product material handles bright versus neutral tones. Do not risk placing your bulk final order without first testing on a single sample. Yes, this takes time, however, it is worth the effort and the initial investment to ensure product quality.
Final Execution
Similar to the process of producing the wrapping paper, I engaged a considerable amount of time in research to discover who should print the journals for the Hannah Kathryn Studio product line. Journals and notebooks are typically a popular gift item, so I convinced myself that I absolutely needed them in my collection. Unfortunately though, journals with full wrap-around cover designs at low order quantities do not often print at a reasonable price point for resale purposes. I could feasibly print single spot illustrations on the front cover, however, limited options existed to feature my patterns on full cover-wraps. Because of the machines and process required to print seamlessly around the front, spine, and back, I understood the high price points I encountered, but still wrestled with finding a printer. Ultimately, I did locate a temporary solution for the purposes of the thesis endeavor and the initial product line, but I continue to seek a more cost-effective partner for long-term use.
Final Execution
With a distinct background in fashion and costuming, I embraced the opportunity to print a few patterns on fabric, so that I could personally sew them into something new for my customers. Based on the researched consumer interest in home goods, I decided that pillows were a viable product for my online shop, especially when sold as shams alone to simplify shipping needs. When creating the design, I did not want to produce simple, boring, square pillows, and I also did not want to worry about complicated zipper installation. Based on these two parameters, I drafted a pillow design with a functional bow to enclose the pillow stuffer, while also effectively using every piece of fabric in a yard. This means that zero scraps are wasted, maximizing the resources invested into fabric printing.
Final Execution

Since all of our friends keep getting pregnant, can we start celebrating our food babies?

No idea why we’re still single, but I’m pretty excited for our future cat lady squad.

I love you more than dry shampoo.

You know that’s like, a lot.

Thanks for never guilting me into joining the latest pyramid scheme. Sorry, I meant to say, “multilevel marketing team.”
The remaining surface designs were printed onto cards, mugs, and tote bags, with relative ease in the manufacturing process. Each of these items required significant order minimums, however, their potential for success justified the up front costs. For example, the chosen card manufacturer requires the purchase of 25 cards per design, at less than $1 per piece with free shipping. With a $5 resell value based on market standards, I only need to sell five cards per design to return the entire initial investment. For the mugs and tote bags, the price information is slightly more convoluted, as impacted by high shipping costs when rush ordering to meet thesis deadlines of the MFA exhibit. Through this experience, I learned the value of manufacturing time, and the effect of shipping on profit margin calculations.
Became research affirms that the presentation of products acts as a vital touch-point to thrill buyers with unexpected elements, the vision for my packaging is to create opportunities for customers to experience surprise. Turning the concept of experiential packaging into a visually applied example, my ideation process involved many different lists of possible ways to create excitement in the unboxing process of e-commerce orders. I included the types of factors required of packaging in a practical sense, such as protection, and also the types of characteristics that could specialize the packaging beyond mere function alone. Remaining aware of budget concerns and the relatively low price point of potential orders, I determined that the production of my packaging needed to possess opportunity for simple execution. Throughout the ideation phase, I identified that experience could be amplified by the inclusion of multiple low-cost items, allowing their cumulative presence to excite customers with new curiosity over each piece pulled from the mailer. Narrowing my lists, I moved into the drafting phase with the goal of designing a specialty mailer, handwritten cards, promotional offers, stickers, and bonus gift items connected to the type of product purchased. The drafting phase created opportunity to further develop the overall consistency of my visual identity, using the branded elements and styles previously designed. In this stage, I navigated concerns of what to do when customers complete additional orders over time - would they receive the same gift and promotional offer as their original order? How could I create new experiences with every purchase to maintain feelings of surprise? With decisions made and designs produced, the final execution phase allowed me to test the practicality of my packaging, including the efforts necessary to gather materials and to prepare the mailers for shipment. Although premium packaging requires more attention, research affirms that the benefits of customer loyalty and repeat orders validate the extra care in the creation of surprise experiences.
To maximize customer experience, I decided to include gift items in every order, and began ideation with a list of possible options. Remembering that my brand is all about personal connections and relationships, I brainstormed ways to infuse the packaging with hand-crafted elements. The simplest solution offered a handwritten card, thanking customers for their order. More complicated solutions involved handmade gift items, such as bows, hair clips, and scrunchies. I decided to focus on paper-based gifts, such as bookmarks and gift tags, in order to lower the price point for sustainability. For the mailer, ideation revealed a desire to order branded pattern-covered containers, understanding that the packaging creates the very first impression when customers receive their orders.
Drafting

After completing the ideation process to investigate initial ideas, the drafting phase allowed me to consider practical shipping requirements and specifications. In this phase, I performed the necessary calculations to determine the appropriate mailer size for each product in my collection, with consideration for the size of extra gift items and packing elements, such as coupon cards and thank you notes. Rather than purchase bulky boxes, rigid mailers provide sturdy structures and appropriate space for my product needs. I first designed a mock-up version of the mailer envelop, and then updated it after the rebrand occurred. In the change, I also re-evaluated the hierarchy of the envelop design, choosing to turn the lettering piece from a prominent printed segment to a smaller accent sticker.
For the packaging gift items, specifically gift tags and bookmarks, I applied the pre-existing patterns from the product collection to maximize my design efforts. These items will be selected, packed, and sent based on the purchased products, to ensure an appropriate match. With intention to print and cut these designs locally, I formatted my files in a way that fills paper space with the least amount of waste. I utilized surplus print area for coupon cards, with three unique discounts that will be concealed under scratch-off stickers. This adds an interactive quality and surprise factor when consumers engage with the promotional card. Aside from e-commerce packaging concerns, I created generic hang tags for pillows, mugs, and tote bags, as well as belly bands with helpful information to wrap around gift wrap sets and journals.
The final mailer design changed fairly substantially between the drafting and the final execution phases. After reflecting on shipping requirements, pricing, and practical considerations, I opted to create two mailer designs for each type of product in my shop. One remains more of a conceptual direction, only possible if the business scales to a large enough size to afford custom printing. The second design serves my current start-up level. Ideally, I would love to cover the entire mailer with the branded tulip pattern, with space for printed shipping labels and stickered accent designs. While the pattern would stay the same to maximize use of inventory, the stickers allow for subtle updates over time. The start-up design does not feature the branded pattern, but the continued use of branded stickers conveys a personal touch.
Entrepreneur Tip:

The actual packaging process can feel like a tedious task. With the designs complete and products printed, this last step of order processing takes a surprising amount of effort. You may feel temptation to occasionally skip special inclusions or skimp on precision, but inconsistency belittles brand value. However time consuming, packaging remains a vital touch point in the customer experience. Reflecting on the research, packaging presents the most potential to wow consumers with surprise and feelings of value. Do not allow laziness to keep you from shipping your items in a way that maximizes experience, and promotes success through additional orders.
Knowing that people typically follow friends instead of businesses, the vision for my social media presence is to create opportunities for customers to experience the process. Applying research on the importance of storytelling, I incorporated narrative qualities into all of my content, presenting the person behind the product. With an understanding that Instagram currently applies most to my target audience and fosters opportunity to share ever-lasting posts in the account feed, 24-hour content in stories, 24-hour interactive live videos, and catalogued highlight reels, I chose to focus on this particular platform to best maximize initial efforts. I launched my social media somewhat prematurely after the first “final” version of the brand and product line was established, however, releasing this direction early allowed my followers to see how the creative process molded future deliverables in continued revisions. This timeline also allowed me to assess changes in interest based on the switch. After the pivot from digital to studio-based designs was officially declared, I began to share videos and images of myself at work on the other components of the business. This content was released through Instagram stories, which only remain available for 24-hours, providing greater flexibility in commitment if and when additional changes occurred. When switching to watercolor and ink, I noticed a distinct increase in engagement with my following, including more direct messages and excitement about featured designs in progress. I personally felt more inspired when creating content, because imagery of traditional materials appeared more visually appealing. Shots of my paint palette, test swatches, early drafts, color-dabbed paper towels, and watercolor brushes appeared much more intriguing than my computer screen alone. No matter the method of publication or type of content produced, I intentionally encouraged engagement by posing questions and welcoming feedback, inviting customers to experience the process by creating opportunities to join the story.
After choosing Instagram as my primary platform, I examined images from my personal account to identify attributes that encouraged the most likes and engagement. I discovered that images of people generally possessed some of the most likes, while flat lay images of my artwork in stylized environments also captivated significant attention. Flat lay refers to images where the camera shoots parallel to the surface of the subject, as seen in the lower example. This investigation into my own account revealed consistencies in my photographic voice, which typically features bright whites, airy backgrounds, and pops of color. While I shoot and edit decently well with my phone, I understood at this moment that professional photography would maximize the success of my social media influence.
Drafting
Prior to the visual pivot, these images and graphics represent some of the first stories and posts shown on the @HannahKathrynStudio Instagram account. When only working in digital illustration, I struggled to create interesting content. In an attempt to capture stories featuring more than my computer screen alone, I shared videos of Pantone swatchbooks and images of colorful gift tags. When planning posts, I convinced myself that visual consistency required new digital illustrations outside of my product line, and I struggled to capture unique environmental imagery of my process. The lack of personal excitement and inspiration in the area of social media actually influenced the decision to change to studio-based mediums, understanding that traditional tools could provide greater visual interest in content.
Final Execution

I have nail polish, lashes, eyeshadow, brushes, mini scissors, lipstick, and compacts. What else can I use to fill the spaces?? Help!!

What will it be???
After the visual pivot, I archived previous posts of the older style, which removed them from my account feed and saved the images elsewhere for future reflection. Inspiration immediately grew when creating and planning subsequent content, since my passion for studio art revealed evident joy in the process. Through 24-hour Instagram stories, I shared content with value in the narratives they told, but not necessarily enough visual value to be posted forever on the account feed. I encouraged engagement through interactive questions, like the one posed in the creation of the cosmetic pattern. Even though I could easily search for new accessories and brainstorm on my own, I allowed customers to experience the process by joining it. I received several messages, responded to each, and posted a follow-up story that expressed gratitude and showed the final outcome. Through stories, I also made a habit of sharing as various items arrived in the mail. In this instance, the package included hundreds of clear plastic baggies for product storage, which invited followers to consider the practical side of developing the business. One of my favorite story series, however, invited followers to my first product photo shoot. I storied images and videos of the styling process, and for the first time, revealed glimpses of my final product line.
Chapter Three: Application

Final Execution

Entrepreneur Tip:

Social media changes constantly, and any specific tips about current system metrics will shift by tomorrow. To best benefit prospective entrepreneurs, my primary tip in the area of social media is to communicate the brand persona through your chosen platform. Branding does not stop when the logo is complete, since the developed persona should flow through every aspect of the business. Dissecting the post above, the image communicates my maker status by revealing the creative process in a bright, colorful manner that communicates the fun, playful essence of the brand. Rather than capturing the workspace alone, physically appearing in the image furthers the personal quality of the business. Analyzing further, the caption exhibits a highly conversational tone, sharing the story of my change in style. My openness and honesty continues to encourage relationship through transparency. Posts like these feel personal, and apply the research that people follow people on social media, not businesses pushing products in every single post. On the right, proceeding posts continue to share the process, highlighting the person behind the product.
POINT OF PURCHASE

An invitation for customers to experience inspiration

In order to incentivize interaction with the online shop beyond browsing alone, the vision for my point of purchase is to create opportunities for customers to experience inspiration. Applying research of the feelings surrounding the buying process and an awareness that my Millennial audience does not necessarily respond to blatant salesmanship, I determined to incorporate special features into the e-commerce space to provide free resources aside from available products, promoting authenticity and good intentions. Within the ideation phase, I brainstormed possible types of features that could accomplish this goal, with consideration for my personal skills in teaching and possibilities provided by the online marketplace. Of all the areas of the thesis endeavor, point of purchase required the most research in ideation to determine the best hosting service to support my start-up business. As someone with limited coding experience, I investigated multiple platforms for possible partnerships that offer customizable templates at affordable price points. After subscribing to a free trial of one particular platform that appeared perfect for my needs, I found that despite its reasonable service fees and attractive templates, the range of personalization and ease of use inhibited my experience. I then subscribed to my second choice, Shopify, which proved to meet all of my design needs through numerous design features, simple customization tools, and practical order tracking resources. Within the drafting phase, I modified available templates to meet my preferences, wrote the necessary copy information, and art directed various photo shoots to capture the lifestyle of my brand. In this phase, I implemented the chosen inspirational elements discovered in the ideation phase, including a biography to share my personal story, a blog of DIY tutorials, and a section of free phone wallpaper designs. In the final execution, I reflected on the overall experience of my point of purchase, with careful attention to the inspiration found on every page.
The featured ideation lists reveal an attention to practical e-commerce website needs and potential experiential elements that may encourage inspiration. I conducted research on other websites who sell paper goods and gifts, in order to generate a series of common pages, such as those dedicated to the brand’s story, products, contact information, and frequently asked questions. I also noted elements that add to the customer experience, such as tutorial-based blogs and lifestyle photo series. With consideration for my own strengths in education and passion for improving everyday life, I developed a list of possible blog topics. Inspiration remains the goal of the blog, however, I believe shared content will appear more unified with the website if the chosen projects relate to my products in some manner.
Drafting

With limited coding experience, I took advantage of templates for the overall layout of my website. Shopify offers a wide range of customization options on each template, allowing users to uniquely brand the experience. Even though other companies may choose the same base design as me, our websites will appear vastly different when personalized. In drafting, I tested a variety of styles, using the branded colors, logo, and temporary images. After determining the general dimensions utilized on each template, I planned possible directions for lifestyle features, artist introduction shots, studio views, product images, and additional visual content. I thoroughly enjoy art directing and styling, but hired Lauren Paige Photography to fill my personal skill gap behind the camera. She is lovely and wonderful. Hire her.
Entrepreneur Tip:

Do not settle for terrible images. The quality of your photos impacts success, especially if marketing to the highly visual generation of Millennial consumers. Unable to see items in-person, the online representation of your collection dictates interest and success in sales. Hire a skilled photographer, and if unable to make the financial investment, offer to barter. Do not simply suggest “exposure” as payment, since an actual investment will grant you more influence in the process. If you accept free photography, you accept whatever the photographer is willing to produce, and you may not experience as many options as those featured here.
In final execution, I tested each page of my website across multiple viewing devices. Screen proportions and sizes differ between computers and phones, therefore, the consumer experience varies based on the chosen viewing platform. Templates available through Shopify, and other website building services, automatically change layouts as needed, but personal review is vital to observe how these changes affect the experience. For example, when analyzing these two screenshots from a 15-inch MacBook Pro and an iPhone 8 Plus, one will notice that the images appear in very different compositions. The lower view does not even feature the lemon, purple grid, or orange scallop illustrations, due to how narrow the photo appears. After reviewing each page and image, I made the necessary adjustments to improve the consumer experience on all possible devices.
When executing the point of purchase experience, I remained particularly invested in opportunities to create inspiration. I moved forward with the blog component of the e-commerce platform, increasing consumer incentive to visit the website. The first post features a tutorial on DIY pillow boxes, inspiring thoughtful gifting and promoting the benefits of my thick-weight wrapping paper sheets. A secondary page of complimentary screen wallpapers continues to resource everyday inspiration, while providing a space for future pattern testing prior to product production. As a final vehicle for inspiration, I specifically executed the “about” page in a manner that tells my unique entrepreneurial story, in order to inspire the dreams of makers like me.

So you want to know a little more about my story? Well, I grew up as a military kid, specifically an Air Force Brat, and I firmly believe that a huge part of what I today was influenced by a lifestyle of travel, movement, and discipline. Guess what? Discipline doesn’t have to be a bad word anymore! Discipline provided focus when my creative noodle brain was on different planes. As an example of this possible brain in action, I entered an undergraduate degree as an actuarial major. Then, I became a theatre major. Then I thought about being a math teacher. Then I took up dance immediately. Then I considered becoming a stunt double even though I’ve never been coordinated and often trip when walking upstairs. That dream lasted about an hour and I went back to fashion.

Most of the art I’ve worked to be a lot of things in my life, but the very first, was an illustrator.

I don’t remember where I first heard the word, or how the thought entered my mind, but I always had a knack for creatively mixing parts of me. I was always a bit of a dreamer. But I did it with my own flair of wonder. I remember so much about my early artistic development, like the day I realized that the only thing I actually look like the original character I always drew at the top of the page, it’s all around us and we just don’t see the paper. So it is me, the bright blue marker I threw that day.

In fourth grade, an art teacher noticed potential and she invited me to join an exclusive weekly work坊, an art club. She taught me about screen printing, stop-motion animation and more. She taught me color theory, but I saw her and ignored everything except the paint. That wasn’t pretty. I don’t remember her name, but I definitely remember her impact on my life. A few years later, I moved away, and didn’t take a steady art class again until college. But the

DIY Pillow Boxes
May 05, 2018

Want to make the gifting experience even more inspirational? Grab some paper, scissors, and glue, print the provided template, and have some fun...
With the thesis document now published and designs for the brand, product, packaging, social media, and point of purchase complete, my vision for the future is to create opportunities for customers to shop the experience. While the provided visual applications were intended to educate creative entrepreneurs in how to tangibly manifest the researched concepts of customer experience, I believe that the credibility of these designs will grow even further through consumer confirmation. While the visual deliverables adhere to the researched concepts of experience, consumer preferences continue to guide the marketplace. Prior to making substantial purchase orders, I am currently scheduled to showcase a pop-up shop as my thesis gallery exhibit, marking the first opportunity to interact with customers in a face-to-face manner. This form of engagement will allow me to gauge which products people choose to interact with most, even if they do not make actual purchases. After the exhibit concludes, I plan to connect with businesses who support local makers, providing additional evaluation of consumer interest, as well as potential wholesale partners. Information gathered from a presence at local venues will primarily derive from the record of actual purchase decisions, which may delineate from the pop-up shop results, based on environment, nearby competition from other product lines, and even the absence of myself as the maker at the time of the shopping experience. In regards to the e-commerce platform, I plan to invest additional energy curating a social media countdown for a future launch date, while accumulating content for future blog posts. It is imperative that the online shop is released at a time when orders are able to be processed swiftly and when the blog can be maintained on a regular basis. I look forward to making these particular steps after graduation with my MFA in Studio & Digital Arts, creating opportunity for my followers, family, and friends to experience the lifestyle of Hannah Kathryn Studio.
Chapter Four: Conclusion

Through the identification of a problem, an assessment of available research, and an in-depth application of the creative process, the thesis concludes with primary takeaways for the target audience of creative entrepreneurs.

With rising creative entrepreneurs as the primary target audience, the thesis affirms the potential impact of customer experience on success within the paper goods and gift industry. Background research reveals distinct competition within this marketplace of stationery, notebooks, mugs, totes, and more, due to the extent of available products and brands. Saturation presents a problem for prospective entrepreneurs, who may experience difficulty vying for attention when competing with existing brands. The combined efforts of the written thesis content and the visual deliverables defend the use of experiential strategies to maximize the efforts of new businesses, filling the knowledge gap between intellectual concepts and visual application. Using a variety of journals, articles, credible blogs, and case studies, the thesis graduate demonstrates an understanding of customer experience in each of its five foundational concerns; brand, product, packaging, social media, and point of purchase. These principles are then applied to the development of a personal business, in order to visually exemplify researched concepts and to articulate the process of each application. Rather than simply tell prospective entrepreneurs what to do, the thesis shows them what to do. Throughout the resulting process narratives, the thesis affirms the need for intentionality, and the need to set goals in every area of customer experience. In the most concise manner, the showcased example invites consumers to experience relationship through the brand, art through the product, surprise through the packaging, the process through social media, and inspiration through the point of purchase. While the verbiage of the thesis proposal referred to “independent makers,” the journey affirmed that to make it as a maker, one cannot stay independent for long. Success in saturation requires substantial skill, time, and attention, which could cause anguish if fighting alone. Seek to maximize the experience, not only for customers, but also for the entrepreneur and the maker, the dreamer and the doer.
Bibliography

Documentation of utilized resources, including scholarly journals, academic articles, credible blogs, and opportunities for case study, each providing insight into the paper goods and gift industry, customer experience, and its related components.


Rifle Paper Co. “History,” riflepaperco.com/history/.


Appendix

Approval for utilized imagery, as exhibited on the e-commerce platform, social media presence, thesis publication, and corresponding thesis website, with distinct attention to photography release.

The above e-mail correspondence affirms that Hannah Kathryn Lynch maintains the copyright and permission to reproduce all photographs utilized throughout the thesis publication, initially captured by Lauren White of Lauren Paige Photography, available at www.laurenpaige.me.

All additional graphics and images remain original creations of the thesis graduate and maintain the same personal copyright and permission to reproduce.