

Tom Gittins

Musician

Musicians' Union

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"I attended FEU Training workshops

What are the biggest challenges of maintaining a freelance career?

Workflow can sometimes be inconsistent. When I first started out I remember thinking 'I've got work this week, but what about next week or next month?' You can never switch off from thinking about both current projects and future work, which makes the divide between work and home life tough. I have a permanent feeling of being 'on'. It would be great just to do the bits I love. For example, I find paperwork a drag, but know that it's a necessary evil that has to be done.

Have you added new work/skills to your portfolio over time?

Since the start, I've always done everything for my business myself including graphics, branding and website development. This may take me far longer than outsourcing to specialists but it enables me to change things as and when I need as well as pick up new information. For example, along the way, I've learned about Photoshop and web design. I bruise my way through the information, see what works, and store it up for future use.

What is the biggest challenge of learning the skills that you need?

Time is the biggest issue for me. I would like to allocate time in my diary for CPD (continuing professional development) but find I'm too busy doing the job, so I just have to weave it in when I can. The FEU Training courses are definitely well worth taking the time out for. Also, anything web-based/technical evolves so quickly that you have to work hard just to keep up.

What FEU Training courses have you attended?

I've attended Driving traffic to you website, How to run a successful social media campaign, The Perfect Pitch and Marketing for Freelances.

Can you tell us a bit about your career to date?

I've played in bands since I was 15 and spent the early years once I'd left school working in day jobs to fund being a musician! I was keen but didn't know how to get into the music business. The day jobs became increasingly technical such as providing sound and lighting technical support at a college, and I had started to build up a home studio setup for my music, as well as doing lots of freebies to help other people – all of which helped me to develop my own technical skills.

By becoming the studio production tutor at the college, I started teaching these skills until I ended up running a full music B-tec. Balancing the day job while still performing (including twice yearly touring in the USA) and producing work for other bands became too much once I'd taken on my first studio, so I gave up the day job and focused full time on running my own business – Monochrome Productions – a decision I'm very happy with. Now, I work with hundreds of bands and labels.

What do you like most about your work?

I'm grateful that I get to do what I enjoy. I love working with bands to help them get the best recordings possible. Musicians are inherently fun and creative people, so whilst the days can be very long, it is usually incredibly enjoyable.

When a band has been together for ages, it can feel strange for them to embrace the thoughts, ideas and guidance of an outsider, so you have to be patient and a good listener to ensure everyone is pulling in the same direction on a project and in the right headspace to perform. My focus is working with them to get a great song and a great performance – whatever it takes!

Also, I'm fascinated by the branding of bands, and enjoy all aspects of that. I am very protective over young bands that are carving out their career path. I'm often treated as an agony uncle for advice on many other areas of a band's branding even outside the studio production, such as imaging, graphics, web branding and video ideas.





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What are the most important things that you've learned?

All of the courses have been great. From the perfect pitch workshop, I became much more aware of my brand and approach and what works. It helped me cement how to brand my company personality.

I attended the website and social media workshops recently, so I've stockpiled all the resources and information. I love that I've learned how much it's possible to do myself without having to outsource, and what areas I need to fix and improve on my own sites.

We were directed to excellent resources. The quality of the tutors is great and they are all professionals in their own fields. Attending these workshops gives you confidence through helping you pinpoint what you are doing right and what you could do better.

What has encouraged you to attend FEU training sessions?

I attended FEU Training workshops because they were relevant to my industry. Also, with the trusted connection to the Musicians' Union, I know that if they are recommending it, it's going to be valuable. It also helps that it's free!

I have a personal desire to progress and improve my business. I love that I'm working alongside a diverse range of creative people such as writers, actors, musicians and producers. It makes the day more dynamic. Learning about how writers work and promote themselves for example can inspire different elements of what I do. The overlap across the creative industries is huge, and the mix in the training room gives it an extra dimension.

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Do you know any other organisation that offers business skills courses for creatives?

Not on a national level – I'm sure there are occasional relevant local evening classes, but as I said I know I can trust the quality of FEU Training courses.