


Business Card Assignment: An Identity Exploration Artifact

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A business card seems an antiquated way of sharing contact information with someone we've met. How could this seemingly archaic medium possibly benefit students who are developing their career orientations now?

In the professional world, establishing a distinct identity is crucial for career success. In the limited space provided on a business card, students can give a tangible representation of their professional identity, providing an efficient and effective way to convey essential information about oneself to potential employers, clients, or colleagues (Gorbatov et al., 2019). By strategically selecting and designing content, students can not only showcase their skills, qualifications, and areas of expertise but also communicate their personal brand and professional values. A business card provides an opportunity to select and design this communicational output, thus providing the scope to solidify and clarify one's professional identity.

Literature Review

Beeching's (2020) book, *Beyond Talent*, provides a structure for both this class and the individual assignments that are related to self-promotion. Central to the ethos of Beeching's discourse is the notion that the contemporary artist must possess not only creative prowess but also a keen understanding of entrepreneurial principles. Beeching advocates for a proactive approach to self-promotion, an approach that resonates deeply with the objectives of the arts entrepreneurship course in which this article is rooted. The book seeks to equip students with the requisite skills and knowledge to navigate the competitive landscape of the creative industries. By elucidating the symbiotic relationship between artistic excellence and strategic self-promotion, Beeching provides a roadmap for students to engage with their own practice critically, fostering a mindset of agency and resourcefulness.

The origins of business cards can be traced back to the 15th century in China, and their purpose has remained consistent throughout history: to exchange contact information and establish professional connections ("On the cards", 2015). In the digital age, where information can be easily shared and accessed online, one might question the relevance and importance of this slip of paper. Despite advances in technology, business cards continue to hold value and significance for several reasons. First, business cards offer a tangible and personalized way to make a memorable first impression. Second, business cards provide a concise and organized format for sharing contact information. This is particularly important in professional settings where time may be limited, and the need for quick and easy access to contact details is essential.

Third, when worked into an effective routine, a business card can serve as a tool to help the cardholder engage in meaningful conversations and networking opportunities where they might normally struggle even to introduce themselves (Yamaguchi et al., 2022).

To this point, I would like to offer to the term "process totem" to describe how a business card can act as a catalyst for professional interactions, serving as a physical representation that sparks conversations and leads to a sequence of fruitful events. What follows is an example written in second person as if being conveyed to a cardholder:

- Step 1. Say hello and your name, then ask for their name.
- Step 2. Once they have responded with their name, tell them your professional affiliation(s).
- Step 3. Hand them your business card.
- Step 4. Indicate on the business card where they can find your preferred methods of contact.
- Step 5. Ask them for their business card, and then some good things can happen.

By following this process, the business card itself becomes a physical representation, or process totem, of the steps taken in establishing a potential professional connection.

Fourth, and quite significantly, business cards can be crucial for students in solidifying and clarifying their professional identity. The limited space on a business card necessitates that students carefully consider the information they include, forcing them to distill their professional identity into a concise and impactful representation. This process of condensing their professional identity onto a business card can help students gain clarity and focus on their goals, values, and expertise (Bentley et al., 2019). As they craft a business card students may reflect on who they are as professionals and what they want to communicate to others in their field, contributing to a cohesive professional identity which may make them even more inclined to look for opportunities to showcase their attributes and further develop as professionals.

Course Context

The Music Entrepreneurship course that is the context for this assignment is part of a curriculum for graduate-only Music Education program. The degree programs at the institution at which this course is found have categories that must be satisfied for the completion of each degree and all the courses offered in the program satisfy at least one categorical designation. So, there are not electives in the traditional sense in this institution and the course described in this

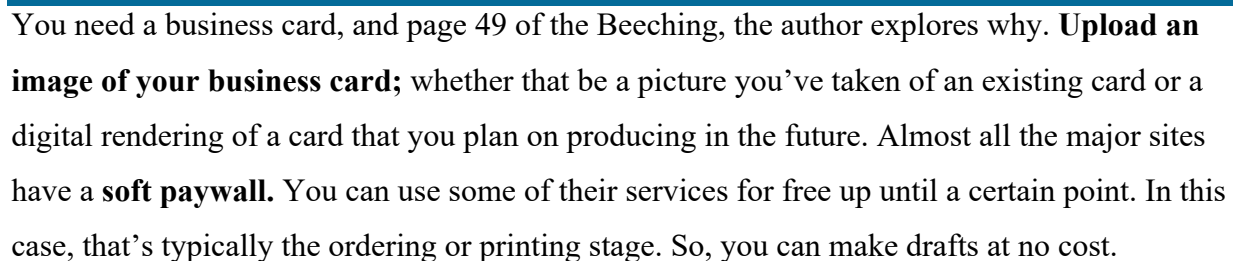
article is held in the same regard as all other courses in the program's catalog. In the author's experience, this is a departure from typical music-school oriented values around these types of courses. The school has roughly 5,000 students, roughly 180 of which are Music Education students. This course typically runs online each spring semester but was also taught in person during one recent summer term. The artifact examples given in this article are from two separate terms. The spring term had 16 registrants and the summer term had nine registrants. The course is offered for three graduate credits and has roughly 45 assignments that are split between artifact assignment forums and discussion forums assigned over 15 weeks.

The business card artifact assignment

The business card assignment is configured in an artifact assignment format within a subject-related module as articulated by Castellano and Coles (2021). In an artifact assignment format, all the assignments are submitted to discussion forums and the students are assessed on two deliverables: their completion of the prescribed directives and their response and/or feedback to a minimum of two of their peers. All assignments are submitted through the learning management system, Canvas, and are often accompanied by context from either the readings or the in-class discussions. As a part of the in-class discussion, students are permitted to ask the instructor anything related to the instructor's personal/professional experience and instructional expectations. The two readings assigned along with this module are Chapter 4 of the third edition of Angela Beeching's (2020) book entitled, *Beyond Talent* and the third chapter of *The Entrepreneurial Artist* by Aaron Dworkin (2019). The figure below depicts how the prompt appears in Canvas.

Figure 1

Artifact assignment prompt



You need a business card, and page 49 of the Beeching, the author explores why. **Upload an image of your business card;** whether that be a picture you've taken of an existing card or a digital rendering of a card that you plan on producing in the future. Almost all the major sites have a **soft paywall**. You can use some of their services for free up until a certain point. In this case, that's typically the ordering or printing stage. So, you can make drafts at no cost.

Please post your response by **Sunday**.

Please respond to 2 of your classmates' posts by **Tuesday**.

Results & Discussion: Using Business Cards to Help Define and Affirm Business Ideas

The outcomes from this assignment are pedagogically significant as they illustrate noteworthy ways in which students interacted for the benefit of their peers, themselves, and the communities they serve. The students had to meticulously select words that they felt would represent them and their ambitions. Because of the limited space on the face of the cards, the students had to choose wisely. They had to choose which words they were going to leverage to appeal to their desired audiences. They had to choose if they were going to include a picture of themselves, and if so, how they would depict themselves. If some other image was going to be used, they had to make decisions about how the image they selected was going to be leveraged to portray them. They had to choose which modes of communication they thought would work best to bring their potential clients, customers, students, or peers to them. Finally, once the students have made all of these decisions about how they would prefer for their professional identities to be portrayed, they engaged with each other in a discussion of what they had submitted.

The following are images of submitted student assignments. In some cases, the student chose to incorporate some of the parts of their computer screen that while they don't directly relate to the content of the card, they do in some small way indicate that the ideas portrayed in the card are still a work in progress. Permission to share each one of the following figures was gained from each student individually in accordance with the institutional review board of the institution to which this course belongs.

Figure 2

Megan Erickson's submission

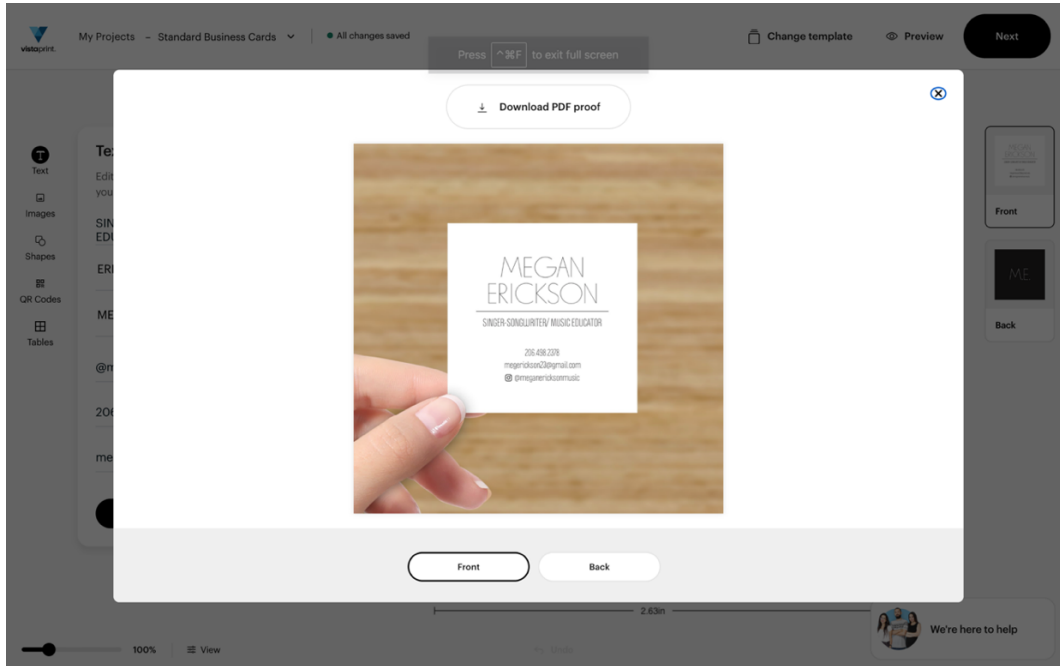
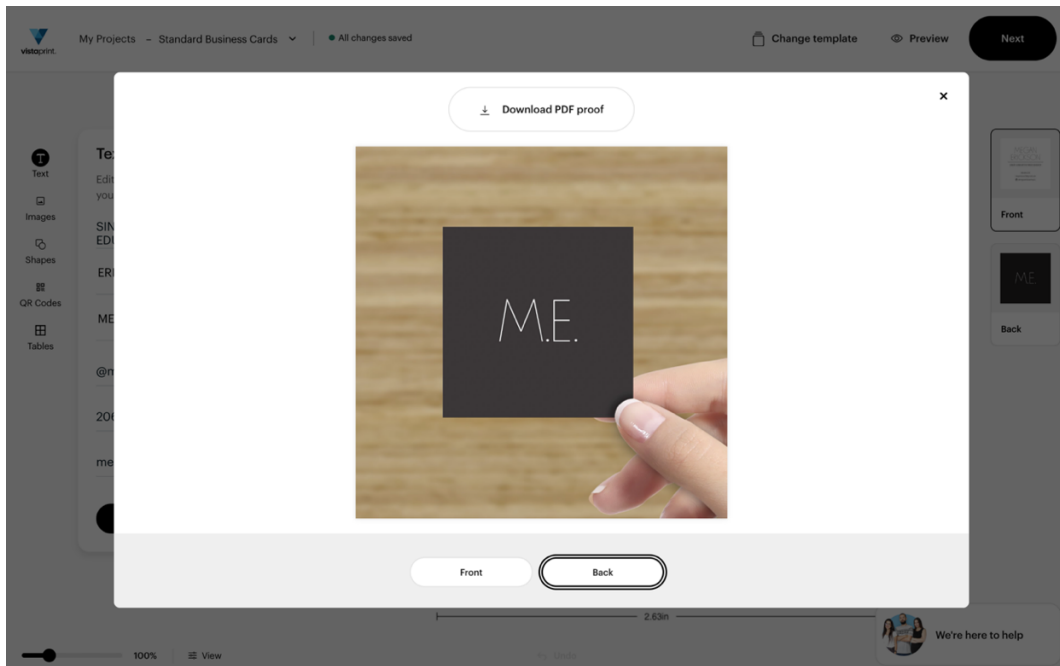


Figure 3

Flipside of Megan Erickson's business card



This student chose a card shape that would distinguish it from other cards. The flipside of the card features the student's initials, the letter M and the letter E, which spells the word “me,” equally as eye-catching as the unique shape of the card. The front side of the card features the student’s name, and two multi-word titles that could be considered Megan’s *multi-hyphenate* (singer-songwriter, and music educator) followed by modes of contact. A multi-hyphenate is a set of words or word combinations that are used to identify one’s professional or vocational orientations (Gregory, 2020). It is also significant that this student submitted a screenshot of the working area in her web browser. In a way, this visual aspect of the submission appears to indicate that the student feels that this is a work in progress.

In the next example, featured in Figure 4, the student configured the design of their card around a full-body image, with only the lower portion of their legs missing from the photo. In contrast with the previous example, this student did not submit this assignment with the peripheral portions of their computer screen showing. Instead, they submitted a file in what would seem to be a final format, as if it were to be sent to printing service provider. In this artifact, the student leveraged their *multi-hyphenate* by choosing to include four terms: composer, singer, conductor, and educator. This combination of words illustrates a delineation of their professional self-awareness, a willingness to work across professional boundaries. It also indicates that this student conceptualizes their career as a portfolio that includes teaching and performing in several respects across different levels of engagement and leadership. Finally, Figure 4 has four modes of communication depicted on the card: a phone number, an email, a website URL, and a QR code. Each of these methods of communication has the potential to satisfy different needs for different populations, which is why the inclusion of all of them together is an effective strategy.

Figure 4

Scott Joiner's business card



Figures 5 and 6 depict a before and after sequence, showing the development of Crystal French's card design. Just as in the previous example, this student included four modes of contact; a phone number, an email, a website URL, and a QR code. The student in this example made aesthetic choices to orient themselves toward a more modern marketing perspective in comparison to where they started. Crystal did so by using soft pastel colors without a gradient which contrast well with the dark font. Finally, I would like to draw attention to the more efficient use of words. Excluding contact information, symbols, and logos not associated with Crystal herself, the first iteration bears 31 words. The second iteration bears 17 words. This significant reduction in text focuses the messaging, arguably making her product clearer for her prospective viewers.

Figure 5

Crystal French's business card before the module



Figure 6

Crystal French's business card after the module

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the business card assignment provided a fascinating insight into the diverse ways in which students interpreted and executed the task, showcasing their unique strengths and creative approaches. Through the three exemplary examples presented in this paper, we have witnessed how individual aesthetic and semantic choices led to interesting final outcomes. In analyzing these three approaches, it is evident that there is no singular "correct" way to interpret and execute a creative assignment like a business card design. Each student played to their strengths, passions, professional orientations, creative leanings, and aesthetic preferences, resulting in distinct representations of their abilities.

As educators and evaluators, it is essential to recognize and celebrate these diverse interpretations, for they reflect the richness and complexity of the creative process. By providing students with the freedom to express themselves in their work, we empower them to tap into their individual strengths and foster a sense of ownership over their artistic endeavors. The business card artifact assignment not only served as a platform for students to showcase their design skills but also revealed their unique perspectives. As they embark on their professional journeys, these valuable lessons in interpretation and creativity will undoubtedly shape their future success, empowering them to make meaningful contributions to the world of design as it applies to how their professional intersections are conveyed and thus enacted.

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