impact studios

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The need for Workforce Development

The school bell rings. It is time for dismissal. Amid the sounds of shuffling papers, Brooklyn can feel a sense of excitement stirring. Unlike the majority of her fellow students, this feeling of elation is not the result of the completion of another mundane school day. On the contrary, she is excited because she now has another opportunity to engage in the educational process. Brooklyn is on her way to Creative Impact Studios.

A 17-year-old Junior at Edison/Fareira High School, Brooklyn Jackson-Vasquez is your average teenager from the North Central section of Philadelphia. She enjoys "coolin'" time with her friends, loves reality television shows like *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, and has music tastes ranging from the smooth synths of Shawn Mendes' *There's Nothing Holdin' Me Back* to the dynamic drumline of Cardi B's *Bodak Yellow*.

At home Brooklyn takes on a fair amount of responsibility. She is the oldest of four and both of her parents work full time. After she departs Edison/Fareira, Brooklyn takes an 11-minute walk to Roberto Clemente Middle School to pick up her siblings. A quick trip to their home on the intersection of B and Ontario Street, and her two brothers and sister are now at the dining room table with healthy snacks fully engaged with this evening's homework.

Brooklyn's mother Janet will be home in about an hour and a half. Always looking for a way to help her family, she removes a package of frozen chicken thighs from the freezer and places them in a bowl of cool water. With the protein portion of tonight's dinner thawing, she makes another pass through the dining room to check on her siblings. Outside of some clarification on long division, they don't seem to require too much assistance. Brooklyn grabs her backpack and heads upstairs to review her own work.

Having taken the initiative to use her study hall period to complete the majority of her homework, Brooklyn quickly glances over her papers to ensure that everything is up-to-snuff. Currently, Brooklyn has a 3.2 GPA. She is determined to bring it up to a 3.5 by the end of the semester. Everything looks good, so she begins to map out a digital design. Brooklyn is fairly new to creating art via a digital platform, but has always had a passion for drawing and a knack for computers. She is thrilled about the opportunity to combine the two worlds through her work at Creative Impact Studios. Especially considering she has been selected as one of their paid interns for the fall semester. Brooklyn can now delve into a field of study that not only expands her horizons to career paths that would not be explored in the traditional classroom setting, but can also help ease the financial burden on her family.

Brooklyn's situation is not uncommon. Philadelphia, with a population of 1.5 million, is the fifth largest city in the United States (America's 5 biggest cities, 2011). Unfortunately, our rate of poverty is high as well, with 26% of our population living at or below the poverty line (QuickFacts - Philadelphia city, Pennsylvania, n.d.). This makes Philadelphia the poorest big city in the United States (Census Reports Philadelphia Remains Poorest Big City in US, 2017). With such daunting statistics facing the people of the City of Brotherly Love, it is imperative that focus is placed on the providing innovative opportunities for career development and growth in the nation's first capitol.

Creative Impact Studios is doing just that. Combining arts and media training, with industry-leading professionals as instructors, CIS hopes to expose youth ages 9 – 19 to the possibility of new career paths. Built into their program is a model that speaks directly to the need for economic diversification in Philadelphia – their internship. This semester long program allows youth to explore non-traditional career paths while being paid for interacting with local arts-based organizations. This basis in both traditional media—such as pottery and drawing—

combined with new media—like sound mapping and digital photography— places CIS in a unique position. They are poised to become a leader in their field. Their use of technology and basis in North Central Philadelphia is in line with the vision of The Institute for the Future's for the growth of workforce development expanding, education "from institutions into online and community spaces" (The Future of Youth Employment , 2014).

Through our four site visits, interviews with one funder, five staff members, and four students, we have identified key areas that will aid Creative Impact Studios in its mission. By setting themselves apart from other programs in their space, utilizing current technological trends, and capitalizing on existing relationships, we believe that Creative Impact Studios can expand upon its current brand strategy and become the model upon which innovative workforce development in Philadelphia is based.

The need for diversification

While Creative Impact Studio's offerings give it a unique space is the landscape of workforce development, they are not the only option in the City of Brotherly Love. A large city, Philadelphia is filled with both government and university-based options in this field. Entities like WorkReady, Philadelphia Works, and several options housed on Temple University (just to name a few) occupy its competitive landscape. With such a crowded environment, CIS would do well to ensure that it stands out among the many options for teenage youth in the city. One way to do this is through a change in nomenclature.

When our group initially presented on Creative Impact Studios, one of the first sentiments echoed throughout the class was that its name did not lend to its unique offering. A studio produces artwork and artwork, by its definition, is creative. The current name of the brand was redundant. Essentially, "creative and studio mean the same thing" (Bedenbaugh, 2017).

Building upon Ms. Bedenbaugh's critique, we did an internet search for other entities by the same name. There we found at least three more organizations by the same name with products that included sound recording, women's professional coaching, and marketing services. We know that brands need to be both brief and unique. Think about the speed in which you drive past a business, click through a webpage, or walk down a street. Customers need to be able to read your company sign in a matter of seconds (not minutes) (Bickle, 2011). Avoid using a name that is used by another company. A name that even similar to another company can cause legal difficulties. At the very least, consumers may become confused and patronize your competition (Bickle, 2011).

With the need for diversification solidified, we went back to Bedenbaugh's initial comment. The name of the current brand contained two words that meant the same thing. The most efficient way to address this concern was to eliminate that redundancy. We would simply drop the word "creative." Creative Impact Studios is now Impact Studios (IS).

Growth through Movement

With the need for diversification now addressed, we took a deep dive into trend research. We began with the user base that Impact Studios serves – Generation Z (Gen Z). This population, born between 1998 and 2016, is the first generation to be true digital natives. "Millennials have long been described as digital natives, but they actually grew up in a world that was still full of landlines and dial-up internet. They're used to progress taking time, and are just as confused by some of the newest apps as baby boomers are. Gen Z, on the other hand, has been living in a world of smartphones and free Wi-Fi for as long as they can remember. Ninety-two percent of them have some sort of digital footprint" (Patel, 2017).

Knowing this, we geared our research towards the strength that Gen Z and Impact Studios have in common – technology. We know that technology increases at an astronomical pace. We believe embracing this momentum is key to the growth and brand strategy of Impact Studios. By allowing itself to be nimble, while maintaining roots in technology, we believe that Impact Studios will not only be able to stay ahead of the curve, but be able to guide the direction of this change. Through a trend theme we have named "Mobile Sprouting," Impact Studios will find a solid grounding in the use of tech to propel itself and its user base forward for years to come. As such, we have developed three recommendations—*B.A.G. Check, Echo Roaming,* and *Innate Curate*— that integrate technology into the work and mission of Impact Studios.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

B.A.G. Check

Instagram and YouTube are two of Generation Z's favorite digital outlets. Growing up in a world that has always had internet, they are heavily influenced by social media. With their mobile phones readily available, apps like Instagram and Snapchat are easily accessible and immensely influential. This is especially true with regards to Instagram which is now considered the best social media platform for customer engagement (DeMers, 2017).

Instagram's popularity has been growing steadily since its debut 2010. The online platform has more than 500 million active users. It is currently the second most popular social media network in the world, behind only Facebook…unless we are speaking in respects to advertising revenue. The number of advertisers on Instagram has doubled over the past six months to more than one million. This is in part due to the fact that Instagram is now considered the best social media platform for customer engagement (DeMers, 2017). Why is Instagram so good at engaging with audiences? The answer is mobile functionality. Instagram is easy to use

when you're on the go. It's a mobile-exclusive platform that allows users to immediately edit images they have taken. This "in-the-moment experience" makes the platform naturally more attractive. Combine this attraction with its ease of use and we find why Instagram, with only a handful of posting options and the lovable "infinite scroll", will soon be the king in social media content (DeMers, 2017).

Versatility of use, unlike social media outlets such as LinkedIn that function only as a professional networking service, and instant exposure make Instagram a prime candidate for utilization for Impact Studios. It offers publicly available posts like Twitter, but at the same time has greater control over spam and reasonably tight personal networks. This maximizes Instagram's potential user base, and naturally encourages people to interact more (DeMers, 2017). Instagram is also the second most widely used social media platform by Generation Z with 51% of their population represented on the platform.

Utilizing Instagram's hashtags functionality, we can create a social media experience with a focus on professional evaluation. Mobile sprouting literally shows up on your mobile phone with our B.*A.G. Check* recommendation. B.A.G check is a program that promotes professional etiquette, social media safeguards, and self-evaluation through the use of the Instagram platform.

Interns will post and use Instagram, as well as its Instagram Live functionality, to record their progress and solicit feedback from their Impact Studios' peer group and instructors. Using the primary hashtag #isbagcheck, which is currently not used at all as a hashtag on the platform, interns will initiate review of their work. Accompanying this primary hashtag will be the secondary hashtags #beginner, #apprentice, and #grandmaster. #Beginner will be used as an indicator of novice level work. #Apprentice will be used as an indicator of intermediate level work. #Grandmaster will be used as an indicator of expert level work. These secondary

hashtags will be utilized as a form of self-evaluation to let their fellow interns and instructors know that stage at which they believe their work to be. Peers and instructors can then respond in the affirmative to let the intern know that their work is on track with the same secondary level hashtag or respond using one of the other two hashtags to indicate progress or areas that need to be revisited. Peers and instructors can also comment on soft skills such as professionalism, word usage, and grammar. Primarily a project management tool, this program also enforces self-awareness, social media etiquette, and SEO (search engine optimization) functionality. *B.A.G. Check* allows Impact Studios to convert a platform for entertainment platform into one with educational value.

Echo Roaming

Picture a retail shop, restaurants, or a health clinic in your mind. Though seemingly unconnected, these three places share one thing in common – the industry which they belong has experienced a dramatic shift. We live in an age where "digitally-supercharged business models deliver everything, from baby food to life advice on-demand, and battle to maximize efficiency... A chorus of purpose-driven brands, big and small, promise (and increasingly deliver) a path to self-actualization." We live in an age of waning attention spans, of customers who often feel that 'paying' for anything – with time and attention – is an almost intolerable cost (Luthy, 2017). As competition and buyer empowerment compounds, customer experience is proving to be the only truly durable competitive advantage (Cundari, 2015). Thus, places such as retail shops, many food services, and health clinics are foregoing traditional brick and mortar establishments and literally taking their show on the road with mobile experiences – banking on this new standard of building more intimate relationships with their customers. "True loyalty exists when customers feel safe, appreciated and smart," says Julie Wittes Schlack and Ed Chao, co-authors of Head vs. Heart (Wahbe, 2016). "Emotions drive behavior; loyalty is

generated when a brand makes a customer feel a certain way. "Intimacy" doesn't scale in large department store settings, and you can't see someone smile online" (Wahbe, 2016). By converting trucks into mobile experiences we meet customers, both figuratively and literally, where they are. We create unique, intimate, and memorable tangible experiences that align with their brand's values.

Considering this new trend in exposure and customer experience, we find opportunity for Impact Studios in terms of literal mobility. It is our recommendation that Impact Studios build mobile experiences via trucks to maximize impact to both internal and external user groups – their interns and the communities in which they serve. One of Impact Studios core tenants is to expose youths to new experiences and help them explore and refine their passions (O'Bryan, 2017). By utilizing trucks that functions as either a mobile makerspace or pop-up shop, they can engage their interns as both creators and instructors while interacting with the community. These spaces provide an opportunity for youths not involved with IS to be taught by those who are when the trucks are utilized as a mobile maker space. Neighborhood youth can enter the makers space and be instructed in one of the many media trainings that the interns have received at Impact Studios. There is precedent for this type of learning based in Atlanta with their STE(A)M Truck. "A growing fleet of mobile makerspaces wrapped around a dense, multi-faceted curriculum that is designed to pull kids, and their teachers, out of their comfort zones and have them see their awesome potential" (What is STE(A)M Truck?, 2017). We will echo these sentiments utilizing our trucks in a similar fashion.

Another example of this can be found in the city of Boston where Mike Boston has developed an experience known as Mobile Stü. Mobile Stü is a recording studio that operates out of the back of Boston's retrofitted pick-up truck. Inspired by his first-hand experience of escaping the ills of urban plight through the artistry of rap, Boston helps ease the tension between police and children in neighborhoods such as Roxbury (Boston, 2017). By utilizing a second truck as a means to create pop-up shops, Impact Studios can create art installations or

performances live. This allows for the mission of Impact Studios to reach various parts of Philadelphia while bolstering the confidence of the interns and expanding up their brand and that of IS. This is in direct response to a suggestion of Ms. L, a vocal coach and instructor at Impact Studios. "What I'd like to see next is an internship run open mic and showcase" (L, 2017).

Innate Curate

Our final recommendation is based on Impact Studios' existing relationships and the potential of predictive technology. In its current state, Impact Studios uses computer software to train its intern population. Utilizing programs like Fruity Loops Studio and the Adobe Creative Suite, the interns gain access to industry-standard software while under the tutelage of subject matter experts working in those respective fields. Unfortunately, both software and subject matter experts have limitations. Namely, what they can teach and how they can teach it with respects to the current level of interns.

Building on the idea of our *B.A.G Check* recommendation we pondered, what if Impact Studios could utilize their software to automatically evaluate their interns? What if there were not only mile markers built into the software based on its initial configuration, but that the software could then adapt to the level of the intern and cater to their needs based on their current skillset? We believe this can be accomplished by integrating artificial intelligence into the coursework prescribed by the instructors at Impact Studios.

To paraphrase Paris Mollineau, an intern at Impact Studios, "I'm bored. I'm asleep. Class should be based on the level [of the intern]" (Mollineau, 2017). With this in mind, we wanted to create a system that did not rely on a static lesson plans or could be hindered by varying level on intern experience. Knowing that Impact Studios currently utilizes sophisticated technology, we wondered if there was a way to ramp up the use of tech to benefit both the student and the learning process.

At its heart, AI is a prediction technology, and that's where it will make its mark (McKendrick, 2017). We believe that allowing these predictions to aid in the natural course of the learnings we will alleviate the pains of both intern and instructor. Utilizing AI-based software, instructors can create a program for the entirety of the group of interns. This program would include set milestones, deliverables, and a final product that could then be evaluated by the software. Each intern will have a unique username and password. The software would then detect which user is logged in, catalog their progress, and automatically make adjustments to the coursework dependent upon the user's past work and current trajectory with respect to the metrics already set in place by their instructor.

AI will also help young developers become better programmers faster while helping them learn different languages if they want to change their focus (Robbio, 2017). Following this model, the artificial intelligence integrated into the coursework of the interns will help them become better photographers, sound mappers, vocalists, etc.

Though this may seem like quite the load to bear for a local organization based in North Central Philadelphia, a good number of the financial and technological strains could be managed by leveraging Impact Studios current partnership with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Currently, Impact Studios does work with MIT through its Symphony Orchestra (O'Bryan M. , 2017). Together they aim to create orchestral pieces based on various sections of Philadelphia's urban landscape. With this partnership in mind, we thought it best to expand the reach of Impact Studios' relationship with MIT. By collaborating with MIT's Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory (CSAIL), Impact Studios could be a piloting shop for new software emerging from the program. Integration of Impact Studios' and MIT's systems would inject artificial intelligence into the coursework of Impact Studios, alleviate experience-based pain points of intern and instructor populations, and provide MIT with a home to prototype emerging developments in AI stemming from their CSAIL program – creating new opportunities for learning, workforce development, and relationship fostering by exposing interns to one of the

most sophisticated universities in the United States. CSAIL seeks to understand intelligence as manifest in living systems, build artificial systems capable of intelligent reasoning, perception, and behavior, and build principled models of reasoning and thinking applicable to a wide variety of real-world problems. (CSAIL MISSION, 2017). What better way is there to aid in the manifestation of living systems than to create a new relationship based in on an existing system? By leveraging their connection with MIT, Impact Studios stays firmly grounded in its partnerships and allows predictive technology to move its interns forward. The artificial intelligence curates its own innate environment and finalizes our final venture into the theme of *Mobile Sprouting.*

In Conclusion

Impact Studios offers a unique answer to the question of workforce development in Philadelphia. With a focus on arts and media production, IS looks to differentiate itself from the current landscape through both innovative offerings and novel career paths. Utilizing current technology, the trends that accompany it, and strategic partnerships we believe that Impact Studios can lead the way as a thought leader in the City of Brotherly Love. Ensuring that interns like Brooklyn Jackson-Vasquez have a place in the future of our workforce and of Philadelphia as a whole.

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