To&From - Handmade Cards

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GrC 462: Senior Project

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March 18, 2024
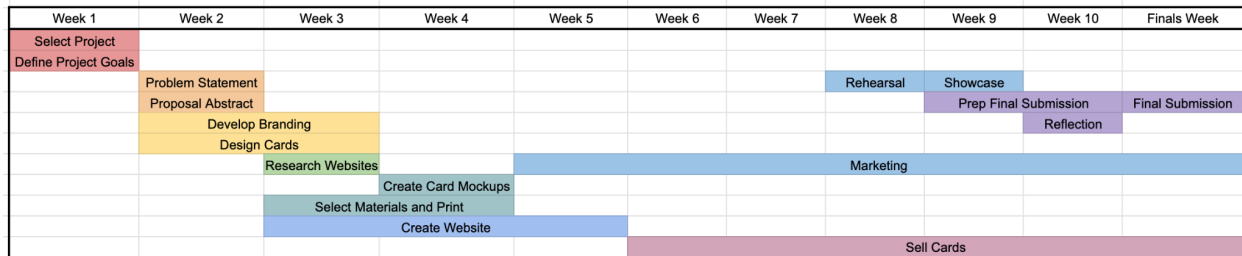
Abstract Proposal

The goal of my senior project is to create a greeting card business from scratch, utilizing the design and marketing skills acquired through my Graphic Communication courses. The initial phase involves designing 20 cards spanning various topics and messages. The card categories will include but are not limited to birthday, get well soon, thank you, graduation, congratulations, condolence, special events or holidays, and customizable options. The project as a whole encompasses designing, branding, physical production, establishing a platform for sales, and lastly executing the sales process. Despite the ambitious nature of this project, it presents a unique opportunity to apply and showcase my GrC skills, with potential support from resources like University Graphic Systems. Furthermore, the project has the potential to extend beyond the senior project course, allowing for ongoing growth.

Beyond showcasing design capabilities, my senior project holds personal significance as it challenges me to see a product through from inception to completion. The ultimate objective is to market and sell the cards both online and in local coffee shops. To facilitate online sales, careful consideration is given to selecting a reputable platform. Options range from a simple Google form linked via Instagram to established platforms like Shopify, Oracle Netsuite, Big Commerce, Network Solutions, and Squarespace (Best eComm Platforms, 2024).

This project begins with creating a distinctive company name and branding, recognizing that a brand's identity extends beyond visual elements to encompass personality and overall identity (Jones, 2021). This identity will be seamlessly integrated into the card designs and website. I will do so by creating a logo that will be cohesive throughout each greeting card. Each card will be meticulously designed, produced, and mocked up. The final steps involve the creation of the website and the implementation of a marketing and sales strategy. To capture the

entirety of this plan, a detailed Gantt Chart has been outlined, guiding the progression of tasks and ensuring a comprehensive approach to launching *To&From*.

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10	Finals Week
	Select Project										
	Define Project Goals										
		Problem Statement						Rehearsal	Showcase		
		Proposal Abstract							Prep Final Submission		Final Submission
		Develop Branding								Reflection	
		Design Cards									
			Research Websites								
				Create Card Mockups		Marketing					
			Select Materials and Print								
			Create Website								
					Sell Cards						

Literature Review

For my senior project, I created a card business from the ground up. There have been many moving parts that have gone into the original creation, design, and overall development of this project. I had to ask myself what the goal of this project was, how am I going to gain a customer following, and how will this business be recognizable and ultimately stand alone. With this in mind, I dove into the significance of branding concerning a company's identity, exploring the diverse processes and constraints important when launching a business. I will explore how I created *To&From* with Graphic Communication design and marketing skills that consider the identity theory and examine how current trends play a role in creating a successful card business.

Before we focus on how identity theory influences some decisions of my senior project, let's define identity theory. Identity theory, as articulated by scholars such as Stryker (1968, 1980, 1987), Stryker and Serpe (1982), Burke (1980), McCall, and Simmons (1978), explains social behavior by examining the reciprocal relationship between individuals and society. This framework aligns with communication, emphasizing how societal influences shape individuals' self-concepts and behaviors. Its development aimed to translate how individuals portray themselves. (Biswas, 2019). This theory is telling us a lot about how people function. Our self-perception plays a huge role in our lives. An individual identity impacts how one interacts

with people, what decisions one makes, and how one portrays oneself to others. Another definition of social identity theory was created by Henri Tajfel and John Turner. They concluded that personal identity encompasses the distinct attributes and qualities defining an individual's essence. Conversely, social identity pertains to the affiliations or groups with which one identifies, including family, friends, profession, religion, nationality, or hobbies. These affiliations offer a sense of belonging, pride, and self-worth, serving as benchmarks for comparison with others. (Linkedin, 2024). These definitions are based on the same ideas of an individual's behavior and how it relates to their surroundings, whether it be social or personal. However, how does this theory play a role in product development? If we take the basis of this theory and apply it to branding, there is a direct relationship between the two. Branding of a product is an extension of social and personal identity as people are inclined to purchase or support a business they identify with. Thus, the branding of a product or business can be categorized into the social identity category. Further, when developing the branding of a business, it is important to consider the identities of your target audience. A person's behavior and demeanor may change in the presence of a strong perceived resemblance or connection between the individual and the product. (Park, Suzuki, 2021). Let's use *To&From* as an example. I had to establish my personal identity as a designer. Then, I needed to consider my personal identity to create the social identity of *To&From* while also considering my environment and target audience. This part of the process created the perfect opportunity for me to develop marketing guidelines for my business so the branding and ultimate identity were clear and cohesive to the consumer. I also wanted the identity of *To&From* to reflect me as a designer. I decided on the name because I wanted it to be simple and sophisticated. Thus, I chose an elegant typeface and carried a deep red throughout the branding of my business. Further, as a female designer, I wanted my business to have a feminine aspect to it. The perfect example of how the Graphic Communication department taught us this process is in GrC 318. A project within this class was creating a personal identity: business card, logo, letterhead, LinkedIn banner, and more.

Designing my personal identity set me up to use my already-developed self-awareness to create something that feels like an extension of my own branding.

Once I established the brand identity of *To&From,* it was time to transition my attention to how the current trends of my target audience relate to my business's identity, and further, how can I use such trends to my advantage. When establishing the identity of *To&From,* I knew my target audience would be students in San Luis Obispo in the early twenties age range. I also recognized that with a younger and modern target audience, I needed to lean into current design trends. Further, with such a personal product, I wanted the designs to feel almost customized and one-of-a-kind to the consumer. In an article by Adobe, they list the top ten graphic design trends in 2023 with number one being hand-drawn illustrations. Incorporating illustration within the design is a key element to draw consumers in as it creates an authentic element to the product. (Adobe Express, 2022). The trend of hand-drawn illustrations is carried throughout the designs of my cards. I created illustrations in Illustrator that fall into this category. Another trend that Adobe mentions is minimalism. (Adobe Express, 2022). Over the past few years, there has been an increased trend in minimal designs. My card designs also take this into account. I wanted my designs to be catered to an audience that appreciates this style of design. Further, according to Forbes, maintaining consistency or steadiness is essential for effective branding. (Arruda, 2016). Consistency is crucial for successful branding as it reinforces brand recognition. By maintaining a steady brand identity through the logo and overall design aesthetic, I can ensure that the customer experience will be consistent as well, therefore building brand loyalty. When designing my logo, brand identity, and individual card designs I wanted them to all look like they belong together. Consistency remained a steady factor that influenced the style and overall design aesthetic of my cards.

Once all my cards were designed and I was ready for physical production, I had to transfer my research and apply it to the printing process. Through various printing classes throughout my GrC career, I meticulously picked the stock and finish that I found would be best

suited to my brand identity and the cards' overall function. Selecting the right paper is equally important as crafting the design for your print marketing materials. Aligning your paper choice with your design enhances the overall impact your print marketing piece will have on its recipient. (Gonzalez, 2023). I wanted to make sure that my brand identity was being considered throughout every decision made for the development of *To&From.* By doing so, I aimed to create a business that conveys a professional, consistent, yet aesthetically pleasing identity. Through working hand-in-hand with UGS, I was able to see the printing process from beginning to end. However, there have been some limitations when it comes to the printing process. I have found that the turn-around was not as quick as expected. While this does not negatively impact the business, I had to make adjustments to the timeline of the selling process.

Another element that I strongly considered when designing my cards and creating the brand identity is color theory. Color conveys a huge sense of identity and emotional response from the audience. The colors I used throughout my designs needed to be attractive and create a connection to the consumer. Color is one of the most important design elements, combining all influences. It captivates the eye and mind, evoking emotion. The key use of color can either elevate or undermine the impact of a work of art or design. (Bleicher, 2023). With color and identity theory in mind, I used a deep red throughout all my branding. I also played around with many shades and opacities of colors which got me to the final designs of my cards that I find to be inviting. If we circle back to personal and social identity, I think color has a huge role because color theory reinforces an individual's social identities and group affiliations. Colors used in branding can evoke emotional responses. I considered this when designing cards, while also using colors that were pleasing to the eye.

Everyone has their outlook and opinion towards design. This brings us to another graphic communication theory that relates to the identity theory: perception theory. These theories go together because you cannot have an identity without perception, whether it be introspective perception or societal perception. Perception is synonymous with observation,

according to Merriam-Webster. The perception theory is known as the idea that individuals develop awareness of specific attitudes through observing their actions. (The Decision Lab, 2024). Perception and identity overlap within a business as the brand's identity, image, and messaging are observed or conceived by customers in a way that aligns with their identities. Brands, such as *To&From* shape their identity to resonate with specific customer perceptions, which is exactly what I have done. What has been overwhelmingly evident is that banding plays a huge role in determining the success of your business. It is so important to not be overconfident in yourself but to remain slightly humble in your work. Ultimately, customer satisfaction is the telling element of success. (Kappel, 2017). To date, I have sold 58 cards since opening for business 20 days ago. For a small, student-run senior project, I would consider this successful. My brand identity has become recognizable to my peers and target audience.

In essence, the identity theory played a critical role in every decision I made when designing and developing *To&From.* From its conception to being sold, the identity of *To&From* has been something that I wanted to focus on. Further, through researching color theory and perception theory about identity I have been able to create a business I am proud of and feel that represents my identity as a designer. The identity of *To&From* is the backbone of the business and represents the overall aesthetic of the cards.

Reflection

As I reflect on my project, I am proud of what I have created. Through extensive identity research, planning, designing, and outreach I have developed a card business that I feel represents my design skills. My final product includes 20 card designs showcased on my Instagram (@toandfromcards_), along with an order form. As I began selling the product, I prioritized organization to satisfy my customer's needs. I created a detailed spreadsheet with specified information for each order, helping me categorize sales. On another note, I believe the branding of *To&From* is successful as it is recognizable and unique. One thing I wish to add to

my branding is business cards. Additional marketing material would only benefit how recognizable the business is. Further, I remained consistent with my branding and plan which is outlined in my literature review. To date, I have sold over 70 cards in the past month. There were some hiccups throughout the production process, where I had to adjust the timeline. Through working with UGS and my customers I have been able to readjust the timeline of production to satisfy customer needs while also being supported by UGS. It has been exciting to see peers enjoy a product I have created from scratch. When I started this project, my goal was to create a greeting card business from the ground up, utilizing the design and marketing skills acquired through my Graphic Communication courses. I feel that I have done just that and more. I wanted to create an opportunity for myself to have a creative outlet where I could continue developing my Adobe skills. Designing these cards has been fulfilling since it created a project where I had complete creative control and freedom to illustrate things I enjoy. As I look forward, I am eager to continue this project. I plan to continue designing cards in the spring and draw more eyes to social media. My tentative idea is to do a second round of card designs targeted at college graduation and springtime activities and holidays. Through doing so, I hope to expand my target audience and increase my sales. Moreover, this project is something I am proud to have established from the ground up, and look forward to seeing it grow and develop. To take a closer look at my project, please access the order form here:

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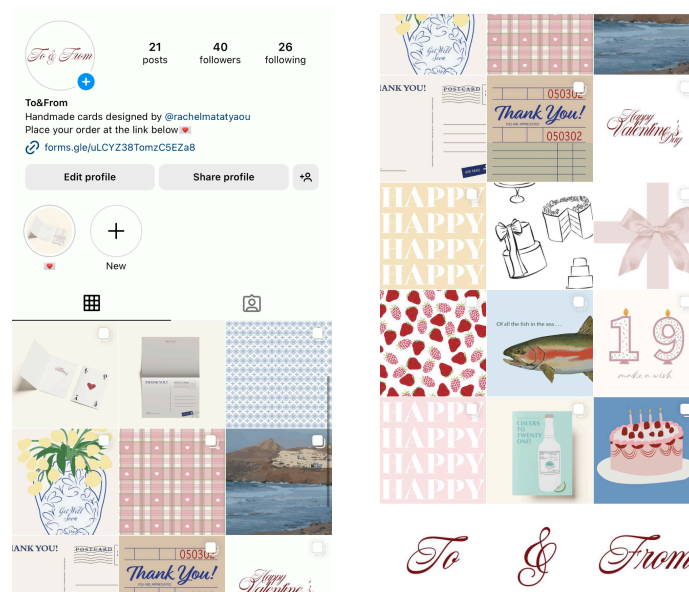
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