

Learning by design

Interns expand their vision of the future with help from Adobe® software



Although Erin LeBlanc's passion for art led her to art school twice, neither attempt provided the right environment for her creative interests. Looking at her striking artwork, created using Adobe Illustrator® CS, InDesign® CS, and Photoshop® CS software, it's clear that LeBlanc stayed on the right track. Today she is not only a talented artist, but also has learned invaluable technology skills—including knowledge of Adobe software that is highly sought after in the job market.



Top, middle, and bottom left: Interns Brian Dayhoff, Erin LeBlanc, and Kristen Napier say they've learned as much about themselves as they have about design and computers since coming to Media WORKS Enterprise. Their voyage of self-discovery includes receiving a solid grounding in Adobe Creative Suite software.

Far right: To create this self-portrait, Erin LeBlanc scanned her photo and transformed it to vector artwork using Adobe Illustrator CS.

LeBlanc is one of a group of 17- to 24-year-olds who are part of Media WORKS Enterprise, a youth development program designed and operated by Training Development Corporation (TDC) and based in Bangor, Maine. It teaches basic and advanced computer and graphic design skills to young adults, most of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The program not only provides technological education and job skills, Media WORKS Enterprise provides employment for those students who excel in the program, operating as a design studio for clients with limited purchasing power as well as an educational and job training program.

“Until Media WORKS Enterprise, I never really had experience using software like Photoshop CS,” says LeBlanc. “Then I tried it and discovered that Adobe software lets me do amazingly creative things. I definitely wouldn’t be back in art school full time if it weren’t for Media WORKS. I’m doing real, paid work such as illustration and web design for clients, using the industry’s best design and digital media software.”

Within their first few weeks at Media WORKS Enterprise, LeBlanc and the other interns in the program learned how to use Adobe Creative Suite software—Illustrator CS, InDesign CS, and Photoshop CS. She’s also building motion graphics and animation software skills using Adobe After Effects® software, and web design expertise using Adobe’s Macromedia® Dreamweaver® and Flash® software. LeBlanc is now a full-time art student at the University of Maine as well as working as a studio assistant at Media WORKS. She’s interested in pursuing a career in graphic design and new media.

TDC founded Media WORKS Enterprise in 2000 after nine years of research and pilot programs in youth development integrating technological fluency, employability, and new media design. Douglas Barkey, formerly director of Altos de Chavón School of Design and computer graphics professor at College of the Atlantic, now oversees the program. He is setting up a second Media WORKS Enterprise site in Richmond, Virginia, and TDC plans to expand the program to other communities.

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Douglas Barkey,
vice president and cofounder,
Media WORKS Enterprise

Media WORKS Enterprise interns created a toolkit for workers who have been laid off. The kit combines print, video, and web communication elements to bring vital information to people who are affected. The integration among Adobe Photoshop CS, Illustrator CS, and InDesign CS helped the project come together smoothly.



“One of the greatest advantages of Media WORKS Enterprise is our use of professional tools, including Adobe software,” says Barkey. “An independent program evaluation conducted in 2003 documented the remarkable changes that our interns undergo: They begin to conceive of themselves as emerging professionals. This change in identity empowers them to consider themselves capable of succeeding in college and expands their vision of what their future can be.”

Four tiers of engagement

Media WORKS Enterprise differs from other job training and educational programs for disadvantaged youth in that participants are part of an authentic business, where they use professional tools and are paid for their work. Interns progress through four tiers of engagement during their tenure in Media WORKS Enterprise: immersion, collaborative, managerial, and leadership. Each tier is associated with a curriculum, a set of learned competencies, and product capabilities. Interns move through the tiers using portfolio-based assessments of their employability, technology, and design competencies. If their work, ranging from business cards designs to personal works of digital art, is good enough, the participants who are accepted into the collaborative tier become paid interns with the company. They also work with a career advisor to develop plans for moving on to college or work upon program completion.

Resident Photoshop CS expert

On a typical day, interns buzz around the studio, working on their latest projects. Media WORKS Enterprise has a professional teaching and design staff, and the interns also help each other learn. Intern Brian Dayhoff is the resident expert on Adobe Photoshop CS and has taught workshops on the software to other youths in the program.

Dayhoff previously worked in restaurants—a mostly seasonal and not very fulfilling career for him—but had always been interested in graphic arts. As is the case with most of the interns, his family and teachers told him that artistic pursuits were a waste of time. But now Dayhoff has become a skilled graphic designer and an adept user of Photoshop CS, Illustrator CS, InDesign CS, and Dreamweaver. He’s doing freelance graphic design work for a local magazine and hopes to write and illustrate graphic novels for a living.

Dayhoff says that the interns pick up Adobe Creative Suite software relatively quickly because all of its components feature similar user interfaces and commands. Once they become functional in one software package, they can quickly start using the others.

Organization

Media WORKS Enterprise
Bangor, Maine
www.mediaworksenderprise.org

Challenges

- Give disadvantaged youths a chance to excel
- Teach marketable design and software skills
- Help program participants become skilled at using software without a steep learning curve
- Create professional-quality logos, posters, websites, and other materials for clients

Solution

- Create a youth development program that builds design skills and teaches the industry’s leading digital media software: Adobe Creative Suite and Adobe’s Macromedia Dreamweaver and Flash software
- Operate as a design studio for clients with limited budgets

Benefits

Enabled interns to:

- Gain confidence and learn valuable skills
- Learn industry-leading software easily due to similar interfaces and commands
- Become skilled in professional-level software
- Gain experience working for real clients

Toolkit

- Adobe Creative Suite. Components used include:
 - Adobe Illustrator CS
 - Adobe InDesign CS
 - Adobe Photoshop CS
 - Adobe After Effects
 - Adobe’s Macromedia Dreamweaver
 - Adobe’s Macromedia Flash
- Apple Power Mac G4 and G5 computers running Mac OS X



Interns at Media WORKS Enterprise are responsible for creating design work for paying clients. They designed this giant decal wrap for an RV in Richmond, Virginia, that is being used to bring career services to the inner city. Interns took on this challenging large-scale project using Adobe Creative Suite.



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David Conroe,
enterprise manager,
Media WORKS Enterprise

Another major benefit, according to Media WORKS interns, is the integration among Adobe software tools. LeBlanc, for instance, easily combines vector artwork created in Illustrator CS and bitmap artwork created in Photoshop CS into layouts in InDesign CS. She used this approach to create promotional posters for Media WORKS Enterprise as well as for the local YMCA. She has also designed logos for clients such as the Innerwalk Institute. LeBlanc and the other interns also appreciate the ease of use of Dreamweaver and Flash for creating websites showcasing their personal and professional portfolios, as well as sites for clients.

“Adobe Creative Suite and Dreamweaver are the software programs the professionals use,” says David Conroe, enterprise manager for Media WORKS Enterprise. “The fact that interns are doing real work for real clients using the industry’s best tools is a great source of pride and a big confidence booster.”

Interns also have an opportunity to evolve personally during their time at Media WORKS Enterprise. They must learn to take constructive criticism from their peers and from instructors, for instance. Intern Kristen Napier says that learning to gracefully accept input from others has been especially beneficial for her. She dropped out of high school at age 16. By the time she was 18, she had a child and was a stay-at-home mother. Currently the mother of three, Napier, who is now in the managerial tier, credits Media WORKS Enterprise with giving her a sense of purpose in life. She also thanks Media WORKS Enterprise for taking a chance on her, despite admittedly not doing well in the structure of traditional schools.

“Even though I didn’t get the best start, I know now that I can do something artistic where my personality and skills mesh to build a successful career,” says Napier. “Part of what’s building my confidence is learning new technologies. The first time I tried Adobe software, I thought, ‘Wow, it’s amazing what I can do.’”

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Kristen Napier,
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Media WORKS Enterprise

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