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.
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
“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.
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.’”

Kristen Napier, intern, Media WORKS Enterprise