

# My Studio Experience

Juhan Sonin

2.Aug.11

# The Media Cafe in 1996

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Software engineering and product design

12 people

Urbana, IL and Hoboken, NJ studios







# Camille Goudeseune



Open source zealot

Unix snob (bought his own SGI box in 1993)

Seriously considered becoming a monk

B.S. in Math from Waterloo  
PhD in Music and CS from Univ of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Musician

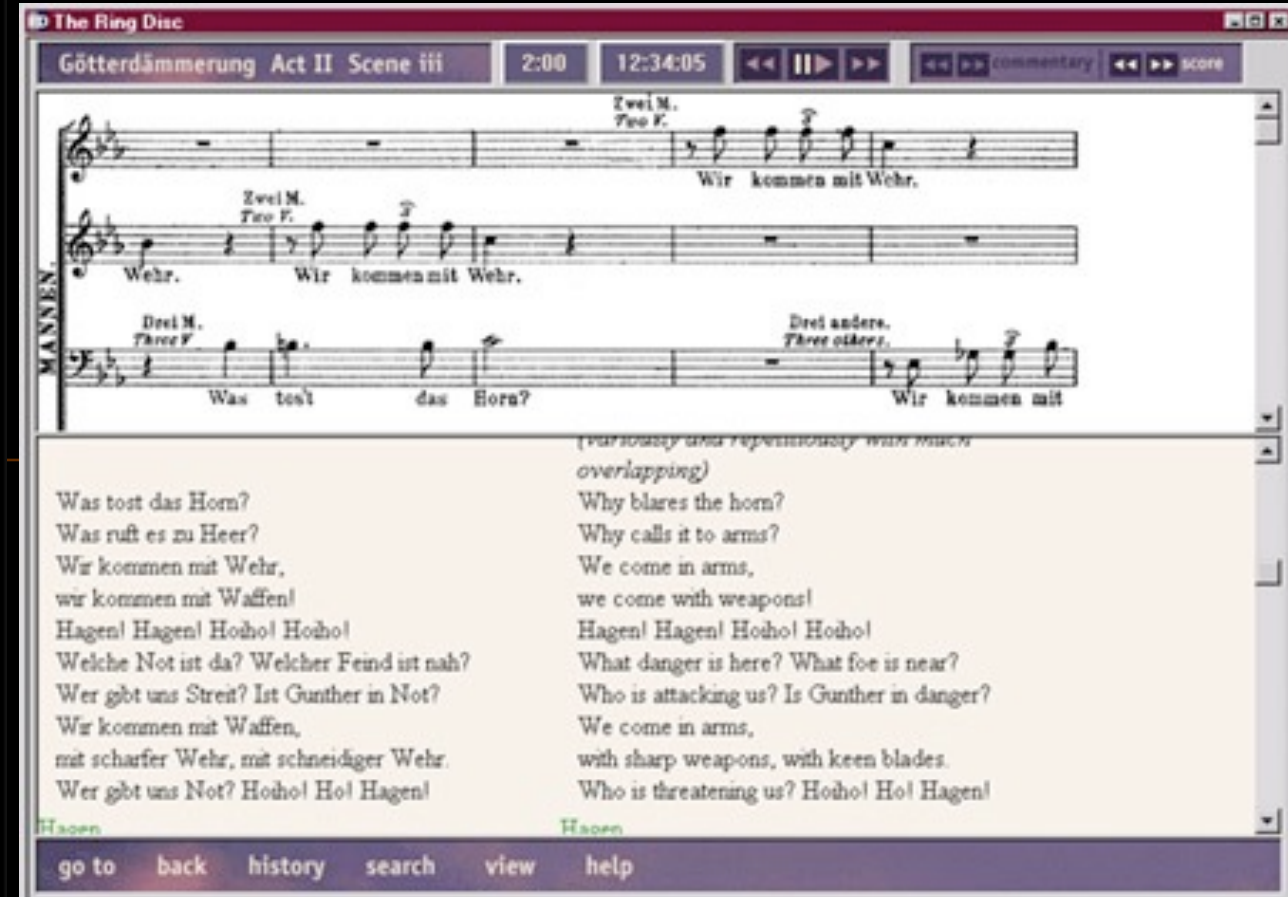
Audio engineer

Lead engineer on Win Word

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**= remarkable 1st  
business partner  
*and life-long friend***





## Characters

RingDisc  
1997

			<b>Rhinedaughters</b>	<b>Valkyries</b>
Alberich	<b>Norns</b>	Siegfried	Flosshilde	Gerhilde
Brünnhilde	First Norn	Sieglinde	Wellgunde	Grimgerde
Donner	Second Norn	Siegmond	Woglinde	Helmwige
Erda	Third Norn			Ortlinde
Fafner				Roßweiße
Fasolt				Schwertleite
Freia				Siegrune
Fricka				Waltraute
Froh				
Gunther				
Gutrune				
Hagen				
Hunding				
Loge				
Mime				
				<b>Wanderer</b>
				Woodbird
				Wotan

# Lessons sorta learned

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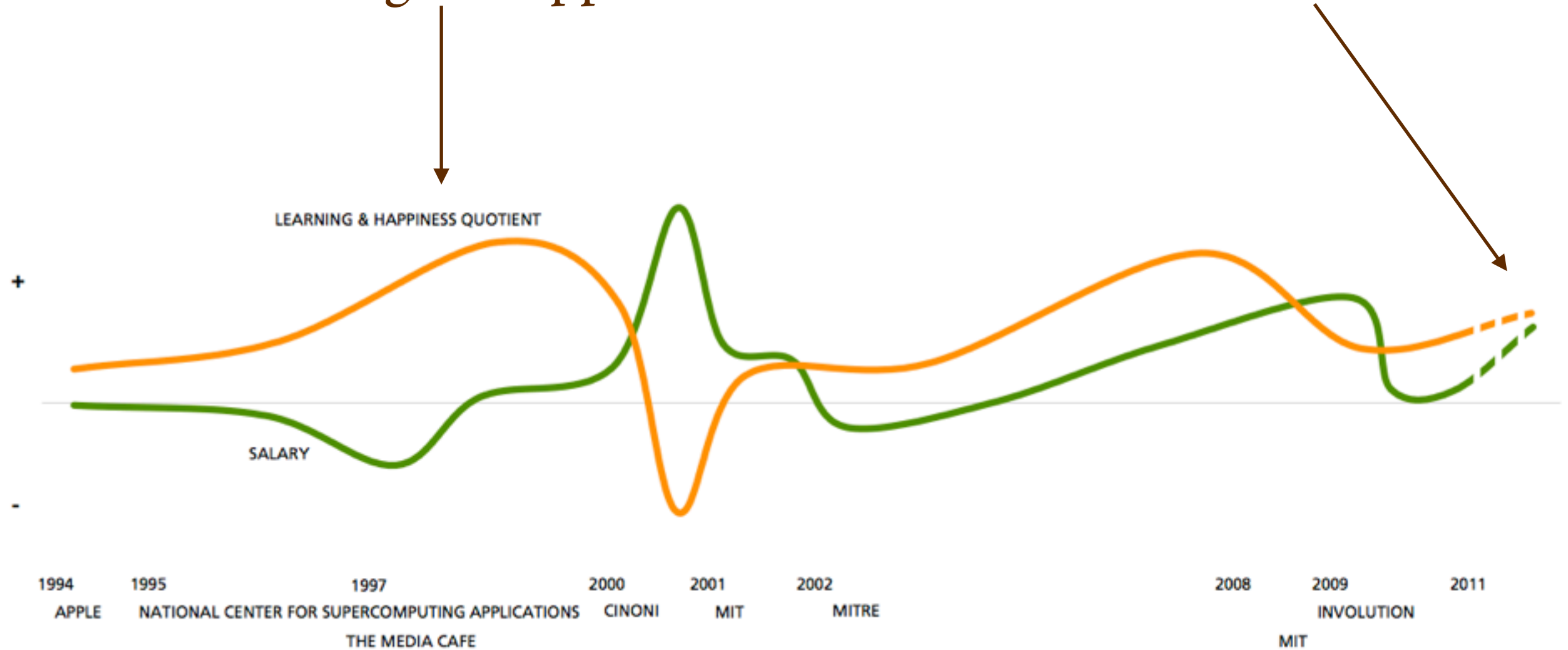
Making a COTS product

Microserf life: startup highs and lows

Trust

Balancing personal and professional agenda

Learning + Happiness on the rise while at studios...



# Involution Studios

as of 2.Aug.11



# Involution Studios in 2009

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Software interface design

*...evolving into a*

Product design MakeShop

where we are building our own apps, physical  
and digital service design

as the studio head, you need to worry about... everything

lead designer

project lead

direction for studio

vibe n' culture

hiring, firing, salaries, rewards

IT

real estate

furniture, equipment

bizdev, landing jobs

client management

direction for company

design training

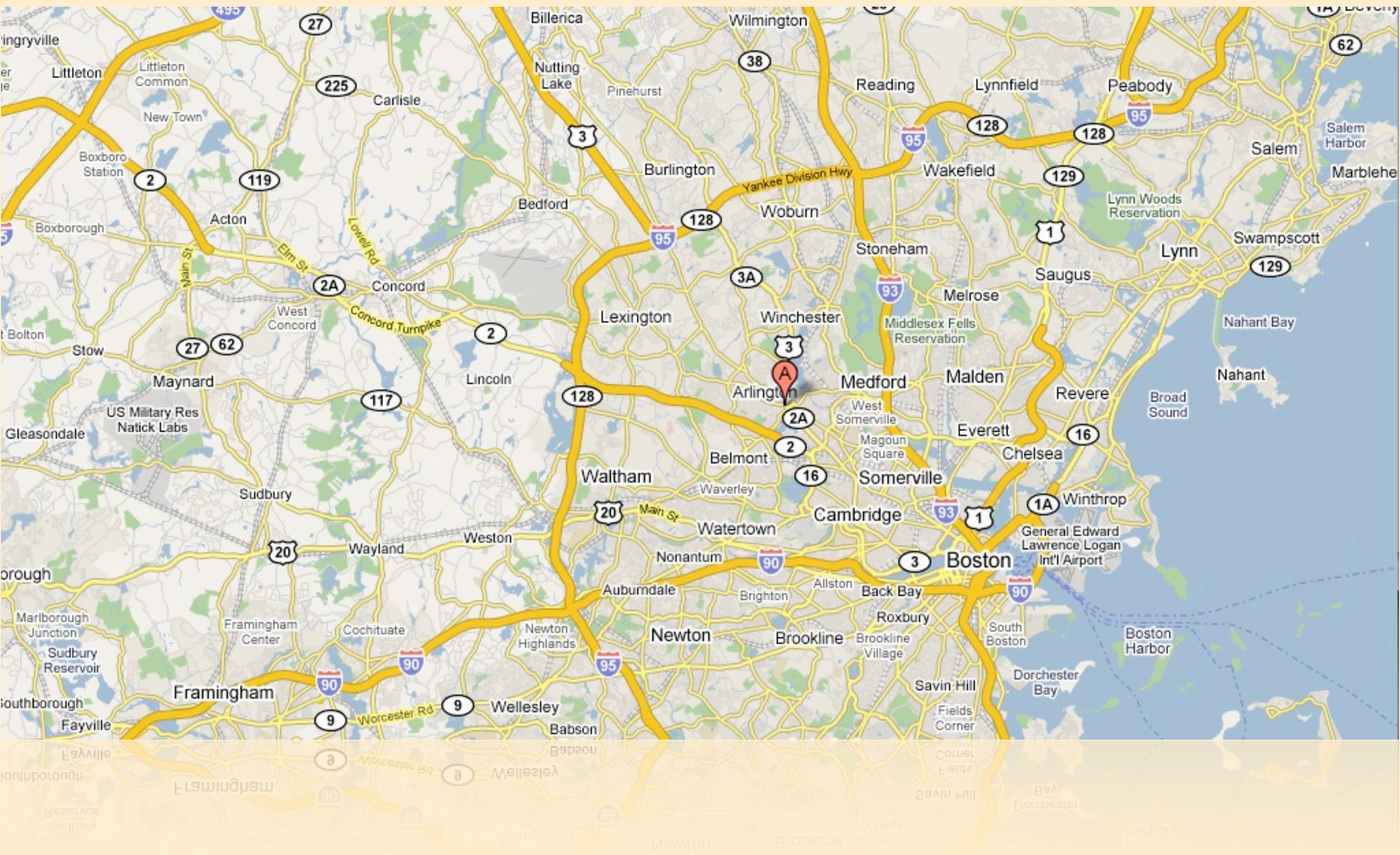
cloud IT

instrumenting the business

repeatable process for next studio



661 Mass Ave, 3rd Floor, Arlington, MA 02476













Juhan pretending to work.





See Dirk work.  
Work Dirk work.

## total cost of starting up

rent (per month)	3x 1,800
energy (per month)	400
5x desk, chairs	10,000
furniture nicknacks	1,000
3x Macs, 1x 30" LCD	8,000
Epson plotter	6,000
2x laser printers	800
Server, IT nicknacks	3,000
IT consultant	2,000
Lawyer	1,000
Accountant	1,000
Space renovation	3,000
	<hr/>
	\$41,600

could be chopped by >1/2



# Juhan's 2009 Goals

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Ship great stuff

Studio becomes self-sufficient

Hire an amazing designer + engineer

Implement lightweight, online PM

# Juhan's 2009 Goals

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\$250k first year...

Rani Manoharan as intern in Feb.09

Find other moms' advice

# Mamapedia

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## Health & Digestion

HOME > KIDS BY AGE > 1 & 2 YEAR OLDS > HEALTH & DIGESTION

Checkup  
Home Remedies

Dental Health  
Illnesses

Diapers & Changing  
Medicine & Treatment

Early Intervention  
Shots & Vaccination

First Aid  
Skin, Hair, & Bath Care

Health Insurance

### Health & Digestion

See all 490 articles

26 answers

#### 13 month old walking

I have a 13 month old that is not walking yet. He is cruising, but not walking. I am not concerned at this point. I know kids do walk funny for several years but that seems...

SO WHAT HAPPENED

We ended up going to our local pharmacy to pick up some high boosters for him...

37 answers

#### 14 month old is not walking

My daughter was walking at 11 months but my son is 14 months and shows no interest. He crawls...

SWH

And who would've believed it but the next...

23 answers

#### Blanket for a 14 month old?

I am asking this because my husband asks me all the time. When do you start giving kids a...

SWH

Thank you all for the kind words and...

#### 8 Needing help with my 17 month who is only 19 lbs...

Any information on babies and toddlers who have health birth...

SWH

I can't thank you all enough. What...

24 answers

#### Multivitamin for 17 month old

Hello everyone! I need suggestions for a multivitamin for my daughter...

SWH

I can't thank you all enough. What...

### Teething

See all 263 articles

19 answers

#### 15 Month old does not 2 of her front bottom teeth

My daughter has not gotten 2 of her bottom teeth. I talked to my dentist and they said that there really was not much they could do because of her age but that I had a good...

SO WHAT HAPPENED

So today when I was taking my daughter to my sister-in-law she asked if I had...

56 answers

#### Teething

My 5 month is teething and also crying. Is there anything to help ease the pain without giving...

SWH

Thank you to all who gave wonderful suggestions. As...

18 answers

#### Seeking food suggestions for my 8 month old

Hello moms! I have an 8-1/2 month old. I was...

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Photo by Toyfoto

## Working from home

November 14, 2008 - Dallas - I am looking into working from home starting in January and wanted to see if anyone had any good references as far as things to do from home. I am a new mom and really want to stay home with my new baby girl. ...Thanks, A.G.

ANSWERS 6

Hi A., There have been several of us that posted the same question and I don't...

I do something from home that I know you'd love and would be great at and...

Hi A., I work from home, and would love to fill you in with this Fortune 500 Inc...

I would love to tell you more about it. Give me [name has been removed] call...

My friend sells southern living products. The products sell themselves and it is...

I've been working a home-based business for a couple of months, and the longer...

Check out workathome.org. They're a non-profit organization that helps moms...

## Dress ups

July 29, 2006 - Cleveland - My 3 1/2 year old girl loves dress ups. I've only done a minimal amount of encouragement and she really uses her imagination a lot. Any ideas how to make this more fun for her? Or good places to get dress up cloths? ... Thanks S.

ANSWERS 6

Have you tried a local thrift/ Goodwill store? Garage Sales?

Lillian Vernon has a 24 piece trunk of dress of costumes with wigs and...

Have a pretend ball, or tea party! Go to garage sales or estate sales.

## What's Popular in Mamapedia

Questions and Answers from millions of moms

ANSWERS

#### 92 Constipation with my 14 month old

my 10 mo. old has constipation, any advice? we have been feeding her fruits and vgs mostly today. is there anything to give her? could rice cereal be the cause? we do make her a big bottle with lots of ... I Thanks, K.R.

#### 82 To bottle feed or not to bottle feed...

I am exclusively breast feeding & I must admit, I quite enjoy that time with my little girl but I keep hearing that I should give her breast milk in a bottle otherwise she'll never take the bottle. This is my question. I Thanks, K.C.

#### 52 18 month old still not talking

I am a first time mom of a great 18 month old. I have lots of experience with kids and I am not really worried about the fact he is only saying "mom" and "dadda". My husband is older than me and this is his first... I Thanks, R.E.

#### 37 14 month old is not walking

My daughter was walking at 11 months but my son is 14 months and shows no interest. He crawls really fast. I was just wondering if... I Thanks, K.W.

## Latest from Chicago

Local advice and recommendations

### Just turned 1 and won't wear walking shoes

4 minutes ago - EVANSTON - Hello everyone, My daughter is 1 year old and won't wear walking shoes. I've read that the best way to learn how to walk is barefoot or w...

### help! my daughter's pidgeon-toed!

10 minutes ago - CICERO - hi moms, my 14 month old daughter has pigeon-toes. the pediatrician didn't say anything about it, but maybe she's gotten worse and now she's tripping over her feet when she walk...

### Trying to conceive!!!

11 minutes ago - NORTHFIELD - My husband and I have been trying to conceive since April. We have a beautiful 18 1/2 month old little girl. I am starting to feel better because it is taking so long to get pregnant this time. It only took u...

Find conversations in your neighborhood.

Zipcode

GO!





# Juhan's 2011 Goals

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Projects we want and own

Instrument the business

Drive the open source biz model

10 person studio

More and more projects I want... from personal health to big data to helping organizations grow their own design chops + departments...

Beautiful space, fun people

Internship program (over the past year and a half, 4 interns... another starting in 4 weeks)

So far in 2011, over \$1 million in sales

# 30 Things to do for a Design Studio

Find 1 amazing person to work with...  
to anchor your company.

---

Design+business+technical can build a great  
culture

Social ties to local community (not just design,  
but community as a whole)

"I'd work for her [i.e. my partner]."



Axe-wielding  
homicidal maniac or  
managing director?



Dirk Knemeyer

Andrei Herasimchuk



# Speak the Truth

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Changing the trust model with staff and the customer (a la FedEx did with package delivery).

Andy Grove engagement model: honest, critical feedback to fellow colleagues (gnaw on the idea, not the individual)... to make us all better.



# Don't wait, just go

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Stuff lingers when you faff about.

Don't ask for permission either.

# Get gigs

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Duh...

Expect contracts to take 3x as long to nail.

Choice may not be an option; start working!

Personal networks = #1, 2, and 3 way to get clients



# Physical working space = uber important

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This doesn't mean you need to have a swanky, high-gloss space (in fact, quite the opposite).

I WANT to go to work... and love the design of the space.













# Get good chairs and machines

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We bought a few Eames chairs: they're uber comfy and beautiful.

Your engineers and designers need fast machines... and machines that they're comfortable with.

1 size does not fit all. Monoculture IT does not mimic nature.





# Don't skimp on screen real estate

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Go big or get out. 30" for all.

Still working on the intern LCDs....

# Have an agenda

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Product design, OS hardware, software interface design...

What is going to get your rocks off? iphone shop, energy, health, etc.

What's the thing you want to solve?

# Geography matters

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Cambridge:

roll out of bed, hit MIT and Harvard

on the public T (Red Line)

recruiting = easier for universities, professionals

close to Boston

great food, shop, museums, fun, recreation selection

expensive, smaller spaces (\$5k/month for a 8x12 office overlooking the Charles River)



# Geography matters

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Arlington:

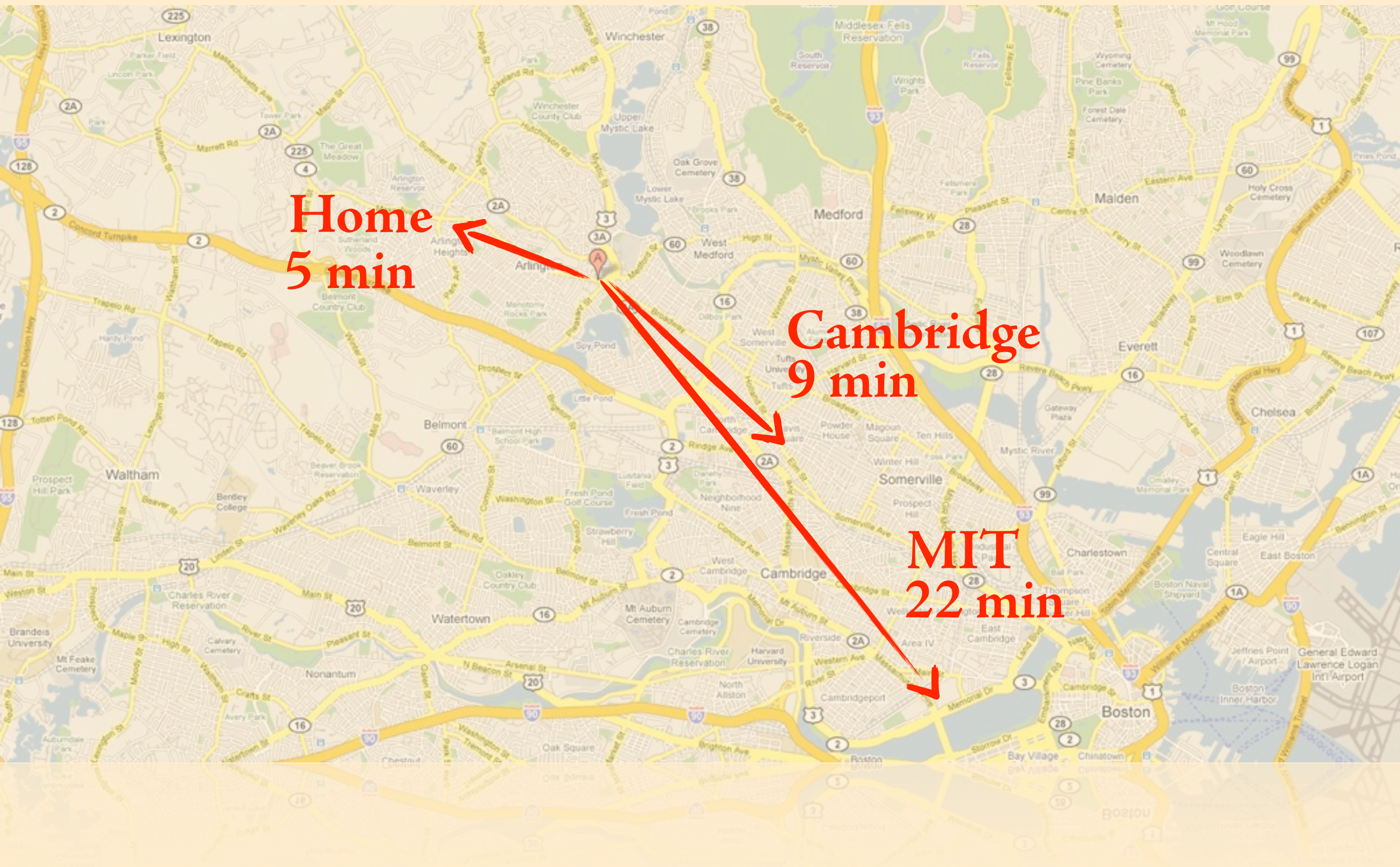
1 town over from Cambridge, less built up

on the public T (via bus: 10 minutes from Alewife, 12 minutes from Harvard Sq)

not quite close enough for MIT/Harvard/Tufts/etc... but for those willing, only 25min away from Kendall Sq via public T.

more bang for your buck (\$2k/month for a 41x41 beautiful ballroom-like office)







# Get real data

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= make better decisions.

Believing the story you want versus truth  
through data.

Show the lie.



# Big prints = bigger impact

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print designs (and task lists) BIG... obnoxious big. It's in your face and you can't ignore it and you can see your design.

small plotters (like an HP DesignJet 130) can be bought for \$1k. My preference: go nuts and get an Epson 9900.

big prints for designers+engineers to hover around = excellent method for on-the-fly critiques

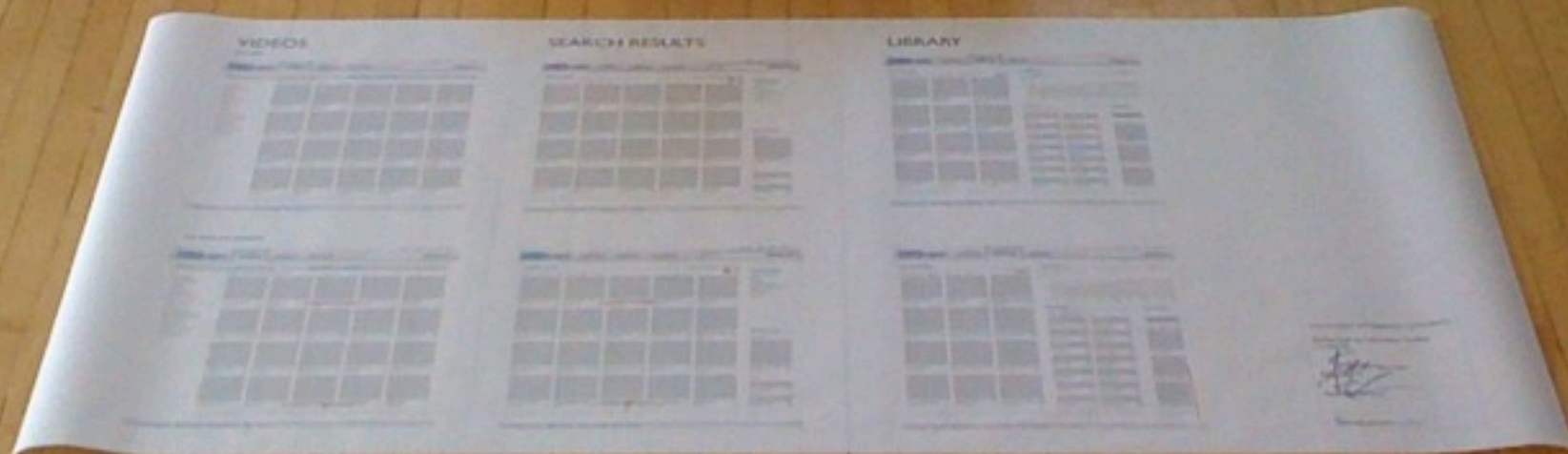
sending clients big prints of their work = bigger smiles
















INTERFACE REVIEW

Performed by Involution Studios  
13.May.09

*Juhan Sonin*  
Juhan Sonin

*Rani Manoharan*  
Rani Manoharan

 involutionstudios



# You're IT. Go cloud.

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We bought an OS X server for ahh... a local copy of SVN. Why do I want to admin a physical machine? We'll be lucky to hit 0.95 up time.

Our Email, DropBox, GitHub, BaseCamp... all cloud services.

Need a LAMR stack? Need a mediawiki instance? Flip a few bits on Amazon and viola!

Having your own machine to admin + physically look after is valuable experience. You get to know the ins and out of IT and running a service (an experience everyone needs to have).

Note: some clients may require SVN/Git/project repo to have certain specs and behind your firewall.



## Breathing room cash

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2 month runway (when starting), 4 month when more established... right now, we're 4 months

Use your own money

Only in emergency, get loans

In our case, each principal put in >\$15k at the start.

See your runway.

# Transparency everywhere

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All aspects of the business need to be open to all staff... from financial to hiring to HR to projects to accounting

Openness breeds trust



**Start looking for employee next, NOW!**

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At least know the types of people you need and where to go.

Hiring great talent takes time. Lots of it.

# Raise your design IQ

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Grow your brain by investing in 2 learning events per year.

Grow, learn with, and teach your customers about Design.

Once a quarter, publish your work (big meaty blog post, micro white paper, presentation).



# Get good legal advice

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Find a very good lawyer; you're trusting someone with your family jewels

## Get accurate accounting

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Once a month or quarter, have a CPA look over and verify/correct your financials.

Half-baked spreadsheets = half-baked - or even worse - results.

Own your numbers.

# Choose wisely ... every small detail and decision matter.

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From choosing carpet to magnets to trash bins to plants, the small details count.

Buying mousepads or small benches or table lamps = the growing building blocks to your studio's aesthetic and personality.

Not thinking through the impact of micro decisions = hodgepodge design.

This is YOUR company.



# Calculate total cost of ownership

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salaries + overhead (healthcare, rent, utilities, machines, printers) + training + ....

Know these numbers.

# Start basic project management

---

wiki (internal + external for clients), google docs

the simpler and lighter-weight the better

print out gross schedules and tasks on a giant poster...

group situational awareness of deadlines = goodness.

hold scrums, even with 2 ppl

gantt charts = the illusion of project management. Ban them.

# Make a giant to-do list

... from clients tasks to  
tiddly startup jobs like  
getting trash bins and  
slippers (we're a shoes-off  
office)

Juhan's To Dos  
1.Apr - 30.Apr

Mama

- \* send final prints and DVD of files (1.Apr)
- \* case study (1 page written, 2-3 pages of pictures)

Curl

- \* timeline + legend update
- \* wrap-up meeting (1.Apr)
- \* QA service
- \* case study (1 page written, 2-3 pages of pictures) = template for Invo case study pamphlet

Design Axioms

- \* full outline of entire book
- \* write 2 chapters: let data scream, color carefully
- \* outline for 8-session course
- \* outline for OSCON 09 presentation
- \* organize, schedule, market, publish free 8-week summer course (June-Aug)

Spreading the Word

- \* give out 20x Invo pamphlets
- \* meet 5 new potential business leads
- \* Health2Con: iLaunch micro presentation (22-23.Apr)
- \* BarCampBoston: 1 hour Design Axioms course (25-26.Apr)

hRecords

- \* architecture v01
- \* sketches v01
- \* interface design v01

Hiring

- \* recs on wiki: senior designer, jr dev, chief engineer
- \* finish quickie hiring process on wiki
- \* college recruiting: post places on wiki, start going (long term)
- \* CHI conference meetup

Studio

- \* Invo Boston tshirt
- \* Financials wiki page + micro publication: a guide to Invo pricing + numbers
- \* 30 Things to do for a Design Studio article; post to Invo.com
- \* upload 1st Boston article to sites
- \* setup shared calendar, printer
- \* noob Invo workshop



# Interns = integral staff

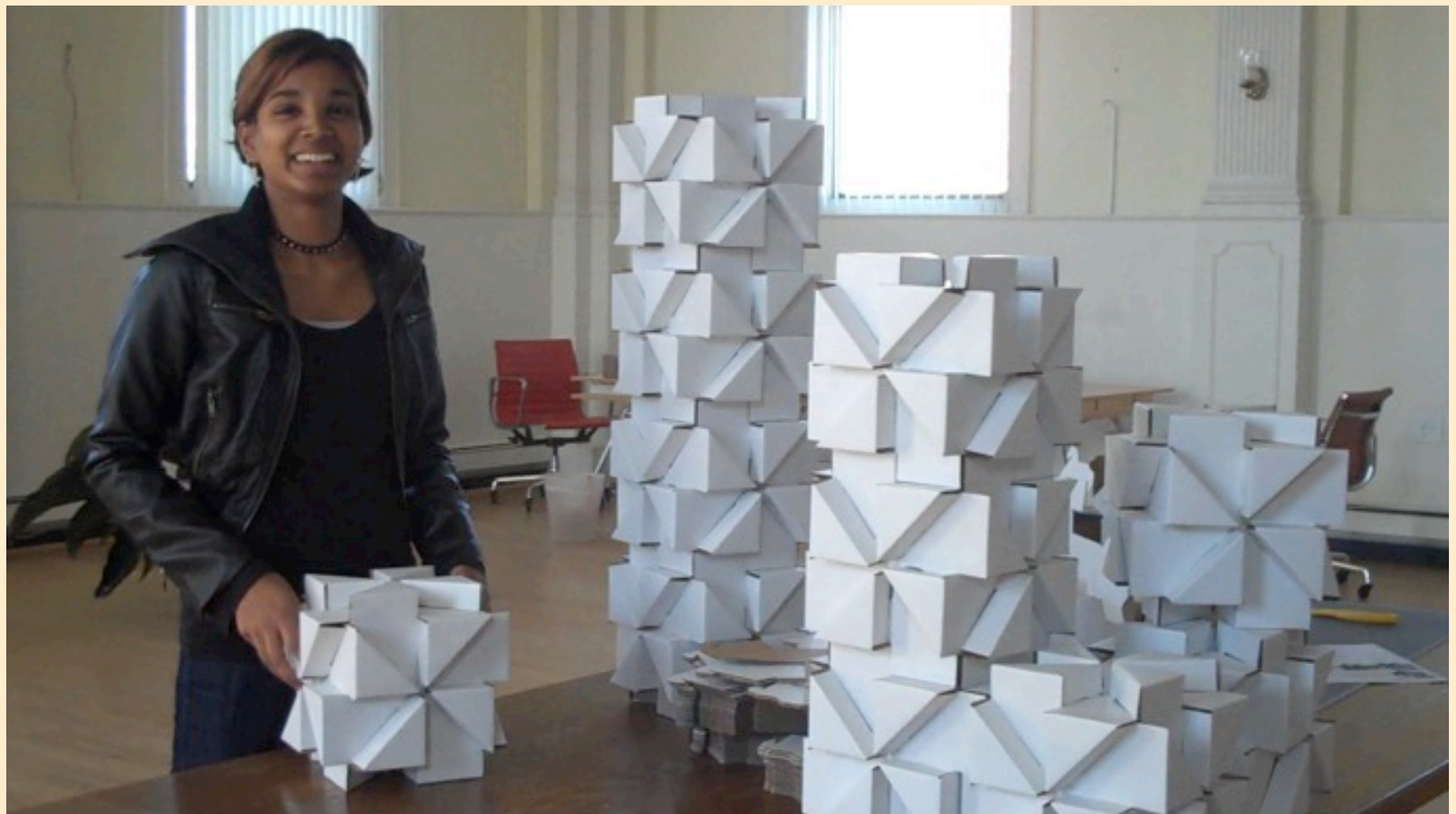
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Great interns = next great staff

Deserve serious responsibilities, project/task ownership

Make them  
smile

Weave them  
into everyday/  
MAKE culture

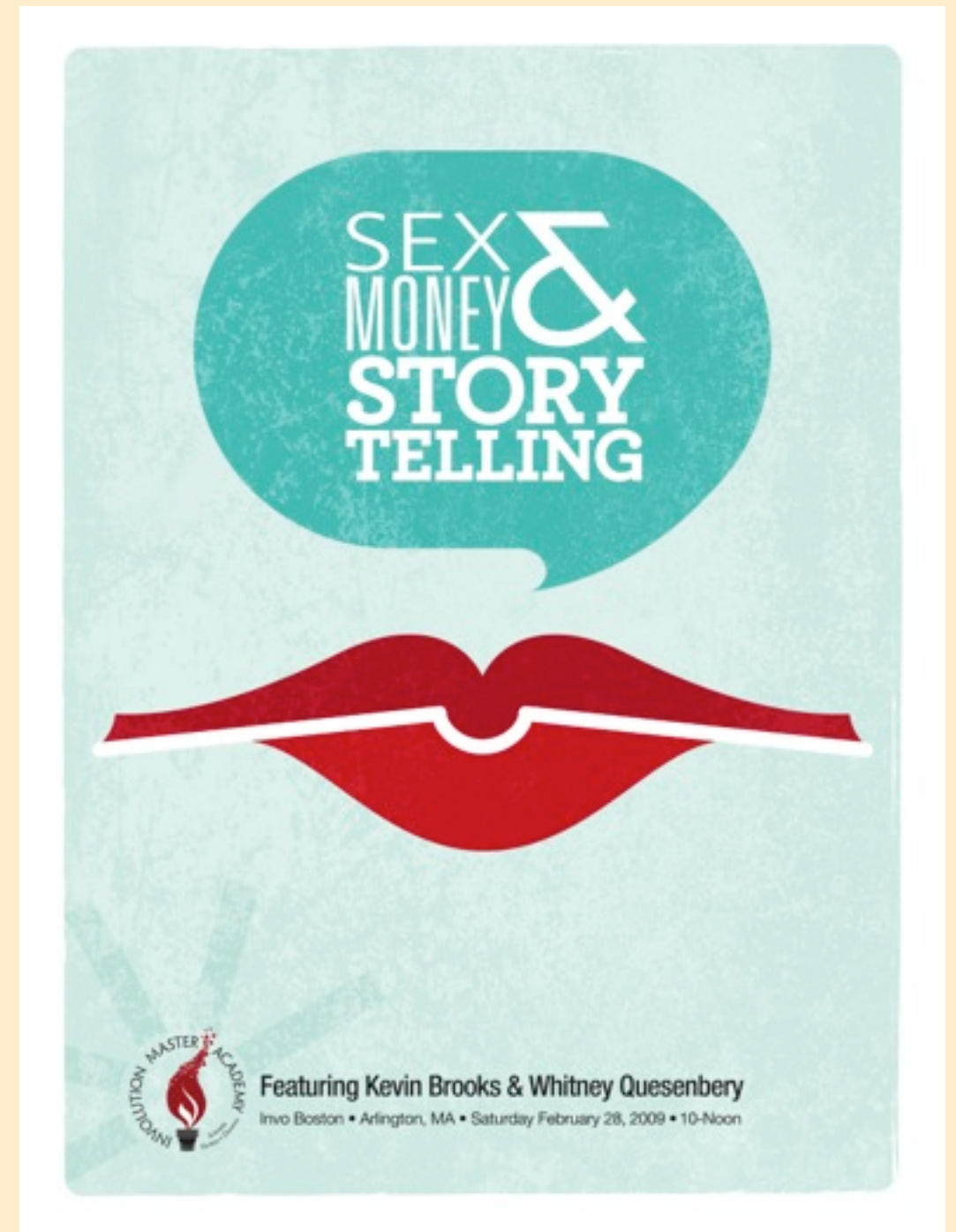


# Host a local design workshop/chapter meeting

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IxDA, UPA, AIGA,  
Boston.rb needs a place to  
meet.

Don't sell. Just serve.









# Make tshirts

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Where there are  
cool tshirts =  
cool stuff is  
happening.



# Make a job acceptance list

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Why are you taking this job?

\$\$ at the start... and over time, why?

bring in money

make \$\$

learning

fun (learning and fun = the same)

new techniques, ideas (design or tech or business)

great clients

open source

big data

info viz

new idea space

national importance

good for the soul/karma

impact++ on entire product, customer business

impact++ for planet earth

Ars Electronica or ID Magazine-bound

hardware + software

wetware, hardware, + software

# Track your time

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How do you know you're making money on a project? Loosing money?

Often forgotten about, time tracking allows you to instrument your business.

Once a week, put in how many hours you spend on projects/tasks (everyone in your shop needs to do the same).

Collect data, see how your business really works.



# Make a newsletter, blog, podcast, something of public record

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Let your fellow designers+engineers see the company's progress (or lack of it). Send it to friends, family, and colleagues... and planet earth.

<http://thedigitalife.com>

<http://www.goinvo.com/intel/>

# Lightweight biz + living

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When in doubt, axe, edit, toss, recycle, reuse, and learn to live with less.

... whether it's project management, developing your special design process, buying furniture, or making long term plans.

Less stuff = less to move when you get kicked out/buy a building.

# It will take 3x longer than you think

---

... for everything.



# You need

a passion for making

to actually make

to recognize talent

the confidence and performance gene

to hear *no* as *yes*

the ability to change tactics quickly

to see and weave the Politics

to make your colleagues better

to live and breathe Design

Make stuff.  
Have fun.



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