

A collage of Canadian 100 dollar bills is shown falling from the top of the frame against a dark blue background. The bills are in various orientations, some partially overlapping, creating a sense of motion and abundance. The text is centered on the blue background.

CASHING IN ON CREATIVITY

Producing Creative Products to Sell

By Bruce Outridge

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Make money from your creativity!

Have you ever wondered how you can make money off of your creativity? You can often make more than you realize, but most people are too busy looking at how to make millions and miss all the pennies that add up to millions. This happened to me when I created my comic book series for kids. I too had my eye on the big prize hoping to follow the comic stars that had gone before me. My wife even asked me the same question, "How long until we're rich?" The truth is it's not her fault at all. I had told her about Stan Lee, Todd McFarlane, and other famous artists that had made their mark in comic books. Although she didn't know much about comic books she knew about the power of money. So when I told her I was starting a comic series and showed her the ones that had gone before me she too figured it was just matter of time before the money rolled in.

I was even told it wouldn't work!

At the time I created the comic series I was part of an Association that had a workshop going on evaluating work of artists that joined the program from others that were successful. This will give you an idea of who you should listen to and why. I was assigned to an artist to evaluate my work and was excited to show her my work. I took my work to the person and I soon found out that she didn't take the time to read it, didn't like comics, and thought she was the big deal. She was a big deal, she had been very successful with her own books, for children under the age of five. She had no problem informing me that not only could I do better but the comic book would never sell. After that I went to a marketing coach who said due to the name she would never buy it for her children. At this point I had gone too far to turn back. I had put in too much time and money and was willing to take the risk myself. In fact to this day I won't enter competitions that have only one person deciding the outcome. I refuse to let one person decide the destiny of my future.

So how much money did I make?

To tell you I was not let down by the evaluation of my first real comic book would be to lie to you. In fact I was a little upset and in my past it would have bothered me for a very long time. This time however was different. I had spent too much time developing it and had already printed two thousand copies, there was no turning back. I felt the test was to offer it to the public so I had a big launch, book signing and began down the road of comic creator. The comic was well received and I went on to publish an issue per year on just that one title. I have other titles out as well.

Pennies add up to dollars.

In order to keep the price low I had to print off at least two thousand copies. I got a good print price of \$.97 per book allowing me to mark it up to \$3.25 retail. The margins were good, it was the sale that was the tough thing. I went to comic shops, entered trade shows and quickly found out that the comic book route would take forever unless you can sell thousands at a time. A few

shops picked it up but chasing store owners for \$20 wasn't worth my time. So was the comic a flop? Most people would say yes if you are looking just at the money.

The comic book made me money in three different ways, one was the actual sales for the book and money generated over time. The second one was in notoriety in my local art world.

Having a published comic book put me above other artists in the areas and got me a lot of work teaching kids comics through workshops and classes. In my local community I instantly became Todd McFarlane of the famous Spawn / Image Comics fame or so I thought in my mind. I haven't tracked how much money the classes brought into our business but it has been at least \$2000 per year since we launched the first issue.

The third way that the comic book has brought in money is through promotional business. As I mentioned over time I published an issue per year and sold some and gave some away. The issues after the first one I printed on-demand so I would just order as needed, but the first one I had plenty of. Although I haven't tracked how much the comic made in other work this one I knew the source so it is much clearer.

As I had extra copies of the first issue I would use them for promotional purposes and give them away as bonuses. Many events I do caricatures at the events and at this one truck show I drew a caricature of a kid and put a comic book in the bag. He left and came back a few minutes later asking me to sign the book, which I did. He left again and I didn't give it anymore thought as I didn't know who the kid was anyway.

A few days later I got a call from a company in the transportation industry. The man on the phone explained that his son received a comic book from me and his company had been looking for someone to work with them on some illustration projects. We started working together and over the course of the next few years did over \$8,000 in cash business and worked on many other projects that offered roads towards other customers. Now think about it, one comic book, one copy, printed for \$.97, given to one kid, made me \$8000 in revenue.

How much have I made off the comic?

So let's take a look the money as a whole. I won't use the other issues because they were printed and sold as needed so I will just focus on the one issue I printed in bulk. So issue one I printed 2,000 copies at \$.97 each in 1998. That totals to \$2,000 plus applicable taxes. At the time I am writing this we are in 2016 so that's eight years. I have averaged around \$2,000 per year in class work so that is \$16,000. Add to that the \$8,000 made from the one client and we are up to \$24,000 in total. There have been more benefits but I will keep it to cash income for this example. If we take our \$24,000 and divide it by 2000 it comes to \$12 per issue. Now we haven't included actual sales of the books or included the fact I still have around 300 copies left that I am still giving away. The normal profit on a comic book is under a \$1.00 if the artist is lucky and I made \$11.00 profit per comic book.

So how did I make money from my creativity?

You just read how I made money from the comic book itself. The question is how did creativity come into play? This is where most people fall down in the creativity forum. They stop believing

in themselves when the naysayers come out and stop the project. The comic was developed based on my values that had made me successful in my own life. I wanted to get that message out to youth and thought a comic book would be a great way to do that. I called the comic the Pride Junkie for a reason. The Pride stood for p-passion, r-respect, i-integrity, d-dignity, and e-excellence. A junkie is someone really into whatever it is they are into. That could be good or bad, I love chrome on cars and trucks and call myself a bonafide "Chrome Junkie". Some people didn't like it, but I did. So the comic was based on my values, the story was mine, and I was the artist. I made the hero a truck driver and it was based in the transportation industry. As I was so tied to the book and willing to pay for it myself I took the opinion from others with a grain of salt. I had combined my talents, my values, my occupation, and my money all into one project. That's how you use your creativity to create a product to help boost your business.

As you can see to date we have made around \$24,000 for our business based on one \$.97 cent comic book. It is even more if I count the t-shirts and hats that we have sold on the book or the promotional value we have had from the comic. The point is that you have to have the confidence in your own creativity to get started down the road of creating your product.

Are you producing products that can be changed into cash?

In the story above you saw how I used my creativity, values, and talent to create a specific product for sale and some of the unexpected spin off business that came along with the creation of the comic. Myself like many of you may be wasting things that you create because you don't see how they fit together as a product or service and you may be leaving money sitting on the table. That is how my cartoon books for the Hammer Down Series started and I don't even try to sell it.

Start paying attention to your hobbies!

Back in 2007 even before I started working on the Pride Junkie Comic I had been building my name as an illustrator for the trucking industry. I remember my first project (by the way I didn't get hired) like it was yesterday. I had been doing a lot of networking with industry magazines trying to get illustration work. I knew a few of the editors and was able to be allowed to put work in on spec (which I don't do anymore) to see if I was a right fit for the job. "Spec" is when you do up a rough layout for a project before being hired so the Contractee can see if you will be a fit for the project. Unfortunately much of my work is done in the finishing stages so my rough work looks terrible. I didn't get the job, but it was a good lesson. However over time I did start drawing cartoons for the magazines in the industry and was drawing for about three of them at one time. If you think of 12 issues for each magazine and I was drawing three cartoons per month it didn't take long before I had gathered a number of cartoons in my stock pile. Since all the cartoons were on the trucking industry for the most part the content had a certain theme.

Stop leaving cash on the table!

Since I owned the copyright on the work I was able to use the cartoons as I wanted to for the future. Now I wasn't trying to create a product from those cartoons, but thought it seemed wasteful to just have them sitting there doing nothing. At the time I was doing quite a few trade shows and although I was busy drawing caricatures of people I began to think how can make passive income while at the shows. Working trade shows can be expensive and unpredictable. You have booth fees to pay the show organizers along with other costs for hydro etc. You have

travel expenses such as hotels, meals, and employees. Even if you don't have products such as I did, you still need promotional items to market yourself, signage for the tent and so on. We were working around 30 shows per year so if you look at booking costs alone you can see how the costs can add up. Add a couple of rainy weekends to the mix where you don't make what you expected in revenue and it can make your annual revenue look much like a comic book.

One thing that I have always wanted from our business was to have it fairly passive. Not that I mind doing events or working live, but our goals for the business were always lifestyle first. My wife and I like to travel and want to be able to do our business from anywhere in the world. That is our focus, but at the shows it was just to make a little money from the back of the room as they say. At the trade shows my wife will accompany me for retail events and often handles charging and taking cash, bagging the products and so on. So many times she was sitting there waiting for me to finish the caricature of the person I am drawing for her to do her thing. I often thought that if she had some products to sell, even a book or two would be good for her and money for our pocket book. This was the basis for our next product, I just didn't know what it would be.

So I am in my studio looking for ways we can improve our income at shows on the road. I'm drawing cartoons every month, some published and some unpublished. Somehow the idea just came out, "Why not put them all into a book?" I know what you are thinking, that's a no brainer! The reason it didn't occur to me before was that the cartoons are created one at a time and I am focused on the topic I am drawing about, not thinking about my next product. So it doesn't just come into play like that. I am sure many of my artist friends are in the same boat. They may create beautiful paintings one by one but could they be creating more products from those same paintings. Why not use those products to create income more than once?

Put your money where you work is!

I thought why not put all those cartoons into a book and sell it at the back of the tent at shows. The Hammer Down Series was created. At 36 cartoons per year, a couple of pages of biography and other information a 100 page book can be created in no time. To date there are two volumes available and are sold at trade shows, given away as promotions, or sold online. Every two years I create a volume and sell the paperback for \$10 at the shows. I am almost ready to put out a third volume in the near future.

How much did I make off this book?

I got smart after my Pride Junkie education and didn't print off a million copies. I use print on demand for most of my books and order 50-100 copies as required. The price per copy is a little higher but my inventory costs are lower. I use platforms like Lulu and Amazon that handle all the payment and shipping duties and send me the money. Truly passive income! But lets look at the income numbers.

If we look at just the first book which sells for \$10. I would estimate (because I haven't tracked it over the years) I would sell 50-100 copies per year. Very conservative, but realistic estimate. If I sold 100 copies at \$10 each that would give us a \$1000 for the year. Now you may think that \$1000 isn't very much but you have to realize that this is with no effort other than the book production. I am already creating the cartoons for other projects, I upload the book online and

order the copies that I sell at the shows. Assuming that I spend half the money to order the books the cash value is only around \$500. Not too much right, but wait!

Just like a financial expert will tell you the power of compound interest for savings, the books work in the same way. One book alone isn't much, but when paired with other products can really drive up the revenue for your business. If we just sold the one book, it may seem like a flop but I added a second book the numbers look better. I also had three issues from my Pride Junkie Comic, I had hats and t-shirts created for the Pride Junkie and sold those as well. Then I took those same cartoon images and created 30 stickers that we sold for \$2 each. More about that later!

So if a person came to get a caricature done at our booth it would cost \$20 on average. If they bought three issues of the Pride Junkie Comic it would add \$10 to the bill. If the person also bought the Hammer Down cartoon books it would add another \$20 to the bill. Now many people didn't buy everything, but many did and you can double your income very quickly with this model. Even if those didn't buy extra products there are enough customers that just bought the cartoon books to make it worth while. The truth is that the products took very little to create and were created with products that were already produced. Could you create extra income with a talent or hobby that you are already doing?

Sometimes smaller is better money, check out what I mean here!

Most people don't put much value into a two dollar product and so they don't bother to even think about creating one. The problem is that you may be leaving huge amounts of cash on the table because small amounts add up quickly. Do you know about the Loonie?

For those of you that are Canadians you will know about our one dollar currency called the "Loonie." The dollar coin was named the "Loonie" after our water bird called the Loon. When Canada discontinued making the dollar bills and decided to make only metal coins the country went nuts! We all thought the coins would be too heavy to carry around and made us look silly in the International markets. I still put my coins into a small bag because they get to be too heavy. In fact over the years the country also did the same thing with the two dollar bill a few years later and that has adopted the name of the "Toonie."

You may wondering why I am telling you about the currency of our country, but I have a good reason for doing so. The country created a new savings program for Canadians by changing over the money. Due to the size and weight of the coins many people started dumping them into jars. I know so many people that saved the coins every time they received one and quickly saved big dollars doing so. My father-in-law saved hundreds of dollars at a time by adding his to one of those giant liquor bottles. In case you haven't seen the light so far let me explain. People don't want to carry the coins around and so it makes a great opportunity for you to make money at fairs and festivals, trade shows, and so on. I would bet that many of you that live in Canada do the same thing for your coffee money. You dump the coins into a spot on your car so that when you go through the drive-thru of your favourite coffee shop you can just pay with a one or two dollar coin. So many people do this!

Create Small Items

Here is how I used this process of saving coins to my advantage and you can too. As mentioned earlier I was looking for ways to increase sales at our trade shows. I looked over the cartoons that I had already produced and noticed that many of them would fit on a small sized product of some kind. I was drawing a lot of trucks at the time and found I had one of each different truck type. The problem was I didn't have a product and didn't really want to get into creating one that was complicated and expensive. When I am creating products for trade shows I like to have different price points for customers. I already had products from \$5 to \$20 so I wanted something small.

The sticker was born. People love stickers because they are easy, low cost, and last forever on whatever is your favourite gadget. Here was my thinking. Dad or Mom drive a truck for a living and let's say it's a Peterbilt. Naturally the kids are going to be fond of Peterbilts and having a sticker adds them to the trucker family lineup in a small way. We decided to put funny sayings on the stickers and by coming up with a few different tag lines per image increased my inventory without any work. For each image I might have three different tag lines and we built our small inventory up to 35 stickers. So how much did that cost to get going?

I was lucky in that I have a friend that does short run stickers as his business. You can check him out at Twisted Sticker www.twistedsticker.com. You may have someone in your area that can do similar work. Just look up sticker companies on Google or find a promotional supply company in your area. In fact it doesn't even have to be stickers, it could be buttons, mouse pads, coffee mugs, whatever! The nice thing about the short run stickers is that I could order different stickers as I needed them. Some images sold better than others so it was nice to have that flexibility. I believe the stickers cost me 25 cents each to print. We sold them for \$2 each or three for \$5 and I was amazed how well they went over. We had many people buying just the stickers and the end of the day we would make hundreds of dollars just on sticker sales.

Now I know what you're thinking, Bruce you have your cartoons but I don't draw! That's a valid point but easily thrown out. Can you type, write, hire someone else to create graphics, buy them off a stock photo website, and so on? What if you just had funny sayings on buttons? You can buy a button machine for a couple hundred dollars and create buttons all day.

So lets get back to the Toonie. As I mentioned earlier when the currency changed people started using those coins for smaller items like coffee and the like. At a fair people are buying hotdogs and cotton candy all day and quickly gaining pockets full of these coins. The kids want something else at the fair so they're driving Mom and Dad nuts all day for something to take home. Here we come to the rescue, we have an inexpensive product so the parents are happy. The kid got something so they are happy, and we made money so we are happy. It is a win-win for all of us. Even better is that you don't even have to sell them.

If you are an author of a book, could you make buttons based on the chapters and give them away as a promotional item? There are endless possibilities and many of you could easily be creating income from work you are already creating. It is a matter of thinking outside the box. Your product might be part of your next marketing campaign, or maybe a funny advertisement for a service. What if you had a humorous way to promote your service through a cartoon or funny infographic. The ideas are endless and have multiple uses. It just takes some time to think about what you like to do, what you're good at, and how the pieces fit together. So to get you

started I have included a list below. Just take time to think, be in a quiet place, and don't edit your list until everything has been put down on paper. We all have creativity inside us but most people don't use it. Creativity is a muscle and needs to be used regularly in order to be ready to go at a moment's notice.

Take your mind off the big money, forget about the millions! What would \$24,000 do for your pocket? Could you pay off a few bills, gain a new client, offer a new service, or improve notoriety for the industry that you are already a part of? I am still using my comic book to this date for promotional purposes. I hope this story inspires you to get creative and think about how you can make your business unique by using your passions, talents, or values in your business. It certainly worked for me. If you want to read the comic and other cartoons you can visit my comic book site at www.pridejunkie.ca. If you want to get started on creating that next product or service for your business you can start by working with the worksheet below and getting your thoughts down on paper.

Below is the worksheet to help build your product and improve your creativity.

You may want to create your list on a separate sheet of paper due to size. By having many columns it may help you think of more additions for the list. Here is how you work the list. Think back to your childhood to your current age and think of everything you like to do. Use the third column to decide if any ideas can become a product, service, or promotional item. Here is a sample for you.

Footnote: please note your ideas don't have to be beside each other, this is just for illustration purposes.

Sample List

List What You Like To Do	List What You Are Good At	List Possible Opportunities
Bake cakes	Teaching others	Create a bake course
Writing	Cooking	Create a cook book

Lets get started on your list!

[illegible]

I wish you luck on building your creativity and if you need help with your business, I help businesses improve their marketing by working with them on their creativity to make them unique. Just visit www.bruceoutridge.com/consulting to get started. I know you have a creative bone in you as we all do. It is just a matter of using it to your advantage. I wish you well and if you would like to improve your creativity on a regular basis with other tips visit bruceoutridge.com and check out the blog. Good luck!