

## Career advice from a creative: Nathan Evans

November 14th, 2016



For our first "career advice from a creative" article we speak to **Illustrator and Muralist, Nathan Evans**, to discuss his career journey and get his advice for current creative students.

Nathan Evans may not be a name you have heard of yet, but you will most likely have come across his work around the city. From the "Hello & Welcome" mural which runs down the side of the outdoor market, to the Leeds and Reading Festival signs his work has become prevalent in Leeds and further afield.

We caught up with Nathan to talk career advice and the creative scene in Leeds.

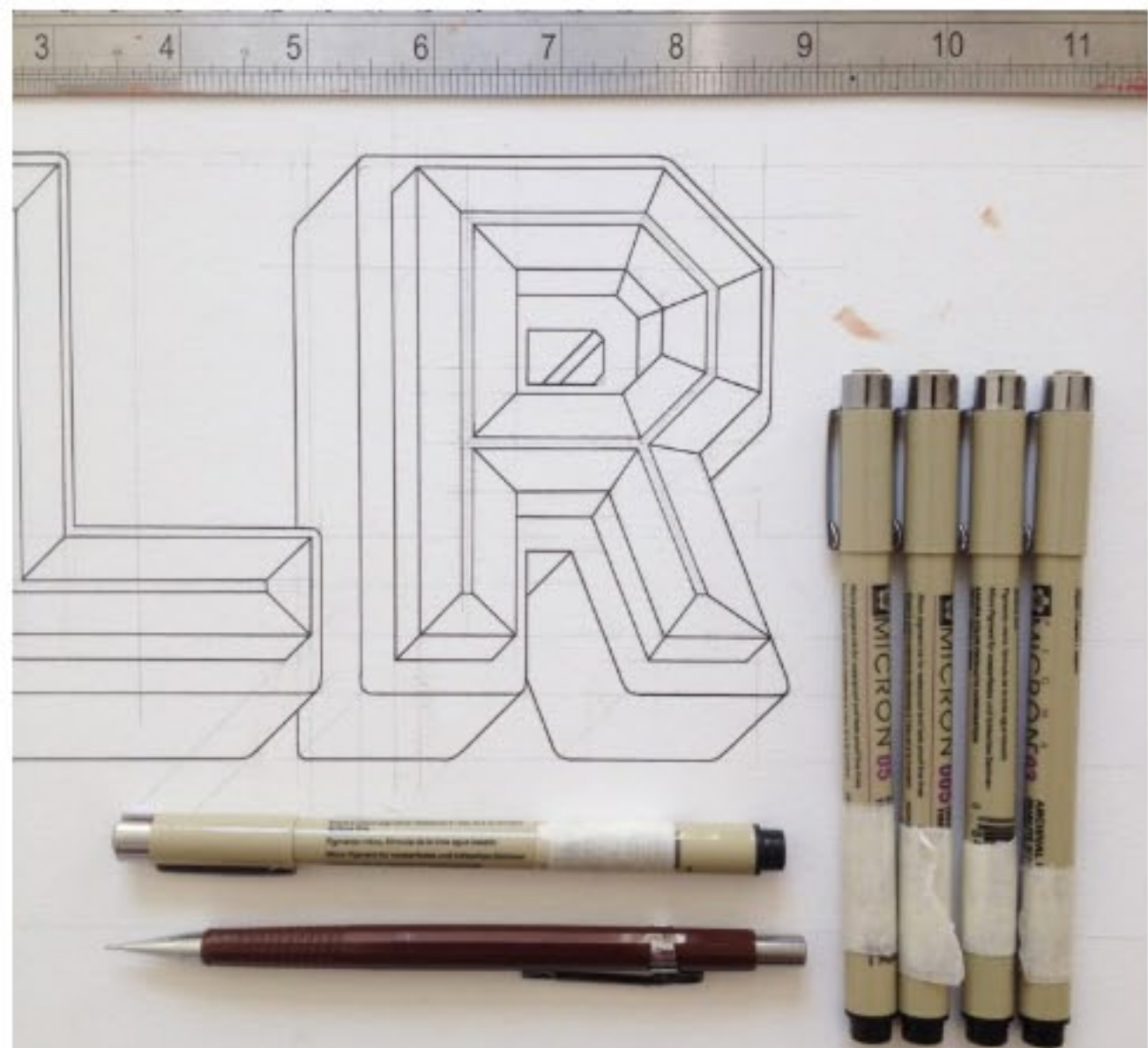


### Firstly, why did you end up specialising in typography and what is it about typography that you like so much?

When I was a child, my dad always thought I was going to be an engineer. I was creative but also deeply interested in the mechanics of how things work and fascinated by how they're constructed. I think that's definitely a big reason for my obsession with letters. There's a sweet science to typography and each letter has it's own set of rules on how they're assembled.



Further down the line as a graffiti artist I was constantly exploring letters, experimenting with different ways to bend and twist the basic structural rules to abstract the form of the alphabet. My degree study in Graphic Design was where I found out about the mathematical nature of grid systems. This amazing insight into different ways an overall composition can be structured re-kindled my love for applying science and mathematics to the creative process.



Since then I have continued to develop and combine graffiti's playful abstraction of letterforms with the mathematical structure and legibility I learnt from traditional graphic design. In short, I'm obsessed with the structure of letters...

### How did you find the transition from being a student to going out into industry?

Like most students, I found it pretty daunting. I'd spent a solid three years developing my work and trying to find my 'style'. I'm not ashamed to say that at the end of my degree I took a bit of time away from illustration and graphic design. I wanted to reflect on what I'd done, what it meant and where I wanted to go next. Aside from painting walls, which has been the one constant in my life, it was nearly a year before I started making what I would consider 'work' again.

I was always very aware of the 'sink or swim' mentality surrounding creative graduates. There's this idea that you have to explode into the industry, and your 'graduate' label doesn't last long. I think this pressure sometimes has an adverse effect on graduates and can creatively paralyse them. Sometimes it's more important to stop what you are doing and evaluate how you feel about it.



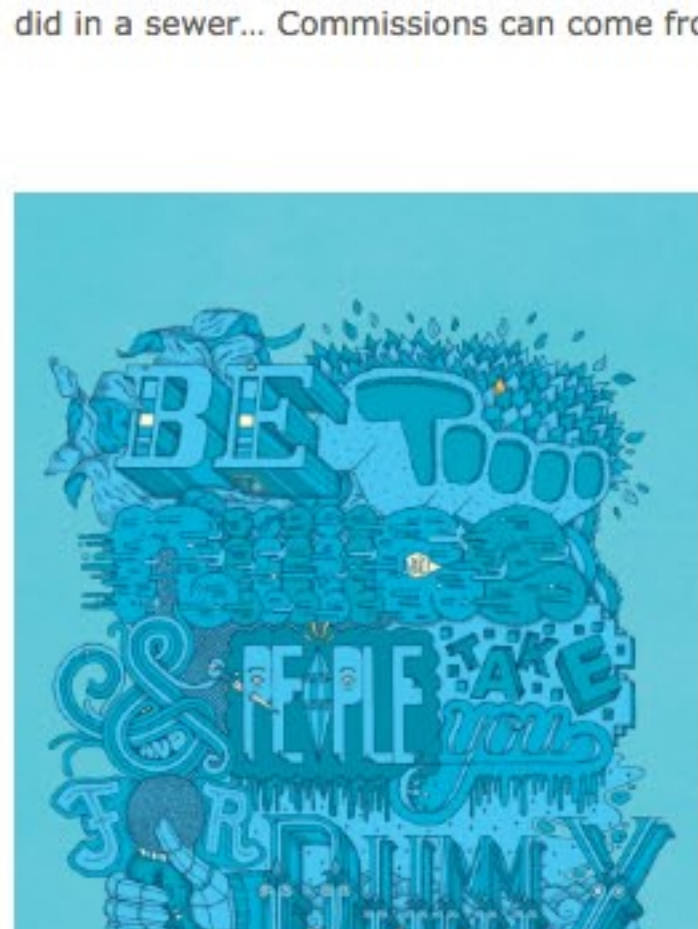
I think it's a little easier for creative graduates now. When I came out of university I learnt to write html and css code just to build my own website! Now there are endless platforms that make it easy to have a professional portfolio online in a day. There's also more access to social media, to grow a creative following. You can have important people in the industry interested, engaged in and aware of your work long before you even step off of your university campus and into the 'real world'.

### You've had lots of amazing commissions how did these come about and do you have any advice for people who are looking to get freelance work?

Forget everything else, productivity is the big secret. The one key ingredient when looking at people I admire is that they're all absolute machines when it comes to producing work. The more productive you are, the better you get at your craft and the more likely someone will notice your work and want to commission you. Work ethic is real and it's the reason some people succeed and others don't.



A common misconception is that all your work has to be for clients and this couldn't be further from the truth. There's nothing more satisfying than working on your own projects and in my experience this is always the work that generates the most interest. Which is not surprising because it's your pure un-compromised style. A few years ago I got a relatively big commission off the back of a self-initiated painting I did in a sewer... Commissions can come from anywhere.



Also it's very important to make everyone aware that you are open for business and actually enjoy working with clients. I see too many creatives complaining on social media about bad clients, scaring people away. Quality service is still a huge factor in word of mouth business, especially with the share-ability of content these days.

### What advice do you have for people when it comes to pricing your work?

When it comes to pricing, there are numerous factors that come into play. Most important of all, I establish exactly what a client is asking for. I then honestly ask myself one important question, 'how much would you be happy with for doing this work?'. Not 'happy' with for doing this work?'. It's about working out the value your work will bring to someone and what that value is worth to both you and that person.

A relationship where your valuation doesn't align is probably not going to be very satisfying. If you run into this problem, I suggest it's best to just politely move on to another project with someone who values your work.



### Was it difficult to pick up the business side of going freelance?

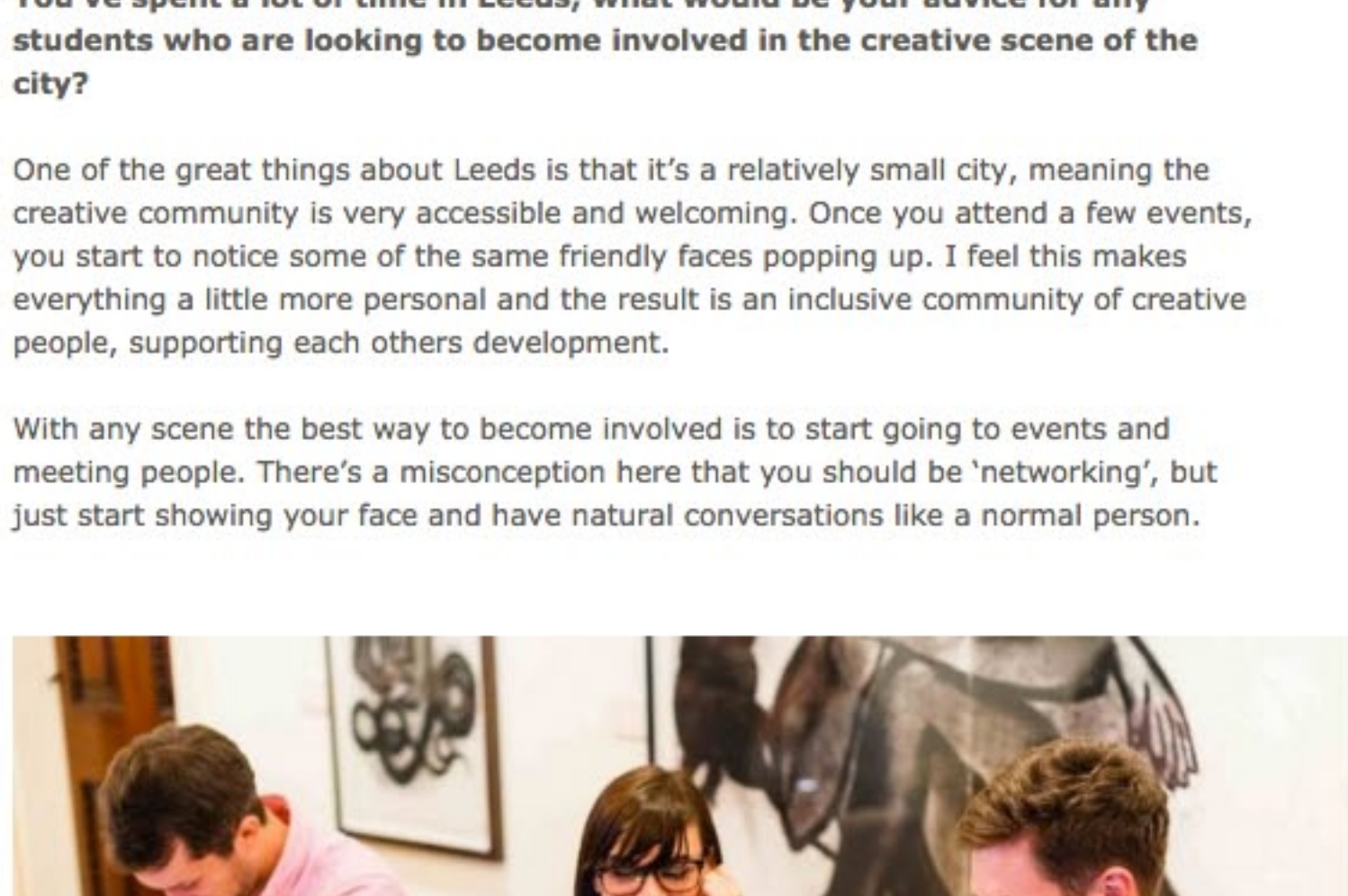
Producing the creative work is the easy and enjoyable bit! I believe that talent alone is not enough to have a successful creative business. There are numerous cases of artists who are technically brilliant and produce beautiful work, but then have no idea how to conduct themselves as a 'professional'. A lot of people underestimate the administrative side of running your own business.

Personally I've always enjoyed learning new things, so I wouldn't say learning the basics of business was difficult. It was just about identifying areas I didn't understand, researching what I needed to learn and then assigning myself some time to become efficient in those areas. I would advise that anyone who is considering being a self-employed creative do the same.

### You've spent a lot of time in Leeds, what would be your advice for any students who are looking to become involved in the creative scene of the city?

One of the great things about Leeds is that it's a relatively small city, meaning the creative community is very accessible and welcoming. Once you attend a few events, you start to notice some of the same friendly faces popping up. I feel this makes everything a little more personal and the result is an inclusive community of creative people, supporting each others development.

With any scene the best way to become involved is to start going to events and meeting people. There's a misconception here that you should be 'networking', but just start showing your face and have natural conversations like a normal person.



An alternative and more exciting way to get involved would be to produce so much quality work that it becomes impossible for people not to acknowledge you, your effort and your contribution to the scene. They're the people who really interest me.

### What's the one piece of advice that you always pass on to students who get in touch with you?

If you've been lucky enough to find the thing you love and then consciously made the decision that this is what you want to devote your time/life to, then work as hard as you can at it. No matter what obstacles you encounter, never give up on it. The only other thing to consider, is make sure you are doing it for the right reasons and not just because it looks 'cool'.

You can find more information on Nathan and his work on his [website](#), or alternatively follow him on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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