Normally when I finish interviewing people on Wicklow Good News I do up a short article on the substance of the record. However, when it came to interviewing young entrepreneur Andrew Woodcook he had already done the writing for me. So, rather than put my words on how he came to set up a business right at the start of a pandemic, I’d much rather present his thoughtful views on his … story so far. And we will all agree he will go far in the future and inspire other young people to follow their passion, regardless of pandemics, lockdowns or COVID19.

My Story So Far – by Andrew Woodcock

My name is Andrew Woodcock and I am the owner of Bad Apple Creative limited.

Bad Apple is a creative studio based in Bray and we mainly focus on brand strategy and design. Our goal is to get your brand the best possible position in its market place, we aim to help make your brand the most visible and most popular on the shelf in the store, the most entertaining online and the most trusted at heart.

How did I get here?

I have always had a passion for art and since I was very young, I can always remember having a sketch pad and pencil at hand. Art definitely had a massive influence on me, it was a way of expressing myself when I didn’t really have the words to use. My grandfather was probably my biggest influence, he worked as a painter decorator at one stage in his life and when I was very young, I mistook this as if he was an actual painter, like Da Vinci, Van Gogh and Michaelangelo. My grandfather did actually have an unbelievable talent with a paintbrush, he would paint beautiful pieces of racehorses, portraits, and scenery.

I really looked up to my grandfather and this fueled my passion for art. As the years went on, I got my nose into every opportunity I could that involved art, I would attend summer camps and focused mainly on the art workshops, my mother helped out at Bray Lakers which is an amazing community helping people with special needs and I would go with her to the art classes and learn a lot of the arts and crafts, I loved it.

I entered secondary school in 2009, art was my favourite subject but when I got through to my Leaving Certificate year, I was first introduced to the idea of Design. My art teacher, who I had a great relationship with, took me aside one day asking about my career opportunities. My teacher felt I would be a great Graphic Designer. I had heard of Graphic Design before, I thought it was the design of book covers and logos, not realising how broad Graphic Design actually is. I looked more into Graphic Design online and I was influenced to pursue a career in this field.

I looked into colleges and courses that teach Graphic Design and I found the Visual Communication course in IADT. I noticed the number of points that it involved to get into this course and I knew straight away I couldn’t get the points required, so I looked into other ways to get where I needed to be.

I applied to the Portfolio Preparation course in BIFE and luckily enough I was successful getting in. This course is known across the country for its success rate. The mentor Annette Vella is amazing at what she does. This course was my first introduction to the art world. I learned about so many amazing artists, model makers, typographers, photographers and so on. I learned about the different types of mediums in this course. It was a massive learning experience for me and definitely grew as a person in this course.

When I finished my portfolio and submitted it to IADT, I was delighted to find out I had been accepted the Visual Communications course. My tutor Annette did feel I should have chosen Model Making, some times I think she may have been right, but I entered into IADT. I can honestly say it was the most amazing, bizarre, heartbreaking and fulfilling four years of my life. Yep, it was definitely an emotional rollercoaster. I was trying to battle against college life, trying to get assignments completed, trying to get a good grade, trying to manage my work/life balance and battle my own personal problems.

Bad Apple actually came to life in my second year of college. I was working on a project at the start of the first semester. We were asked to design an informative booklet on a specific topic. My topic was rotten fruit, so I had to come up with a way to make use of rotten fruit. I thought of a DIY beer brewing kit made out of rotten fruit. This project was a bit tricky for me mentally, I had lost two friends within the year, so I was distracted in a way. I was also receiving feedback and influence from two tutors who were with me right up until the weekend before final assessment, then a guest tutor came in and wanted the design changed completely. I did as was asked and unfortunately, I failed the project. Not because of the feedback or tutors, but because I wanted to please everyone. The project was titled Bad Apple.

In my second year, I started making logos for people around the town, and I was getting really handy with a camera, so I was taking photographs for nightclubs and musicians, and I was creating music videos for my good friend Lawriii Craic. I was getting more work and I wanted to promote myself but I felt that if I went with my personal name, it wouldn’t work too well. I had some amazing visual imagery from the Bad Apple project so I picked from that and rebranded myself. I first used the idea of Bad Apple as my brand as a “screw you” to the tutor who failed me, being the bad apple that I am.

In my fourth year, I dropped the name Bad Apple and just went with Andrew Woodcock Design, I wanted to promote myself as a freelancer rather than a brand itself. I really should have been focusing on my grades rather than work outside of college, but I had a goal of running a creative studio of my own and thought the work I was doing outside of college would stand to me more.

One project that has stuck with me is definitely Catalyst Coffee, I worked on the design with my good friend Laura Deveney and it was the first job that I branded that allowed me to see my work come to life. This was amazing for me to see, it was so fulfilling to see work I helped create in real life. Catalyst came to life about a week after I graduated from college. I applied for an intern role in John Sisk & Son the month prior as I felt that if I wanted to run my own studio, I need to get experience in a real business. John Sisk & Son is one of Ireland leading construction companies, they have built the likes of Bord Gais Energy Theatre, Capital Dock, The Aviva and so much more. They are truly at the top of their game.

I was part of the Preconstruction team, my role mainly involved designing presentations for bids and graphics for signage, posters, and information booklets. I worked on a lot of projects in Sisk and I was getting a really nice wage. I was very lucky to be working in such a successful company but I just felt I was missing something.

The projects I was working on outside of my day job were honestly so fulfilling and when I completed a project and got to see it come to life, I was completely blown away. But this did have an effect on my mental state as I was taking too much on, I was working in my day job from 9 to 5, Monday to Friday then going home and working on a brand design for a client.

In late January, my manager in work informed me that my personal development meeting was coming up. This meeting is where I come up with a plan for my future within the company. It is a chance to push for courses to improve your skills and knowledge which will help you grow professionally.

When I was asked to think of how I want my future and life in Sisk to go, I took it very seriously. I sat down and thought long and hard, I examined how my life was going. I felt the work I was doing outside of Sisk was making me happier and more fulfilled. That is when I thought about setting up a company of my own. I pulled my manager aside to inform her about my feelings. I told her that I am becoming more in demand and that my goal in life is to run my own studio, so I felt that time is only right. The team I worked with were delighted for me, they said it was going to happen sooner or later as I have said I want to run my own studio since I first entered the doors.

I did originally set up as a sole trader, so I would have been known as Andrew Woodcock Design, but my director in Sisk pulled me aside and said that they would love to have me back to work with them but I couldn’t be a sole trader and I would be better off signing up as a limited company.

So, I set up as a limited company, it would be silly to turn down the chance to have John Sisk & Son as a client. With a limited company, I was advised not to use my personal name. That is when I began brainstorming names. When I asked friends and family, they all said they loved Bad Apple, they loved the visuals and they loved the idea. But I wasn’t 100% pushed.

I thought about the idea of Bad Apple, I felt the “screw you” attitude was very immature. Funny, but immature. I did, however, get a chance to think back on the time, I remembered my situation, I knew I was trying to please all of the tutors, I was saying yes without question and because of this, I failed the project. The idea of Bad Apple suddenly changed more to “you’re not going to please everyone”, don’t be afraid to ask questions, don’t be afraid to say no, and get up after you fall down.

With this mental reassessment of Bad Apple I knew I had to run with it. From February onwards, I was preparing to open my first business. I gave a two-month notice to Sisk, and my final day of work was scheduled for March 27th. I was organising bank accounts, my own brand, my own website and I let clients know I would not be taking on work until I have finished in Sisk.

Nearer to my departure the Corona Virus began to hit the headlines. I didn’t really take much notice until I had seen the statistics in Italy and realised how much closer it was coming to

Ireland. This did make me extremely nervous, it’s hard enough opening a business on your own but during a pandemic is another thing.

I did, unfortunately, lose work due to the virus, but I had a few projects to keep me busy for the first few weeks. I believed that opening a business with everything going on would be a very bad decision, but I stood my ground and tried it out. I was shocked to actually see how busy I would be. The first week I got in a lot of work, I found a lot of small businesses and brands that weren’t originally online wanted me to help them go online, rebrands were a big thing and social media graphics and templates were in high demand.

I am only a few weeks into business but I’m extremely busy, I’m a stage now where I have to turn away projects as I have reached my limit. I hope to employ soon, so I can balance the workload.