

ALICIA SOUZA

ILLUSTRATION

101

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

From doodling her rib-tickling illustrations on social media to co-founding Chumbak and eventually starting her own label, Alicia Souza is one of the most talented illustrators in India. She was born and brought up in the Middle East, graduating from Royal Melbourne Institute of Design. She moved to India a few years ago and is an entrepreneur and a freelance illustrator.

She has worked across different industries with distinguished clients including Penguin, Google, The Hindu, The Mint, Yahoo, AOL, 3M, Wipro, Cadbury/Mondelez, INK, Time Out, Cornetto, Air Asia, Kyoorius, Amazon, Champak and Tinkle. Various companies have licensed her work, she is also an INK Fellow and talks about the importance of creativity at various TEDx events and educational institutes across India.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Overview of Illustration.
2. How to become an Illustrator?
3. How to build your brand?
4. Overview of Freelancing.
5. How to be a freelancer?
6. How do you charge Clients?
7. How did Alicia Start her Company?
8. Is Vocational Training Necessary?
9. Is Illustration a viable career option?



01

OVERVIEW OF ILLUSTRATION

Illustration entails a whole new creative world of its own. Learn more about this field and what key factors set it apart from the world of designing.



Design Vs Illustration

Design focuses on solving a problem and adheres to a specific structure. Illustration, on the contrary, can be purely aesthetics or can be used in design projects. For instance; Alicia has to consider all the design elements (colour and space) to make illustrations for a brochure.

Types of Illustration

There are different kinds of illustrations. Technical illustration deals with projects such as the creation of car manuals. Fashion Illustration focuses on clothing lines and seasonal clothes. Cartooning is also a popular kind of illustration. Alicia does a lot of cartooning for social media. Editorial illustration are used to depict an article pictorially and are usually seen in newspapers or other print media.



02

HOW TO BECOME AN ILLUSTRATOR?

Illustration is just a story taking a visual form. Learn more about the art of storytelling and experimentation.



Alicia never left her passion for drawing. She kept on experimenting with her work while she was still a student. It took her years of practice to discover her unique style. Her motivation behind drawing was to tell stories. When Alicia moved to India, she was fascinated by the things happening around her. She realised that the quickest way to put something out into the world was to draw it. Her illustrations are colourful as she takes inspiration from India's vibrant culture.

The style is not Compulsory

Having a unique style is useful but not necessary when you are just starting out. Alicia Souza has a unique style, but she developed it through years of experimentation and experience. You can execute design briefs in multiple styles. Usually, clients who need dull illustrations do not approach Alicia because they feel that her style does not suit their requirement.

Storytelling

You should be able to tell a story through your illustrations. Take inspiration from your surroundings and create illustrations and stories that are relevant to you. You need to be observant and look at things from a different perspective. Alicia carries a notebook with her every time so that she makes notes and later uses them in her projects.



Experimenting

Experimenting with your style will make you do things that you initially thought as impossible. It will help you explore new styles, create a unique identity and improve your art. You can take your work to a new level altogether. According to Alicia, she is unable to experiment with her style anymore because of her time constraints.



03

HOW TO BUILD YOUR BRAND?

How can you build your own personal brand? How important is your brand identity? Read this lesson to find out!



Alicia developed her style and brand over a period of time without even realising it. Her illustrations revolve around her day-to-day life. She has a very normal life and her depictions revolve around simple things in all her illustrations.

Be Observant

If you have a monotonous day, then you have plenty of time to think about things from a different perspective. A creative mind comes into play in such circumstances. For instance; think about how you can draw a chair differently from underneath or from the top.

Stories

You need to create a unique or relatable story through your illustrations. It is the only way you can connect with your audience. For instance; everyone takes their dog for a walk, but when Alicia takes her dog for a walk, she imagines it talking to her. She depicts these imaginary conversations with the dog in her illustrations. If you are going through a hard time, then you can create illustrations about it. You can also tell stories that have never been heard and show the world your perspective.



Social Media

Social media is indeed a necessary evil. However, Alicia owes everything to it. When she started freelancing, she did not have a portfolio. Her Facebook profile became her portfolio and that is how she got most of her clients. Social media is crucial for beginners who do not have a portfolio of their own. Your clients can see your work online and based on its quality, hire you for their next project. Unfinished projects and simple sketches can make way to social media but not to a portfolio. This is one of the most considerable advantages of social media. However, you cannot post once a month and then once every three months. You need to post diligently and consistently to keep your audience entertained.

Feedback

You should always appreciate both positive and negative feedback about your work. Alicia does not take any feedback to heart. Be open to criticism and negative feedback. Alicia usually takes feedback from her online followers. Similarly, you can ask for feedback from your fans online as they can help you get better at your art.

Dealing With Piracy

What if someone steals your work? Alicia's illustrations are copied a lot. She however, suggests on focusing on creating fantastic illustrations and forgetting about it. "Piracy" has unfortunately become a part and parcel of the creative world, but you need to make peace with it.



04

OVERVIEW OF FREELANCING

Freelancing opens up a lot of new alleys for your growth and diversification as an artist. Learn more about freelancing and the key differences between freelancing and being employed in this lesson.



Who is a freelancer?

A freelancer is someone who takes projects on contract from companies or individuals. The duration of a freelance project can vary from a few days to a month. You can get projects through an advertising agency, brand, publication or an individual. Illustrating as a freelancer is different from drawing for yourself. This is one of the key things to realize before starting out. You may love to draw for yourself but as a freelancer, you need to pay attention to the briefs provided by your clients. You need to ask yourself whether you can draw a specific thing required for a client. Will you be able to execute your briefs on time? If a client asks you to make changes and tweaks to your illustration, then, do not take it to heart. You should be willing to deliver on the changes as asked by your client.

Freelancer Vs Job

You can take a job as an illustrator. It ensures financial security, social life and availability of work. However, you will not have flexible timings, and you cannot say “No” to anything that comes your way. A few jobs, however, allow employees to take up freelance projects. On the flip side, you can have a lot of creative freedom and flexible hours as a freelance illustrator. If you want to plan a vacation, then, you do not have to file a leave. You can simply arrange your projects around those dates. However, initially, it is difficult to get projects and you have to accept everything that comes your way. You need to work alone unless you work in a co-working space. This may be a great option if you love to stay in isolation. You have to be motivated. It is easy to jump out of bed and sit in front of the TV, but you need to have fixed work timings. You need to push yourself to work because no one is going to supervise you.



05

HOW TO BE A FREELANCER?

A portfolio gives life to your work and speaks for itself. In this lesson, learn the importance of a portfolio, how to create an efficient portfolio and working on projects.



Assemble a Good Portfolio

Your portfolio should define your capabilities as an illustrator. You should have your best work in your portfolio. Focus on quality rather than quantity. The portfolio should not contain more than a handful of projects. College students usually choose to put only college projects in their portfolio. However, Alicia suggests putting personal work too, as it helps in skill assessment. Remove everything that portrays you as anyone other than an illustrator. Your portfolio should be readily available online. If the portfolio is in PDF format, then make sure that the file size is not more than 5 MB.

Getting a Project

You can send cold emails with your portfolio to potential clients such as advertising agencies or studios. Be specific about your clients. Do not write a 1000 word email. Keep your email short and crisp. This increases the chances of you hearing back from them. You can also think of an idea specific to a client. For instance; you may come up with an illustration for Coca-Cola and then contact the brand and see how things turn out for you. Even though many people consider business cards as ineffective and old school, there is still a chance to get upcoming projects. Business cards are easily accessible and portable. If you are looking for work, then, you can check forums that have potential clients. Clients are always in hunt for a logo, menu or a drawing for a social media campaign. You need to be aware of the opportunities available to you. There are websites on the internet where you can get work done in exchange of payment. However, Alicia believes that it is not a sustainable option in the long run.



Client Approaching Directly

You can get a design brief from your client verbally or via a telephone call or email. Always ask your customers to send you the brief through email. It will help you cross-check the illustration requirements if such a need arises. Once Alicia gets the brief for a project, she breaks it down into three steps. She writes down the requirements of the client, followed by the deliverables. Deliverables also include the size and format of the output file. Lastly, she writes down the timeline for completing the project. She also mentions the estimates for the project and sends it to the client for approval. Once approved, the finances can be obtained in two ways. You can either take an advance payment or take the full payment after the work is done. Choose the latter option only if the project is of extremely short duration.

Three Step Workflow

You should ask for a 30 -50% advance before commencing your work. Break down your timeline into few steps to be able to fasten your workflow. Alicia splits the workflow into three parts. The first part is the idea stage during which she sketches on a piece of paper. She inks her sketch in the second stage where it cannot be changed any further. In the third stage, she puts it up on the computer, colours it and sends it across to the client.



If she has a timeline of 10 days for a project, then, she spends 2 days each on ideation and inking the sketch and the remaining days to colour it on the computer. This allows the clients to track her progress and visualise the work. Making changes to an existing illustration is the worst nightmare for a beginner. You need to understand as to where changes are possible. Convey the same to your client and make sure that he understands it. Alicia sends sketches to her clients and inks it only after the approval is received. Modifications need to be made for 2 main reasons. It can be personal or the brief may demand the change. For instance; if you drew a girl with a long hair and the client needs short hair, then, try to reach a common conclusion.



06

HOW TO CHARGE CLIENTS?

What are the factors that you take into consideration before charging your client?

What are the vital features that are to be looked into, while creating an invoice for your work? Find out through this lesson.



Important Parameters

When are the illustrations to be delivered? How much time will it take for you to complete the project? Do you need to draw on a 10 X 10 sheet or on a surface as large as a wall? Is the illustration meant for a social media post or commercial purposes? If a client places an order of 20 illustrations instead of just one, then consider giving him a discount. Experience largely determines your pay. As a beginner, you cannot charge a client at par to an illustrator with ten years of professional experience.

How much can you charge?

Freelancers are scared of asking their clients about money. However, you will get used to it after a short period. You can charge anything between Rs 5000 to Rs 1,50,000 per illustration depending on the factors or parameters mentioned above.



07

HOW ALICIA STARTED HER COMPANY?

Alicia shares her journey from
being a freelancer to starting
her own company.



Ideation

After years of freelancing and posting daily online, Alicia had a substantial following on social media. She would frequently get messages about her illustrations. However, she never thought of starting a company. She put up a stall in an event with products that can be easily made. Her entire stock sold out in a span of a few hours. Even after a few months, she kept on getting enquiries. She eventually realised the need to establish her business.

Finding a Business Partner

Managing a business and working as a freelancer is like having two jobs at the same time. It was really hard for her to manage everything. This was until she met Sourav who happens to be her partner in the business. She decided to set up an online store for a season, and the sales were great. Sourav convinced her to run her store for an indefinite period.

The growth of the Company

The company has grown substantially in a year and a half's time. She clearly mentioned that she would not handle the logistics and operations. If you have to work too much on the operations side of a business, then, you will not have enough time to work on the designing side of the business. Sourav is a partner in her business. He has equity in the company and is therefore invested in the business. He takes care of inquiries and shipments, and Alicia takes care of product design, upcoming products and social media marketing.



08

IS VOCATIONAL TRAINING REQUIRED FOR ILLUSTRATION?

Is it compulsory to go to an Art college?

What advantage does vocational training add to creating a career out of illustration? Find the answers to these questions in this lesson.



Self – Learning

Alicia went to a design school and realised that she loved drawing. Similarly, you can develop the required skills by reading books and taking relevant online courses. You can check out Youtube to learn about the technical aspects of Illustration. It can be frustrating to spend a lot of time learning just one bit of illustration. Self- learning also involves a considerable amount of experimentation and trial and error. Vocational training can be useful but not necessary.

Passion

You need to be in love with the process of illustration and not the final result. You need to be passionate about illustration because it will get frustrating after sometime. Be passionate about your work so much, that you are ready to quit your existing career in pursuit of it.

Online Learning

Online learning has helped Alicia in a number of ways. She had learnt everything from scanning a paper to using Photoshop; There was a time when she did not know how to open a Photoshop file. Take online courses and hone your skills.



Sketching Every Day

You need to make it a habit of drawing every single day. Have a strict routine or timetable and religiously abide by it. Alicia carries a notebook and makes small notes about things around her. It is important to not forget any ideas. She uses her notes as an inspiration for her future illustrations. A few people are talented enough to sketch on the spot. According to Alicia, this is the best thing that an illustrator can do. Alicia claims that she has the memory of a goldfish and therefore needs a diary to document the little things around her.



09

IS ILLUSTRATION A VIABLE CAREER OPTION?

Creating an entire career purely out of illustration might baffle many and leave others confused. Find out the viability of illustration as a career option in this lesson.



You can make a good living being an illustrator. With substantial experience and expertise, you will be able to generate more income or the same income as you would have received if you had pursued some other career option.

Time and Patience

You need to exhibit patience and wait for some time until you can make it big. Success will not come to you overnight. During this phase of struggle, you need to work hard without thinking about money. You need to give yourself time to grow as an illustrator.

Discipline & Diligence

You need to diligently sketch every day and experiment with various styles to discover your uniqueness. You need to have the discipline and diligence to get through hard times, see your project from the start and finish, and be true to your craft and work ethics.

Passion for Freelancing

When do you know that it is time to leave your job and work as a freelancer? This is probably a question that only you can answer. When you have a job and an overwhelming number of freelance projects at your disposal, it is time to take a plunge. When Alicia started freelancing, her parents were worried about her future.

09 IS ILLUSTRATION A VIABLE CAREER OPTION?



However, they were supportive and gave her the opportunity to do things independently. You need to have faith in yourself. If you believe in your dreams, then your parents will believe in you.



GRADES
DON'T MATTER

WWW.GRADESNOTMATTER.IN