FAILING UPWARDS

OR HOW TO SUCCEED AS A CREATIVE FREELANCER WITHOUT REALLY TRYING

1. Hello everyone, I'm here to share with you some of the secrets of my modest success. American-made cars, West-End living, moderately-priced champagne… yes, all these things and more can be yours, without even really trying.

2. It all started in the summer of 2008 when I decided I was tired of working for others, with all their "rules" about "wearing pants in the workplace". Look, they shouldn't have call them "hotpants" if they aren't really pants. In short, I was misled. So I packed up my Futurama and Simpsons figurines and headed out for greener pastures.

3. I initially assumed I was doomed to fail and would have to resort to begging, or worse- my old job at Future Shop, but much to my surprise, things seemed to fall into place nearly right from Day One. I had established a decent website and online portfolio for myself before I quit, and lined up some clients to supplement my income.

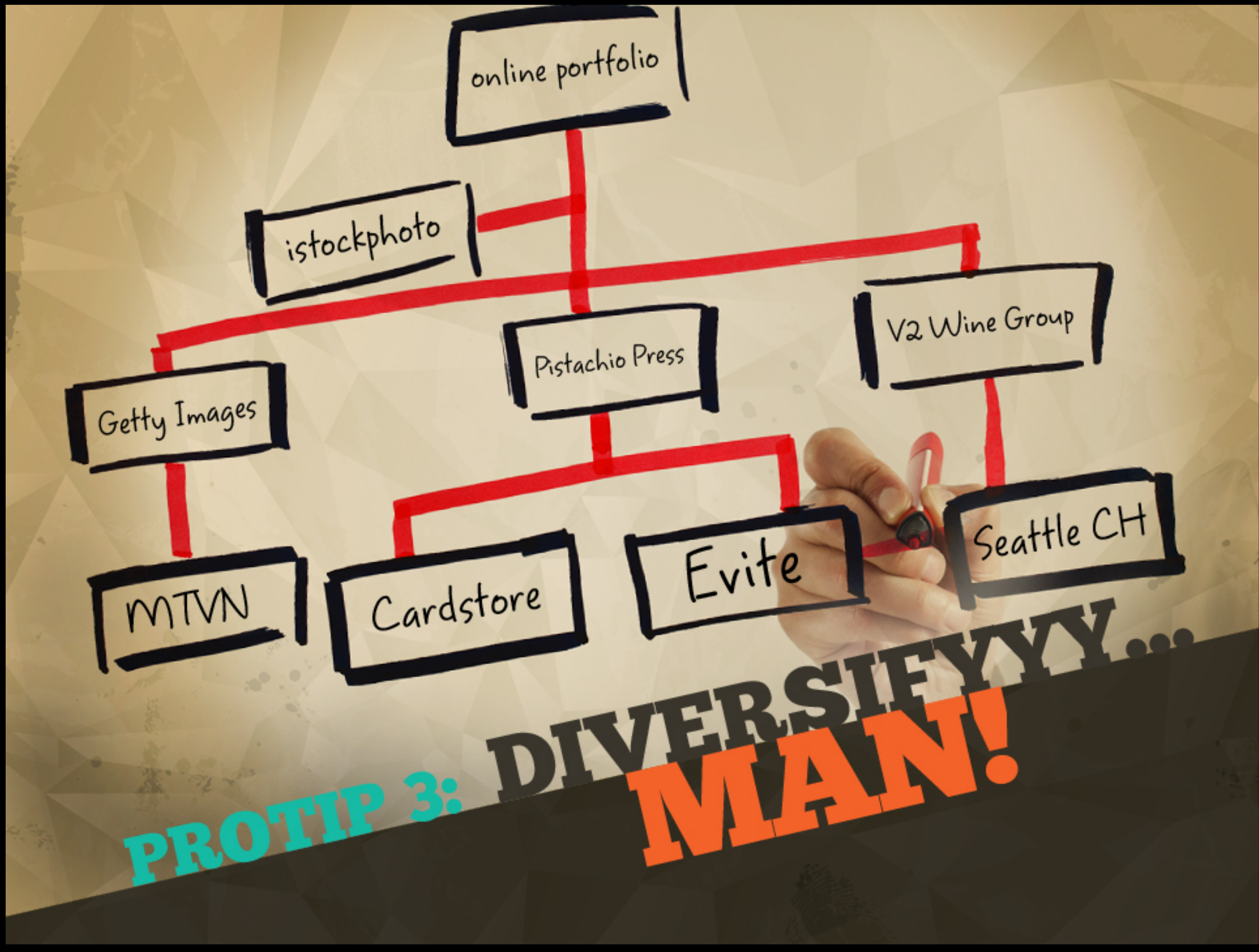
4. There's a lot of good reasons to freelance, #1 being of course the freedom from tight-binding, leg-prisons like pants. This, of course, only applies if you're freelancing from home. Co-op office spaces tend to frown on it. Unless they really like to party.

5. The worst reason to go freelance would be mistakenly thinking it's the path to riches. While you can certainly do well with it, it's definitely not a get-rich-quick scheme. Another problem is that once you start going pantsless around the house, you really resent having to put them on to go out. Not gonna lie, I almost didn't come here tonight.

6. I've got a few "Pro" tips lined up for you tonight, simple and easy to remember ones too! Number one is to have a financial backup BEFORE you quit. For most people, the first 6 months to a year are the hardest, so having a monetary cushion to fall back on is imperative. Literally. I stored my money in a pillowcase.

7. ProTip #2 - Stay Healthy. Now, your diet may vary, but if I don't get my required daily amount of orange-dyed, cheese flavoured, corn-based, food product, my productivity takes a real dive. I'm pretty sure they added Cheez Pleesers and Rockets to the new food pyramid, so I'm good!

8. In all seriousness though, it does help to be a healthy person. About 3 months after I quit my job at the Museum, my appendix burst and I landed in the hospital for about a 10 day stay. Even with the severity of the situation, it was hard not to think "Damn, 6 months ago I would've been getting paid to lie here watching The Price Is Right. This sucks."



9. My next tip is don't put all your eggs in one basket. Me, I have illustration portfolios at Getty Images and iStockphoto. Those, plus my website, begat some of my earlier illustration clients, which begat bigger contracts with Cardstore.com and Evite. Added onto all of this is a pick 'n' mix selection of freelance clients and contract work as an inspector for iStockphoto.

10. Number 4 - Get your butt online. All the time. I was always an internet junkie, but since I became a full-time freelancer, the computer and I have become one. I AM THE INTERNET! There's so many outlets to spill your guts on nowadays, but Twitter is my favourite. The short format appeals to my general laziness.

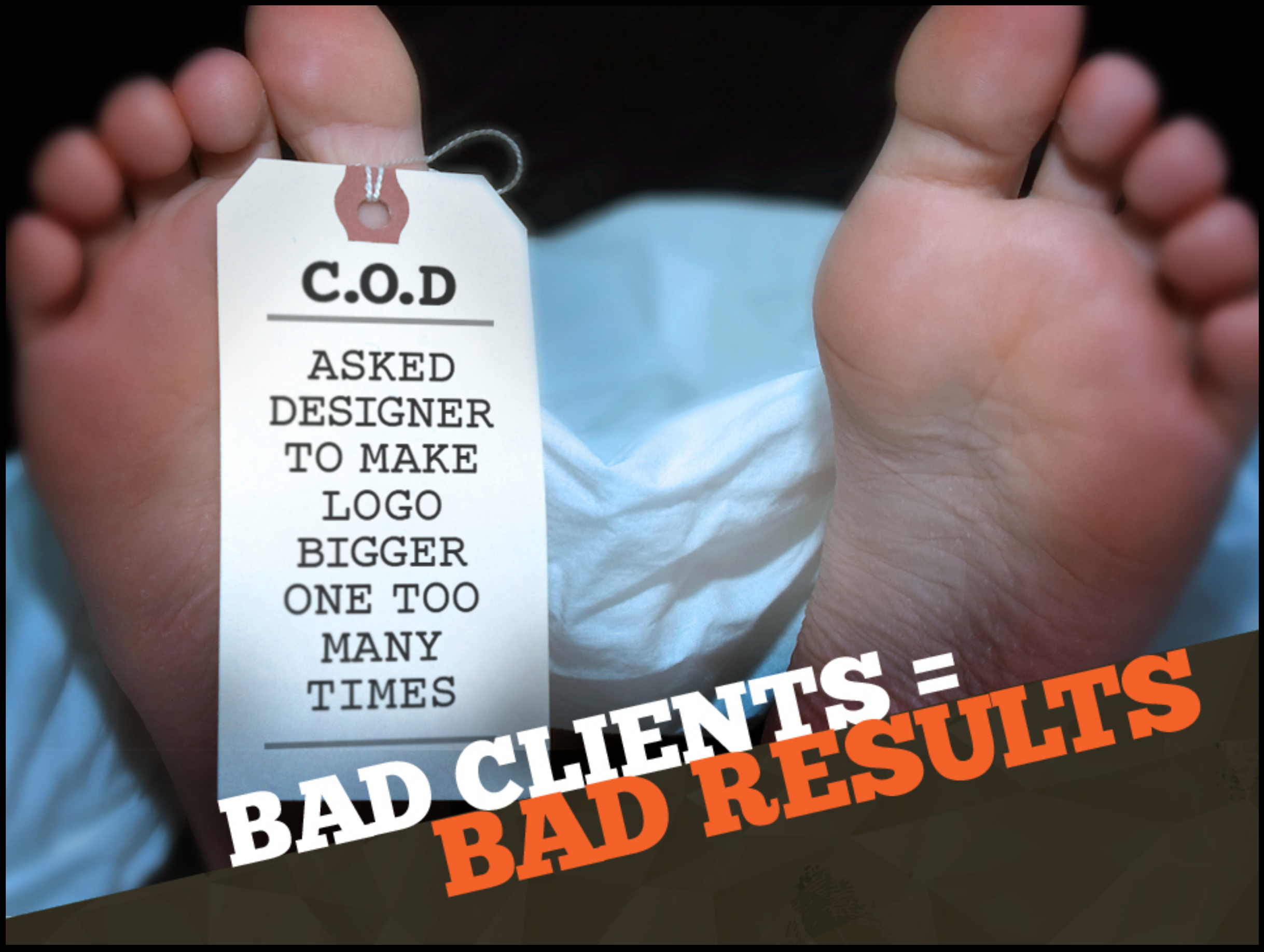
11. Aside from tweeting about your butt, there's a lot of other free online outlets to promote yourself. You can make a Facebook Fan Page, get some videos up on YouTube, start a Wordpress blog or site (or you can do the Tumblr thing too), or get your business profile up on LinkedIn and then do absolutely nothing with it because LinkedIn is kind of useless. I'm on there… but I'd need the bloody Rosetta Stone to decipher what LinkedIn is actually supposed to DO.

12. ProTip #5, Organize everything, especially your client files. As you can see, I'm using the "ABC" method of client organization, though I might start being less specific, as some Buttheads are ALSO Crybabies. When you go freelance, feel free to come up with your own derogatory names for less than stellar clients.

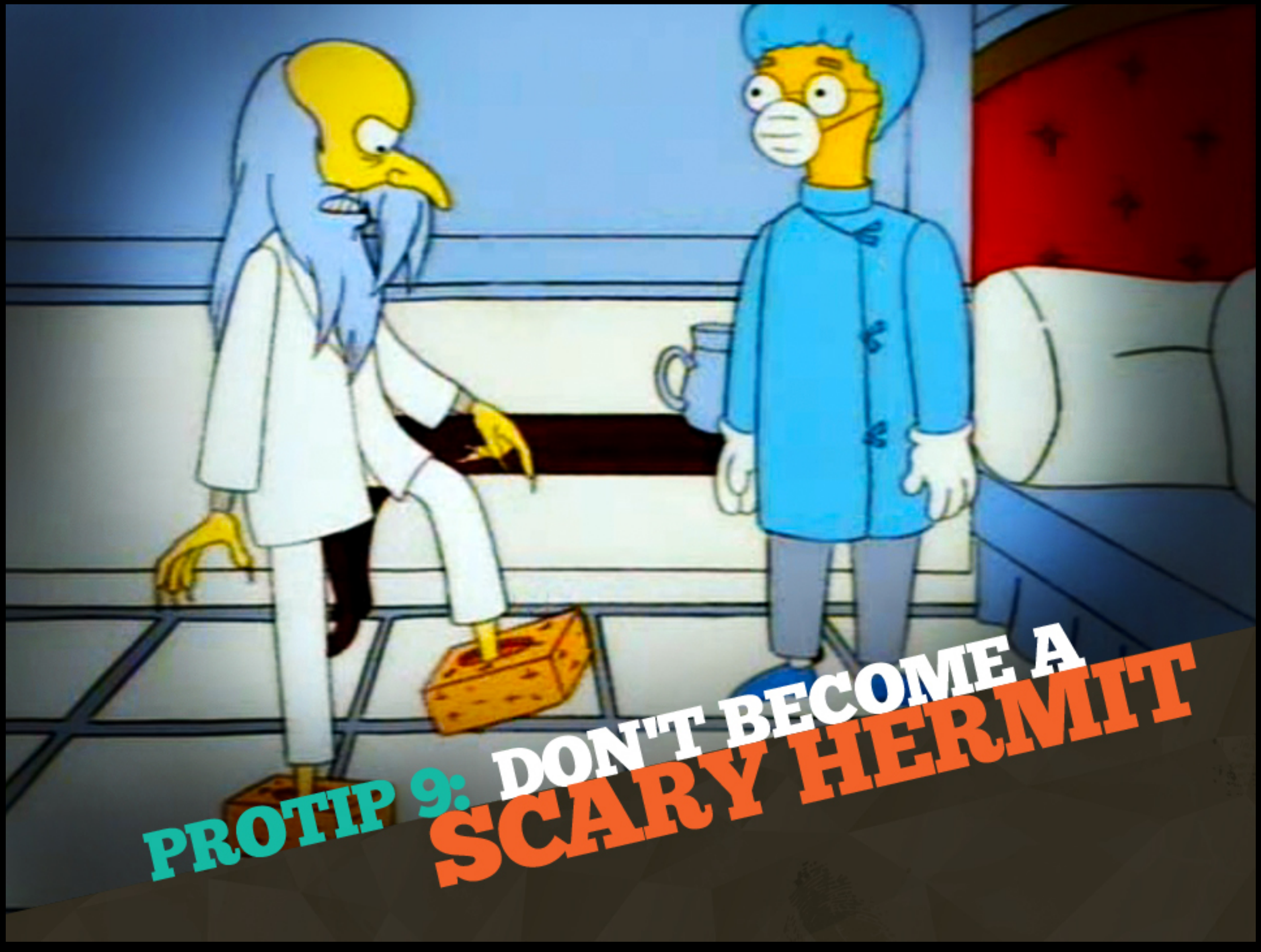
13. This slide was supposed to be about watching industry specific videos to inspire your work. I was going to reference a certain event/video series that rhymes with RedMex, but since they decided to hold an event on the very same night I stand here, they'll get NO promotion from me. Instead, enjoy this selection of horrible tv shows that I entertain myself with while working.

14. Realistic goals are important. You're probably not going to make $100 grand in your first year and you probably shouldn't tongue-kiss Madonna anyways, unless you really like the taste of formaldehyde. Your best bet is to separate your goals into 6 month, 1 year, and 5 year categories. To really feel productive, make a 10 minute goal category. Then you get to pat yourself on the back every time you check your email.

15. This next tip, I actually think is one of the most important things a freelancer can learn. Every now and then, you will take on a client that later ends up in the "Butthead" folder. There's a chance you heard about this person through other freelancers beforehand, or you just had a feeling they were bad news but you thought "Hey, I'm not gonna turn down money, my babies need-a wine". 3 months later, you're still working on their project and it seems like the clumps of hair falling out and clogging your shower drain are getting bigger and bigger.



16. So just say no! Otherwise, you end up with a lot of stress and a lousy product you can't even use in your portfolio. I've worked with a lot of great people over the years, but every 6 months or so I end up working with a happiness vampire. And it would probably be a lot more often if I didn't turn people down now and then.



17. This one is pretty self-explanatory. If you're not careful, working from home can turn you into a cash-poor version of Howard Hughes. You've got to peel yourself out of your office chair once in a while, even if it's just an excuse to put on makeup or change your underwear. So it's good to occasionally change out of your cookie-crumb riddled pyjamas and head out to a local event.

18. There's dozens of professional groups in WInnipeg, many of them are free to join or leech off of. I've been known to suckle off the teat of New Media Manitoba's great seminars and events, attend some of the workshops ACI Manitoba puts on, and have a few drinks with the Secret Handshake crew. I haven't yet been to a Girl Geek Dinner, but they seem awesome, and I hear the GDC puts on this Pikachu thing?

19. This last tip is the most important one, at least for me. You need to fake it until you make it. I, like many creative people, am a person with a certain amount of self-loathing and high standards for myself. So it's important for me to remember that what I tell people becomes a part of who I am. I don't want to be harsh, but no one wants to work with a loser, especially a self-proclaimed one.

20. All cliches aside, it's okay to be humble (not that it's ever worked for me) but make sure you're putting yourself out there. You can't win if you don't play, you'll always miss 100% of the shots you don't take, yada yada yada… no pants. As a final aside, I should have titled this presentation "No Pants Freelance" for the sheer amount of times I said the word "pants". A big thanks goes out to my fiance Nik for taking some of the photos and a huge thanks to you all for listening to my crap.