

A NNC
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A guide for
creative
business
owners

**Never
Not
Creative**

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NNC NEVER NOT A WAY IN: HOW TO HOST A GRADUATE INTERN NNC

CONTENTS

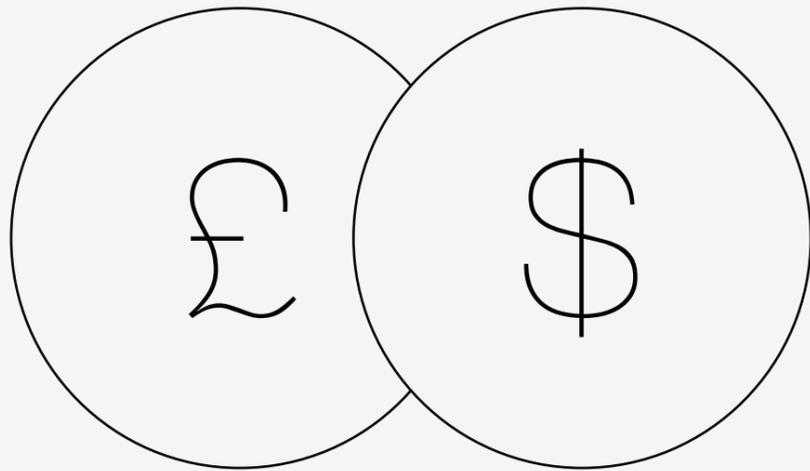
How to host a graduate intern	3
Let's talk about unpaid internships.	4
So what is an internship?	5
Why take on an intern?	6
Managing expectations	8
Be prepared	8
Can I afford an intern?	9
What type of internship?	10
The length of internships	12
A paid, onsite internship	13
An option: an onsite shadowing experience	17
Remote working internship	19
Managing an intern remotely	20
Welcoming an intern	21
What you want from an intern	22
Understanding what you need	23
Introducing the NNC resources	26

1 HOW TO HOST A GRADUATE INTERN

Thank you!

Helping graduates take their first step toward a career in the creative industry is to be applauded. It's great for our industry, and it can be great for your business.

Before we begin, let's talk about unpaid internships.



Working for free is wrong at any point in a career. It's wrong mid career when a client asks for a free pitch and it's wrong at the beginning of a career when an intern asks (or you ask an intern) to work for free.

Unpaid internships are a blight, not just on our industry, but for many industries globally.

They take advantage of those who can not afford to work for free and they disadvantage the vulnerable in our society who all struggle to work for free. It's up to the stronger in our industry to protect the less strong. It's the only way to be build a diverse, vibrant industry.

And did we mention they're **unlawful in Australia**? The Fair Work Ombudsman clearly states graduate interns who produce work must be paid a minimum wage. (This does not include students interning as part of a curriculum).

Think you can't afford an intern? If our business case doesn't persuade, you could always offer a **shadowing experience**.

Sometimes, unpaid internships exist because business owners haven't the time, nor the energy to think through alternatives. That's where this book and the resources on the **Never Not Creative website** can help.

So what is an internship?

An internship is a paid, fixed term role. The aim is to accelerate the learning of an graduate in a real commercial environment.

Both the employer and intern should benefit.

Why take on an intern?

Tertiary courses are jam packed with valuable learnings about how to be a creative. Problem is the limited time available to learn all the information needed. Especially as our industry fractures with more and more skills (like service design, UI and UX to name a few) to teach.

That's why internships are valuable. They're like a finishing school for graduates. A chance to learn real-life industry skills from practising creatives.

A good internship is a win:win

A Learning Experience

Internships should be an opportunity for both the intern and the employer to learn.

The intern gets to work on commercially-valuable work. The employer benefits by giving back to the industry (nurturing young talent), share their knowledge and for some, experience being an employer/manager without a long term commitment.

Internships are valuable for the intern. They offer:

- experience in the 'real world' of a creative business
- knowledge about what business owners expect from employees
- opportunity to hone soft skills, like communication, collaboration and presentation
- the chance to develop specific vocational skills
- confidence through participation and accountability in a work environment
- exposure to clients and budgets.

Internships are also of valuable to a creative business:

- opportunity to give back to the industry – to pay forward
- chance to incorporate diversity into your studio, import a different skillset or economic or social background, even for a short term
- exposure to management for designers who might not get the opportunity to art direct/manage other creatives
- and they can breathe fresh air into a stagnant workforce.

Problem is, there are **good** and **bad** internships.

Good internships

Good internships are a win:win.

The intern learns through a variety of methods, by watching (shadowing), by listening (being mentored) and by doing (playing an active role on client projects).

The creative business designates a mentor for the intern, helps them learn an aspect of the business and then steers them toward filling a valuable role in the business.

The investment of time, and money can be recouped when the intern begins working on billable projects. Trust us, we've done the numbers. Take a look at the business case on page 15.

Not so good internships

Unfortunately, not all creative businesses use their powers for good and some interns take the experience for granted.

Using interns as unpaid labour is not a sustainable business model. And phrases like, "We're busy, let's get an intern in" and "Shit, the intern's here, has anyone got anything for them to do," will no longer cut it.

Nor will the excuse "we just didn't know better".

Similarly, interns who don't turn up on time, or fail to take notes test the most dedicated of employers. Don't set interns up to fail, use our guide to understanding what you want from the internship to find someone perfect for your business.

Managing expectations

To make it easier for employers to understand what's expected when they take on an intern, we've written [Internship Minimum Standards](#).

The standards are aimed at giving emerging talent the best possible start in our industry by not only asking employers like you to sign the pledge, but to deliver on, and go beyond the bare minimum. If you haven't signed the pledge you can do it [here](#).

Be prepared

Creative businesses prepared with an internship program will get the best out of the experience. That's how we can help.

There's a [step-by-step guide](#) on the NNC site to help with everything from onboarding, to ways to manage expectations and share feedback, and how to finish the program well.

Having empathy for your intern is valuable. They will be on a steep learning curve in those first few weeks and it's your role to do alleviate their stress so you both can get as much as possible from the experience. This guide includes tips how best to do that.

The question on everyone's lips ... can I afford an intern?*

THE COST

Recommended: pay minimum wage
\$20.33 per hour plus 10% super

3 months of wages:
\$5,855.04 + 10% super = \$6,440.54

To recoup outlay:
Assume intern is billed at \$90 per hour
\$6,440.54 = 71 hours over 3 months
1.9 hours per 8 hour day

FINANCIAL COMMITMENT
\$6,440.54

THE TIME

Recommended: 3 x 8 hour days x 12 weeks
24 hours x 12 weeks = 288 hours

Recommended productivity level:
40% mentored + 10% shadowing = 144 hours
50% billable = 144 hours

Interns are not mentored 100% of the time...
sometimes they watch (shadowing),
sometimes they are mentored and
sometimes they'll produce billable work

How much billable work to recoup costs?

POSSIBLE BILLINGS

144 hours billed at
graduate level of \$90 per hour

POSSIBLE BILLINGS
\$12,960

*Figures correct in Melbourne, Australia 2021

2 WHAT TYPE OF INTERNSHIP?

The next step is to decide on the type of internship suitable for your business and your team.

Be flexible, there are a few different ways to experience an internship

Internship is a broad term that has different definitions across different industry sectors. What we call an internship others may call a cadetship or a (short) apprenticeship.

NNC recommends internships are:

- 3 days per week over 12 weeks, to allow interns to experience the variety of a creative business
- paid pro rata, based on the minimum wage
- a mixture of experiences made up of (approximately): 10% shadowing others in the business; 40% being actively mentored and 50% producing billable work.

In short, it's hosting a recent graduate in your creative business. How you do that is up to you and your resources — people, projects, finances, and most importantly time.

Above all, a successful internship will take time, and we know that's a precious resource in any business but the more time you put in, the better the result. The good news is, the management of an internship can be spread across the design team.

The other advantage is there's an internship to suit most businesses.

This section covers:

- a paid, onsite internship experience, including a business case demonstrating how this can be a cost-neutral experience
- an unpaid onsite shadowing experience
- a remote working internship experience.

A word about the length of internships

Bottom line

Internships don't have to be over 12 weeks but they should be long enough for you to mentor the graduate before they are expected to be productive.

Before accepting an intern you should be clear about what you are offering.

NNC recommend internships are a mixture of shadowing, mentoring and doing, 3 days per week for 12 weeks. That length of time means the intern can settle in and get the best from the experience.

Not sure what to do in that time? Download [the NNC guide](#) — it's a step by step, week by week guide on how the internship may work.

Here's a summary...

Week 1 is all about on-boarding the intern, helping them understand who does what, and why.

Weeks 2-5 may involve a lot of shadowing (watching and listening); and mentoring (having someone actively explain practices and processes). Hopefully there will be some doing too.

Weeks 5-7 are when interns hit their stride. By now they understand more about your business, work and clients. They will be productive – perhaps a little slower than others but able to take responsibility.

Weeks 8-10 are for honing skills and ensuring you are both getting what you want from the internship. By now interns should understand and be comfortable enough to ask questions to the right person.

Weeks 11-12 are the finishing line. Interns should now be a productive member of staff.

A paid, onsite internship

NNC recommends an internship spans three days per week over 12 weeks.

Three days per weeks gives everyone space to regroup, think about the experience and work independently.

Twelve weeks gives an intern enough time to experience different aspects of a creative business, follow a project from start to delivery, and become a productive member of the team.

In that time, we suggest the day to day activities are a mixture of shadowing, mentoring and producing.

Shadowing

We recommend shadowing constitutes around 10% of an internship experience.

Shadowing is observing others performing a task. It's what trainee surgeons do in an operating theatre – looking over someone's shoulder to see what they do. It's a passive activity but it doesn't mean nothing is gained. Many learnings can be had by observing, listening and taking copious notes to read/discuss later.

There are heaps of shadowing possibilities in a creative business, from watching designers solve a problem to 'fly on the wall' experiences during meetings, briefings and presentations through to accompanying others to offsite activities.

Shadowing can also work in a studio where the design team are working remotely. [More about this here.](#)

Mentoring

Where shadowing is all about observing or learning through observation, mentoring is about listening, questioning and being guided.

The mentoring part of the internship can make or break someone's career. It's where you can instill confidence in their ability and their potential. But no pressure ;)

Actively mentoring takes time, but it's a task that can be shared across the design team. Mentoring includes delegating with intent and being available to answer questions so interns don't ever flounder for long.

Delegating with intent

Put yourself in their shoes. Interns will often not know what they need to know, especially under pressure of a deadline. Debriefing is a skill learned. Be kind, especially at the beginning of the internship.

Delegate by communicating with clarity. Ensure you have the time to explain clearly what you are asking them to do, and by when. Nudge them to take notes, or a recording, so they can refer back to the information as needed.

Being available to answer questions

It's not realistic to be available all the time, but interns will have questions, so active mentoring means making yourself available for periods of time.

It may mean working alongside them on a task you can do that won't suffer from disruption, or it may mean identifying specific times during the morning/afternoon you will be available for questions.

Doing – producing billable work

It won't happen overnight, but it will happen. With assistance, interns will become productive members of your design team.

The business case for internships

This business case on the following spread explains how an internship does not have to cost a business financially, in fact, with the right mentoring, an intern can return a profit, and then some.

A business case for taking on an intern is laid out on the next page spread. It proves, with the right help, an intern can be a financial return on investment. (And you shouldn't ever ignore the valuable social return to your business.)

The experience of working on 'real' work in a 'real' environment complete with constraints, interruptions and deadlines, is invaluable. Working alongside other designers, being able to ask questions, observe others and overhear solutions is like learning on steroids.

Around week 5 interns will be able to work independently on paid work, but they will need active mentoring. As the internship progresses, so will their skill, but as recent graduates they will still need to be helped and guided to deliver on time and on brief.

Ensure you, or someone else in your team has time to check in with your intern regularly. It is not appropriate to ask them to work independently to perform the task. As much as it sounds tantalising, that's not mentoring and it's not an optimum way to learn.

It can lead to them losing confidence and you facing a re-do.

An option: an onsite shadowing experience

Shadowing is one of the best ways for new graduates to see inside a working creative business and get a grasp on the culture, energy, expectations and environment.

Unfortunately many grads have few opportunities to see inside a creative business. With constraints on teaching time, insurances and contacts, many don't actually see inside a studio until they've graduated and going for that first interview. This leads to a bumpy first few weeks/months while they get to grips with expectations.

Shadowing is a great option because it can be purely observational. It gives a reference point to compare future experiences and helps build soft skills while exploring how education translates to a valuable workplace skill.

For the shadowed it's also a great option because it requires little planning and little change to your normal routine. You basically go about your day with a graduate tagging along for the ride.

You can choose to engage with the intern or not — they would have been briefed about what to expect — their job is to purely observe with the possibility of asking a question when and if it's appropriate.

Shadowing is not an internship, nor is it mentorship — it's something different. If it was to sit on a scale, shadowing would sit on the opposite end to internships, in effort as well as expectations.

Generally shadowing may span over a few days or a few weeks and is rarely a paid gig. It can be the first step, before a mentoring experience or a great alternative for a micro studio lacking the capacity to take on an intern.

Shadowing experiences may include observing:

the variety of roles and responsibilities in a creative business // a client briefing // a designer briefing // the research component of a brief done before the design phase // a presentation or pitch // a photoshoot // a print check // a WIP meeting // Friday drinks.

Remote working internship

By now, we're all attuned to the advantages, and disadvantages of working remotely. Some creative businesses have embraced the model and are not even contemplating a return to the studio.

Maybe you're one of the many creative businesses planning a mixture of collaborating onsite then 'outputting' remotely?

Good news is, you can still take on an intern. Infact, mentoring a remote intern might be an easier option for a micro business.

Added to that, remote working is inclusive – you can include interns from rural and regional areas — graduates often isolated and overlooked for internships because of the tyranny of distance.

An internship may be the solution one of the challenges of remote working: maintaining the momentum and creativity of your design team. Long zoom meetings can suck out energy levels, and make it more difficult to collaborate, so the tendency is to work as a solo.

That's where introducing an intern is a great solution. It focusses everyone's attention and the fresh energy lifts spirits – especially if mentoring responsibilities are shared among the team.

Managing an intern remotely

The mixture of intern activities: shadowing, mentoring and billable work is still possible when working remotely. Consider:

- share the mentoring by introducing a buddy system around the design team (mentoring)
- (virtually or physically) inviting the intern into your home studio space(s) to show your setup (mentoring)
- including the mentor in all WIP meetings and sharing files (mentoring)
- include the intern to listen in on zoom meetings with clients, both in the briefing and presentation (shadowing)
- explaining how you cost a project by sharing your CMS screen (mentoring)
- giving the intern a role in the project team with structured touchpoints over zoom (billable hours)
- schedule time to intentionally 'look over the interns shoulder' at their computer in the same way you would do if you walked by on the way to make a coffee (mentoring)
- give your designers a management role to supervise the intern's role in a project (mentoring)
- assign tasks to the intern at WIP meetings much as you would a graduate designer.

Welcoming an intern into your community

Doesn't matter why type of internship you offer: paid, shadowing or remote, it's important to welcome the intern into your community.

You can reduce feelings of isolation by suggesting ways interns can socialise with other employees — especially important if everyone is working remotely.

Consider:

- scheduling a daily morning coffee meet-up before the workday starts. Encourage people to join the video call once a week or every day, and keep conversation light and non-work-related
- assign each intern a buddy. A buddy isn't a mentor or manager. Rather, their role is to be encouraging and friendly so that the intern feels connected to the team
- start any video meetings with a five-minute check-in during which you discuss non-work topics
- plan post-work happy hours
- make meetings fun by having themes
- if budget allows, send everyone a gift basket with snacks to enjoy together on camera. Sharing the same food makes people feel especially connected.
- include the intern in a virtual book club or movie group.

3 WHAT YOU WANT FROM AN INTERN

The best results will come from understanding the type of intern you want to host, and then interviewing candidates with an open mind.

Understanding what you want from the internship

An internship should be a win:win.

As a business owner you're offering an opportunity to a young graduate, but don't forget, there's heaps you can learn from a graduate.

Graduate interns have so much to offer a studio – the skill is in understanding what your business aims to get from of the activity and then use that information to strategically choose an intern.

Are you offering an internship...

... for altruistic reasons?

It's a great way to help graduates get a foothold in the industry, give back and to share knowledge.

Why not make it a win:win by selecting an intern who will expand your thinking and increase diversity.

Consider graduates from:

- minority groups
- a different culture or demographic to your existing employees
- rural and regional areas
- an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island background.

... to teach management skills?

Mentoring/directing/managing others is a valuable skill for designers but not one easily attained in a small business with limited scope for advancement.

Hosting an intern can include the whole studio (for example rotating the buddy system) to give all designers the opportunity to learn how to delegate and direct others.

The financial process of paying and billing the intern could be transparent so everyone understands the cost and the importance of recouping the cost. That could lead to more discussion around productivity measurements.

... to bring fresh energy to your team?

Boredom is a real problem in small creative businesses.

It's hard to keep good designers when there's limited chance for advancement. Added to that, a stable of loyal clients can often mean repetitive briefs.

Hosting an intern can help keep good staff, it can breathe fresh energy, especially if the team of designers have worked together for a long time.

Bottom line, mentoring would add to the skillset to your designers.

... to increase the morale of your team?

Mentoring is about having empathy for those trying to get a foothold in our industry.

If empathy is one of your values or part of your studio culture, hosting an intern is a perfect fit.

Added to that, most of us take pride in sharing skills, so that can increase the morale of your whole studio.

Hosting an intern is a chance to talk about mental health/burn out/what we need to do to stay fresh.

And don't overlook the reputational gain had by telling clients about your paid internship program.

Are you offering an internship...

...to build a sustainable business?

A strong, robust creative business needs an entry tunnel for fresh ideas/new people and that doesn't always happen in studio/agencies with a loyal client base and a stable base of designers.

A strategy of hosting interns can ensure a constant supply of new ideas and new ways of solving old problems.

Added to that, internships help build a sustainable creative business. It is in everyone's interest to lift the skill set of all graduates so they join our industry understanding hourly rates and the value design delivers.

... to increase the skills of your design team?

Interns not only bring fresh ideas and new thoughts into a studio, they can plug a competence gap and share new skills.

The design industry is fractured – each year new design disciplines appear making it hard for employed designers to keep up with new skillsets.

Graduates may have been exposed to many of the 'new' design disciplines like motion graphics, CX, UX, whereas designers who graduated years ago may not.

Use this chance to import new knowledge into an older team.

... to 'trial' employing a junior designer?

Hosting an intern is a great opportunity to trial a graduate designer without committing to a fulltime staff member.

There's two advantages: firstly the trial happens in a 'real world situation' but with an escape clause embedded.

Secondly, knowing when to hire is a challenge for all 'young' studios. Internships are a chance to trial managing/delegating and paying another creative, without a long-term commitment.

... on a limited budget?

Even though an internship can be **revenue-neutral** (or even return a profit) if a business doesn't have the earnings, it's difficult to manage cashflow to pay an intern.

In that case, all is not lost – take a look at **shadowing**. Shadowing can return all the value of an internship without the pressure.

4 INTRODUCING THE NNC RESOURCES

There's a host of valuable resources online for creative business owners or managers wanting to host an intern. The first two steps are on the next page.

Step 1: sign the pledge to meet the minimum standards for interns

Be prepared, be reasonable, pay fairly and understand your responsibilities. The **Minimum Standards** were developed by the Internships Change Group with expertise and advice provided by Interns Australia.

Step 2: download the Never Not Better Internships guides for employers and interns

The **guides** have been developed by a collaborative team of educators, designers, leaders, lawyers and students and they are yours to own, to download and to use.

The guide for employers covers the following sections:

1. What to expect as an employer
2. Preparation form
3. Onboarding: looking after your intern on their first day/week
4. Mid-program advice
5. Mid-program feedback form
6. The finish line advice
7. Post-program feedback form.

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