

## **Ben & Anvil - design matters**

***The Ben & Anvil studio was launched by husband and wife team, Daniel and Ailbhe Cantwell. It hit the ground running. Here's how.***

Ben & Anvil won the Audience Choice award at the Dublin Animation Film Festival in October and had a short film screened at nine film festivals globally. It's also a finalist for Best Design at the Accenture Digital Media Awards, a finalist at the PromaxBDA European Awards in March 2016, and is nominated for an international A'Design Award in Italy in April.

### **What do you do - how would you describe what you do?**

[Ben & Anvil](#) is a creative post production studio, offering animation, motion graphics and visual effects services. For motion graphics and animations we offer a wide range of styles in both 2D and 3D, to cover corporate idents and stings to animated infographics or animated short films. Ben & Anvil is also a full-service visual effects studio for the film and TV industry, and we offer VFX consultancy.

### **Is this your first business - what did you do before?**

We set up the business in 2015 as we felt that together we had a creative vision that needed to be expressed. Daniel worked for many years in other creative studios, on award-winning children's television shows and other high-profile visual effects work. My own experience in team supervision and business administration meant I was suited to look after the business side, in terms of administration, marketing, communications and project management. This division of labour has been really important for us, ensuring all aspects of the business are covered. We felt we had the knowledge and experience to be able to make a success of the company, but more importantly we had the drive and dedication to see it through. We are both very determined.



**Can you describe what it was like setting up and launching this business, what were the major hurdles, if any, were there any surprises on the startup journey?**

It takes a lot of guts setting up a new business, and Ben & Anvil was no exception. You have to put your money where your mouth is, and that can be daunting when it's your own money. We initially put our own savings into the business which carried us through until we got a few jobs. We got a couple of small grants from the council when we set up, which was a great help too. It was tough when the business was just in the planning stages, as we had taken a big leap of faith and it was too early to tell if it would pay off. But once we launched the website in September 2015 we knew we had made the right decision. We put a tremendous amount of effort into planning our business - I would say our journey has so far been 99% planning, 1% chance. With careful planning, you can put yourself in the right place at the right time to take advantage of an opportunity. A quote from Thomas Edison is our motto - "Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks a lot like work."

### **You are up for many awards, what does this mean for you?**

It's fantastic to get recognition this early on in our business. We think we offer something a bit different, and our successes so far have confirmed for us that we made the right decision in setting up our own studio. Our emphasis on design within each project has helped us to stand out from the crowd. It's great to know we are on the right track when it comes to our designs.

### **Who do you admire in your industry?**

It's a competitive business, so we admire any creative studios that have managed to set up and keep their doors open. If we were to name names, we hugely admire what Cartoon Saloon has done for Ireland's reputation in animation and also Screen Scene for the quality of its visual effects. It's great to have companies like them as representatives for Ireland on a global scale.

### **Who do you admire in business in general?**

We admire anyone who has a creative vision and can stay true to it.

### **What is your favourite digital device (e.g. phone, laptop, tablet)?**

We are huge fans of the iPhone - it just makes life so much easier, especially when you are out of the office. And drawing tablets like the Wacom and Centiq are indispensable in our industry, although the new iPad Pro with the Apple Pencil might be a serious contender.

### **What are your favourite apps (if any)?**

Google Drive for work-related stuff, Procreate for drawing and Spotify for keeping us sane at our desks.

### **What one piece of advice would you give to people thinking of entering your industry?**

Know your weaknesses and team up with other people who have what you need. I think that is good advice for all industries, though.

### **How does the evolving nature of technology affect what you do?**

Technology changes constantly, and software keeps getting better, but the tools cannot do all the work for you. Projects do not have to be overly complex, or using only the latest technologies. Good design is timeless, and relies on balance and composition. Seamless visual effects are a question of training, experience, and a good eye, although new advancements certainly help.

### **What inspires you?**

Inspiration can come from anywhere - a conversation, a walk, a gallery or museum. The key is making a note of it so you don't forget.