



# The Business of Origami

## Tung Ken Lam

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# The Business of Origami

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# Outline

- 1 Context and strategy
  - Context
  - Strategy
- 2 Options
  - Make / buy / sell things
  - Write books
  - Teach / run workshops
  - Consultancy / commissions
  - Creator / influencer
- 3 Decision making
  - Earnings
  - Ansoff matrix
  - Give up the day job?



# United Kingdom earnings (GBP)

**Median annual earnings** for full-time employees who had been in their job for at least a year were **37,430** for the tax year ending on 5 April 2024

[www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/  
bulletins/annualsurveyofhoursandearnings/2024](http://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/annualsurveyofhoursandearnings/2024)

## Minimum hourly rates

National Living Wage (aged 21+): **11.44**

National Minimum Wage (at least school leaving age): **6.40** for apprentice

<https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates>



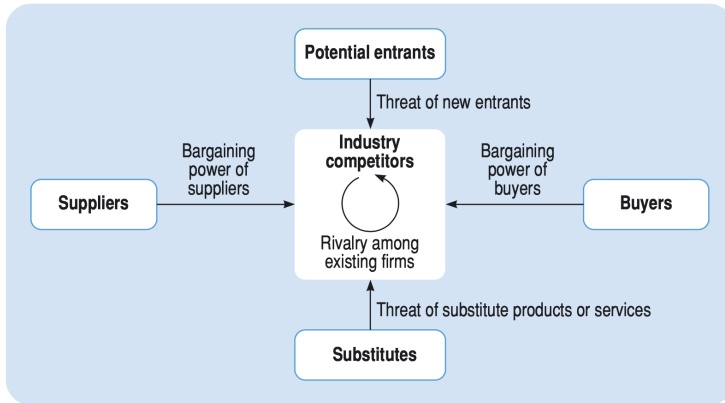
# Strategies for competitive advantage

- 1 Rare
- 2 Appropriable
- 3 Imitation-proof
- 4 Durable

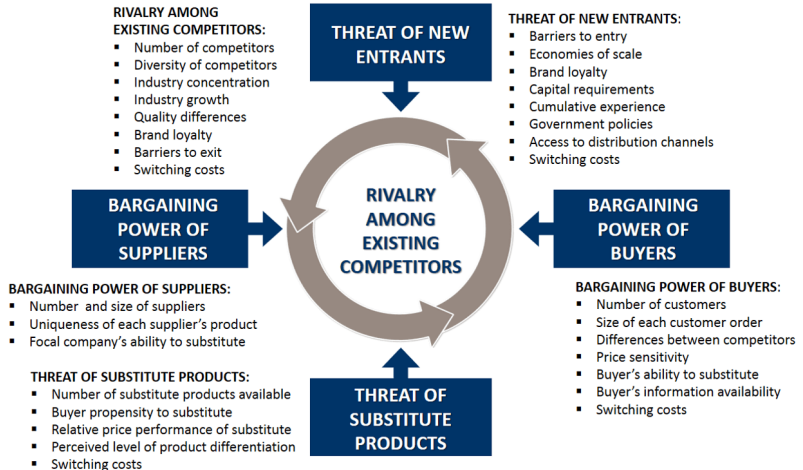
When everyone has the same advantage, it is no longer an advantage.



# Porter's five forces



# Porter's five forces



# Evaluation of strategy

When everyone has the same advantage,  
it is no longer an advantage.

Evaluate using De Bono's PMI method  
(Plus, Minus, Interesting)





# Make / buy / sell things

Product/service: Paper, supplies, jewellery, art works

Customers: origami enthusiasts, galleries/art buyers, collectors

## P

- Well-known business model
- Established infrastructure (pay, ship, etc)

## M

- Competition (commodification)
- Perceived value
- Time-consuming

## I

- Gaps in market?
- Marketing / Promotion is key



# Write books

Product/service: Manuscript, artwork, photographs

Customers: Publishers, editors, readers, gift-givers

P	M	I
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Established business</li><li>Prestige and validation (traditional publishing)</li><li>Low barrier to entry (self-publish)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Time (1500 hrs)</li><li>Low returns</li><li>Low barriers to entry</li><li>Small market unless mass market</li><li>Bargaining power of publishers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Electronic media and new developments</li><li>Resurgence of physical books?</li><li>Reasons other than money</li></ul>



# Teach / run workshops

Product/service: Teaching and running workshops for the public and specific audiences

Customers: Event organisers, participants, funders

## P

- Service that cannot be copied easily
- 'Experiences are the future'

## M

- Low barrier to entry
- Low rates?
- Exhausting?

## I

- Customised workshops
- Online / physical
- Make trend
- 'Ikea effect'



# Consultancy / commissions

Product/service: bespoke services (and products)

Customers: clients of all kinds

## P

- Unique and interesting work
- Higher rates possible

## M

- Hard to find work: who knows you?
- Secretive

## I

- All kinds of possibilities: packaging, deployables, entertainment
- Negotiating with clients: avoid free consultancy



# Creator / influencer

Product/service: entertainment for consumers

Customers: Social media firms: 'the algorithm', consumers

## P

- Low barrier to entry
- Your choice of content

## M

- The algorithm
- 'Digital homesteading'
- Fickle audience

## I

- Sponsorship and donations platforms: Kofi, Patreon, Kickstarter, etc?
- Beyond big tech?



Context and strategy

Options

Decision making

Make / buy / sell things

Write books

Teach / run workshops

Consultancy / commissions

Creator / Influencer

# Other?



# Artists' industry rates

New graduate, day rate with 5k overheads pa: **204**

10 years' experience, day rate with 15k overheads pa: **377**

For artists with more than 10 years' experience, their rate will depend on **other external factors** such as their **art world track record** and/or **unique attributes and market forces**.

<https://www.a-n.co.uk/resource/guidance-on-fees-and-day-rates-for-visual-artists>



## Writers' industry rates

National newspapers typically pay...**25p and 50p a word...**  
Regional newspapers can pay an abysmal **60 per 1000-word**  
feature or **up to 120 a day...**

One freelance colleague who writes regularly for women's weekly magazines pointed out that the **rate had gone down** considerably – from **500** for a DPS in 2019 to around **300** in 2023: '**Nothing ever seems to go up** and, if you make a fuss, it's suggested that there is **always someone else willing to do it for less,**'

Georgina Fuller (2024). 'How to write features for the national and regional press' in Alysoun Owen (ed.) Writers' & Artists' Yearbook 2025, A & C Black





# My books



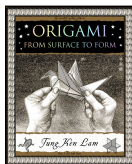
2016



2018



2021



2022



2023

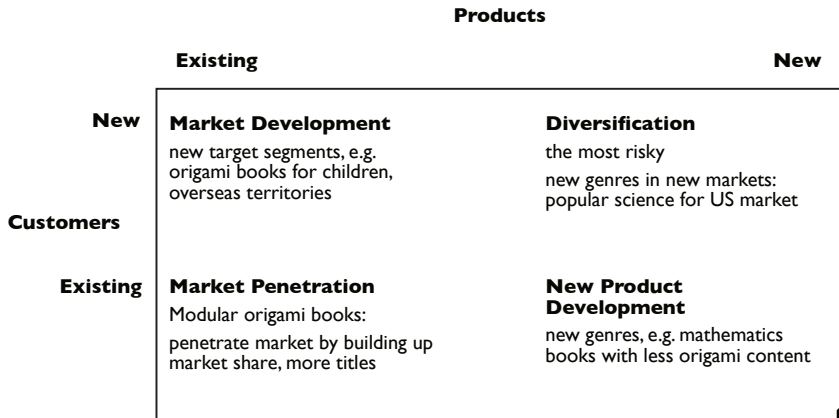


2023

[foldworks.net/books](https://foldworks.net/books)



# Ansoff matrix



# Give up the day job?

**‘You can’t hold down a job in a bank,  
and be Yoshizawa in the evening.’**

Paul Jackson (quoted in The Paper, 54, Spring 1996)

Keep the day job:

- **Diversify** income sources
- You can say **‘No’** to work you don’t want to do
- Keep some things for yourself (**don’t monetise everything**)
- Turning your hobby into your job means **losing your hobby?**

