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## Young entrepreneur has designs on client service

Nishad Majumdar  
Staff writer

(May 29, 2006) — Scott Reeves' business, Mr. Fussy Contracting, has a colorful name. But even after four years of running his business, the 54-year-old didn't have a logo to communicate that.

"You want everybody to remember the name," Reeves said, "because everybody in my business has names like 'Bill's Remodeling.' That's your first impression."

So he went to Cristina Eagan, the founder of another new company with a catchy name, Button Down Graphics and Designs. Eagan started her Irondequoit company to help small- and medium-sized businesses with their design needs.

"Design helps people to understand more about a business and in essence makes them more successful from it," Eagan said. "You can have a brochure and say here's what we do. But if you add some color and add some personality into some put-together package, it's telling their story."

Eagan, 24, takes pride in seeing her clients' faces light up when she shows them a new logo, letterhead, brochure or Web site.

"I like it when there's that emotional attachment to a logo and you see it in people's eyes that they really like it," she said.

Reeves said when he came to Eagan he had some vague ideas on what type of logo he wanted.

"She nailed it right on the head," Reeves said. "She took my real abstract ideas and came up with a physical logo that was tremendous."

Reeves' customers have taken notice, too.

"The feedback I'm getting from my customers is, 'It's like you know exactly how to run your business,'" he said.

Eagan, a native of the Rochester area, graduated from Rochester Institute of Technology's new media design program in 2004, gaining expertise in graphic and multimedia design. But as an RIT student, Eagan didn't think starting a business would be a serious option.

"When I thought of designing on your own, it always had to be that you're freelancing," Eagan said. "When you tell people you're a freelancer, there's two connotations. One, which is probably more common around here, is 'OK, she's working somewhere else probably, and this is a very temporary state.'"

Or two, she said, if you're in a bigger city, people assume that all freelancers are doing well.

While she didn't mind freelancing for about a year after graduating, Eagan said "getting that piece of paper that says I'm a business tells people that I'm very serious about it."

"It's to give that look of success, that look of stability to people that they're not like, 'Oh, here's a kid fresh out of college.'"

Many of her former RIT classmates dashed away to design jobs in major cities. Eagan decided to stay put.

Currently, she's operating Button Down out of her home office in Irondequoit. Her only major expenditures have come from purchasing the pricey software that is standard among designers.

"A lot of people want to go do the big-city thing, which is great," Eagan said. "But I did want to stay around here, which probably made it more difficult. But at the same time, it did open up different possibilities."

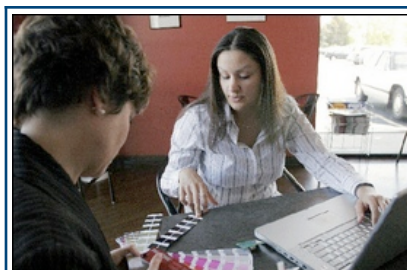
Things have been rolling along. In several months, Eagan has built a list of clients ranging from small businesses to nonprofit organizations. She seeks out many of her clients through pure networking and word of mouth.

Kent Winchester, who founded the Rock Ventures rock-climbing facility about 12 years ago, has been refocusing his business from recreation to team-building. His logo needed to convey that new purpose.

"She's really good at asking questions and is really familiar with what we do now and where we want to go," Winchester said.

While Eagan's youth might scare some clients away, she earned plenty of respect from Melissa Geska, who commissioned Eagan to design some of the products for Geska's new direct-sales business, The Dream Group.

"She is above and beyond the best designer I've come across, and her being so young — it's kind of surprising," Geska said.



MEGAN DAILOR staff photographer  
At a Webster café, Button Down Graphics and Designs founder and RIT alumna Cristina Eagan, 24, shows color swatches to Melissa Geska, left, who commissioned Eagan to design some of the products for Geska's new direct-sales business.

Day in Photos

### Tips

Cristina Eagan offers these tips to other young entrepreneurs and graphic designers:

- Listen carefully and closely to your clients. When you pay attention in the beginning of the design process, both you and the client will be content — if not thrilled — with the results.
- Always be professional, and take your reputation seriously. You can be an extremely creative and talented person, but without respect from your clients and peers you will find yourself without any projects to be creative on.
- Seek out relevant resources that help you strengthen your weaknesses. The *Business Side of Creativity* by Cameron S. Foote has helped Eagan avoid some potential disasters.
- Design for your clients, not for trends. Each business you work with wants a unique solution. Trendy design is awe-inspiring and exciting, but the novelty soon wears off. So be selective when you choose to follow design trends.
- If a potential client asks you to work on speculation and will pay you only if he or she likes the finished product, decline the request immediately. You run too many risks, and your reputation, as well as the reputation of the design industry, is compromised if you accept such a request.

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A designer at heart, Eagan is learning about how to run a business in good humor. For example, she admitted that she might be a little reluctant to hire employees even as her business grows. She would miss being involved in the design process.

"It's hard for me to think of myself as only a designer or only a businesswoman, just because I think of myself as both," she said.

"It would be hard to hire a designer and say, 'Hey, you handle the design,' because I would really miss it."

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