

CASE STUDY

Consulting and Online Publishing for Architects

BUSINESS MODEL Consulting & Online Publishing
COMPANY ArchSmarter
FOUNDER Michael Kilkelly

The screenshot displays the ArchSmarter website interface. At the top, the ArchSmarter logo is centered, with the tagline "Helping Architects and Designers Work Smarter, Not Harder." Below this, three course cards are presented in a grid. Each card includes the course title, the instructor's name (Michael Kilkelly), the price, a brief description, and a "View Course" button. The courses are: "Learning Dynamo" for \$249.00, "Mastering Revit Macros" for \$349.00, and "Revit Data Masterclass" for \$250.00. The background of the website is a teal color with faint architectural drawings.

Course Title	Instructor	Price	Description	Action
Learning Dynamo	Michael Kilkelly	\$249.00	Learn how to automate Revit the easy way and save lots of time!	View Course
Mastering Revit Macros	Michael Kilkelly	\$349.00	Learn practical programming skills to automate Revit fast and effectively.	View Course
Revit Data Masterclass	Michael Kilkelly	\$250.00	Maximize Your Building Information	View Course



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Business Description

Michael Kilkelly runs two businesses: Space Command and ArchSmarter.

Space Command, founded in 2012, is an architecture and consulting firm in Middletown, CT. The business is focussed on designing intimate spaces using traditional materials in innovative ways.

“Work smarter, not harder” is the slogan of Michael’s website ArchSmarter, founded in 2014. ArchSmarter’s goal is to help architects and designers work more productively by leveraging technology and so increase efficiency. The site provides high-quality content on productivity, software customization and product reviews.

Founder Background

Michael Kilkelly received his Bachelor of Architecture from Norwich University in 1995 and his Master of Science in Design and Computation from MIT in 1999.

After school he worked for a number of firms in the Boston area and then in Los Angeles. Michael was interested in trying out different types of work so he spent some time at a landscape architecture office and even an Internet startup in the late 90s. He always came back to architecture though.

Michael wanted to start his own firm since he was in architecture school. The turning point occurred in 2008 when he was working at Frank Gehry's office in Los Angeles. The economic climate in the US was starting to take a turn for the worse. Michael was working on a large project at the time – there were over 70 in the office working on the same project. All of a sudden, the client put the project on hold. It was a shock. The team was in the middle of construction documents. There wasn't enough other work in the office to support 70 people so everyone knew layoffs were imminent.

Michael was fortunate and kept his job. However, a lot of his good, experienced friends and colleagues were let go. It wasn't the firm's fault. Things were bad for the entire industry. But Michael realized over the course of that year, as more and more people were let go, that he wanted to be responsible for his own livelihood. Employment wasn't guaranteed. He rather wanted to take his chances and build something on his own.

To Michael, this actually seemed like the less risky option.

Michael started devouring business books and learning more about sales and marketing. He never had any formal business training to this point so he took it on himself to learn as much as he could. Josh Kaufman's *The Personal MBA* was a great resource and fundamentally changed the way Michael thought about running his own firm.

In 2012, Michael's wife got a job offer in New England. They had two kids at the time and were spending most of their vacations traveling back to Boston, where we're both from. To Michael it seemed like a good opportunity to be close to family while striking out on his own.

He had a great relationship with Gehry Partners and was able to continue on as a consultant which turned out to be really beneficial. It allowed Michael to have consistent income through the consulting work while he built up Space Command and ArchSmarter. He still does work with them today, some four years later.

Business Model Analysis

Michael has an interesting hybrid business model consisting of Space Command and ArchSmarter.

In total his two businesses provide seven different income streams. ArchSmarter's five revenue streams are online courses, consulting, software add-ins, freelance writing and affiliate marketing.

Space Command has two main revenue streams: client projects and expert witness services. The latter came about by chance after Michael was contacted by attorneys who needed an expert witness in a lawsuit related to the topic of BIM (Building Information Modeling).

ArchSmarter's business model is focussed on selling information and content. This type of business is highly scalable because his online courses only need to be created once and can be sold over and over again. The key to growing this business is to increase website traffic. However, creating courses and building up website traffic is very time intensive.

Michael has been very strategic in terms of his growth strategy. While he is building up ArchSmarter he continues to do consulting and client projects to supplement his income. In the long-term his goal is to have a 50/50 split between ArchSmarter and Space Command.

KEY PARTNERS	KEY ACTIVITIES	VALUE PROPOSITION	CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP	CUSTOMER SEGMENTS
<p><u>ArchSmarter</u></p> <p>Online publications related to architecture and design</p> <p><u>Space Command</u></p> <p>Planning teams, statisticians, developers</p>	<p><u>ArchSmarter</u></p> <p>Writing, content production, audience building</p> <p><u>Space Command</u></p> <p>Client acquisition, architectural modelling and execution</p>	<p><u>ArchSmarter</u></p> <p>Helping architects and designers work smarter, not harder with time-saving tools and targeted training that increases effectiveness and efficiency.</p> <p><u>Space Command</u></p> <p>Designing more intimate spaces with thoughtful function and aesthetic detail using traditional materials in innovative ways.</p>	<p><u>ArchSmarter</u></p> <p>Direct relationship with readers and customers facilitated through digital content and email subscriptions.</p> <p><u>Space Command</u></p> <p>Direct relationships with clients to facilitate their architectural goals.</p>	<p><u>ArchSmarter</u></p> <p>Architects Engineers Designers</p> <p><u>Space Command</u></p> <p>Architecture clients</p>
COST STRUCTURE		REVENUE STREAMS		
<p><u>ArchSmarter</u></p> <p>Web hosting, marketing tools, customer acquisition</p> <p><u>Space Command</u></p> <p>Client acquisition, time invested in projects</p>		<p><u>ArchSmarter</u></p> <p>Online courses, consulting, Software add-ins, freelance writing, affiliate marketing</p> <p><u>Space Command</u></p> <p>Client projects, expert witness service</p>		

Highlights, Resources and Tips from the Interview

Benefits of a hybrid business model (10:35)

- “It’s given me the ability to ramp the design side up more slowly and also to test things out in at least terms of coming out with an approach and marketing strategy.”
- “It means I haven’t had to rely on that income, there’s additional income coming in through consulting and courses.”

Tips for architects who want to start a business on the side (12:00)

- “The one tip is to just start and not worry about the metrics”.
- “The hardest thing is to start, to put that first piece of whatever it is out there video, podcast, blog post. It doesn’t have to be perfect, no one is going to read it at least in the beginning. You can learn as you go and grow. Most people say “I wish I had started sooner”.

Most effective marketing strategies (15:28)

- “One has been putting out content consistently but it’s a slow growth. It takes a while to get your numbers up there.”
- “I struck up a content partnerships with ArchDaily, very beneficial in terms of growth.”

- “Partnering up with sites that are bigger than you allows you to get your message out there.”

Email marketing strategies (17:00)

- There are four main pieces to an email marketing strategy: website, email list, lead magnet and a newsletter follow-up strategy.
- Opportunities come up from content creation and authority. Michael was approached by attorneys for expert witness work. It only came about because of perceived authority and his content on ArchSmarter.

Creating online courses (25:15)

- It takes a lot longer than I thought.
- Recording, editing, marketing, sales pages.
- Michael started out with a very elaborate course consisting of seven hours of video. In hindsight, he would have started out with a pilot course taught through GoToWebinar. He’s been following this strategy now to test out feedback for new content. He has also focussed more on creating mini courses (1-1.5 hours on a specific topic).

Pricing lessons (30:40)

- Michael started selling one of his digital products for \$49 and later changed it to “pay what you want”. You can download it for free or name your price. Surprisingly, he has made five times as much by changing it to “pay what you want”.

Tools to create and sell online courses (31:13)

- Michael uses thinkific (<https://www.thinkific.com/>) to host and sell his online courses.
- Another alternative he has tried is Teachable (<https://teachable.com/>).

Website tips and tools for architects (33:55)

- Michael’s first version of ArchSmarter was run on WordPress and hosted by HostGator. He later moved over to the Rainmaker platform (<http://rainmakerplatform.com/>).

Michael reveals details on his income streams (37:50)

- Michael’s income streams include: consulting, online courses, software, affiliate marketing, freelance writing, clients, expert witness work.
- He estimates that 65% of his income is coming from consulting at the moment. The remaining 35% are generated from courses and the other income sources. His goal is to create an income split of 50/50 between consulting and the remaining areas.

Benefits of selling consulting services (40:35)

- “It’s kind of a like having business training wheels.”
- Entrepreneur mindset, opportunities and how to get started (41:43)
- Michael provides tips on how to shift your mindset from employee mindset to entrepreneur mindset.
- One of of doing it is to start thinking of your employer as your client. Right now you have one client. And one source of income. Start shifting that mindset: instead of thinking about it like a job, think about it like a client.
- Then you are going to have to start thinking about client management. How can you offer additional services to my client? Or also how can you offer the same service to other people as well? You want to get a running start with your business.
- About a year before Michael started his business he started reading a lot of business books about starting a business and shifting that mindset. The key is also to look at opportunities where you could offer a service, sell a product, be useful to somebody. Michael is now often looking around thinking “that’s a great business idea”, “here’s a service I could offer” and “let me send this out to my email list and see if anyone bites”.

Be strategic about your time (44:26)

- Architects main acquisition strategy is to take part in competitions which is not very time effective.
- Michael has learned that his time is valuable and limited. He uses strategies and tools to use that time and leverage it as much as possible.

Recommended online tools (45:32)

- Michael is a big fan of creating mindmaps as visual outlining tools. He uses XMind (<https://www.xmind.net/>) as a mindmap software.
- If you are doing a lot of writing, Michael recommends the tool Airstory (<http://www.airstory.co/>).
- Evernote (<https://evernote.com/>) for capturing information.
- Harvest (<https://www.getharvest.com/>) for time tracking. Michael tracks all of his consulting work with Harvest.
- Bench (<https://bench.co/>) for bookkeeping. “I use Bench for book-keeping. Bench prepare all my records and then I give that document to my accountant.”

Recommend online courses for storytelling and writing sales copy (48:38)

- Copywriting courses by Joshua Earl (<https://joshuaearl.com/>).
- Michael also follows Copyblogger (<http://www.copyblogger.com/>) to improve his marketing.
- Fizzle (www.fizzle.co) provide training for entrepreneurs and small businesses.

The power of a mastermind group (51:01)

- I have a slack community with four people who are all doing architecture/business related things. Michael recommends going to a community or creating your own community.

How To Connect

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