

INSPIRING INSIGHTS

SITE AIMS TO TURN IDEAS INTO REALITY

Good, great and silly

A ccording to Thomas Edison, "genius is 1 percent inspiration, and 99 percent perspiration." The website 99U.com uses this quote as its mission statement. The site's goal is to give you information and motivation to act on your ideas.

The intended audience for 99U is people working in creative, technical and entrepreneurial endeavors. The information and motivation is delivered via articles, videos and interviews by, about and with people working in industries that require these traits.

While most of these people aren't household names, many of them are prominent in their fields. Some work, or have worked, for organizations with a reputation for excellence and innovation, such as Apple, Yale University, Rhode Island School of Design, MIT or National Geographic. Many of the contributors work in professions that don't fit the 9 to 5, weekly paycheck mold, such as writers, graphic designers or artists.

The quality of advice given on 99U ranges from inspirational to cliché to just plain silly. An article on thinking laterally provides solid suggestions on reframing questions and changing perspectives in order to solve difficult problems.

What self-help/motivational site would be complete without lists such as "7 Habits of Incredibly Happy People" or "5 Ways to Do Nothing and Become More Productive"? Some of the items on the various lists will cause you to examine the way you live your life, such as the value of mastering your craft or the importance of investing in experiences over physical items. Other items are important but obvious, such as the need for rest and exercise.

Many of the articles and lists expose the Web-centric bias of the site's producers. An article titled "10 Online Tools for Better Attention & Focus" touts an app called Self-Control that prevents you from "slipping into a Twitter sinkhole" by blocking your Internet access while you work on something else. The fact that there are people with so little actual self-control that they need virtual Self-Control to avoid slipping into Twitter sinkholes is both sad and funny.

Spend time offline

There are frequent mentions of grooming social media profiles, online "publishing" projects (such as sharing your latest epiphany with the world) or inordinate amounts of time spent trolling on blogs. These activities are treated as if they are just as important as cultivating close friendships or leaving your comfort zone to learn new skills.

Much is written about Silicon Valley and how the tech revolution is changing the way we live and work. And much of it is true. Technology has certainly changed the way I earn my living and improved my life in many ways. But it is not the answer to everything. There's a segment of society that believes it is, and they receive a disproportionate level of press coverage. I think there's a quiet majority of people who embrace technology as a useful

tool for work, commerce, entertainment and social interaction, but prefer to spend most of their time in the real world.

Style and some substance

The folks who produce 99U are the same ones who produce Behance, a website that features portfolios of creative work in the visual arts. As such, they are no strangers to good design, and 99U is easy on the eyes. It features a clean, contemporary design with good organization. The typography and color palette are unified throughout the site and the navigation is intuitive. Photos, graphics and illustrations are used effectively to guide the eye and organize content. Video thumbnails expand to a watchable size when selected, and can also be viewed full screen.

When I first came across 99U, I was impressed with what I saw. As I spent more time on the site I discovered the pool wasn't as deep as I thought. It's definitely worth dipping your toe in, but it's only 1 percent inspiration — or maybe closer to 10.



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InSites

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