

Professional Practice | GRAP2495 | Assessment 2

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INTRODUCTION

This report examines the 'Start-Me-Up Labs' branding project that was created by 'For The People' in response to a brief for Adobe's 'Make It' advertising campaign. For The People (herein referred to as FTP) were commissioned to develop a creative idea to be used in Adobe's ongoing campaign, which advertises their Creative Cloud mobile applications. The project itself was exhibited at three design related events in Sydney and documented for use in a promotional video. The project also became an opportunity for FTP to demonstrate their branding expertise and contribute something unique to the industry in which they operate.

Start-Me-Up Labs (herein referred to as SMU Labs) is an experimental service that was designed to help new startup businesses by providing guidance around the importance of branding. It would simultaneously offer participants the chance to create a brand identity for their own business. Participants would engage with an elaborate pop-up shop to select 'products' off the shelf, these were then combined to create a 'Minimum Viable Brand' or MVB. Participants were free to use their new MVB, with the goal of helping them progress their business to the next stage.

In addition to SMU Labs, this report also discusses some relevant theories that support and inform the design of the project. Many of these principles are intrinsic to FTP's credo, including design thinking, social design and design strategy.

The ideation, development and implementation of SMU Labs took place over three months, and was exhibited at three separate events. This allowed for many iterative improvements as the project progressed.

SITUATING CONCEPTS

Adobe 'Make It'

Adobe is best known for its Creative Cloud software which is used by artists, photographers, designers, animators and developers from many creative industries. Around one year ago, Adobe launched a campaign to showcase its new mobile capture apps. Its latest apps are an extension of their industry leading desktop software and are designed to help users capture and recall moments and details whenever inspiration strikes. These captured elements are converted into assets that can be used later in the desktop software when resuming a project.

Their ad campaign focuses on different creative artists from around the world, showcasing their creative process, whilst incorporating Adobe's mobile apps into the story. They usually do this by including the apps as part of the creative workflow used to produce their work. The artists that Adobe chooses are also an important part of the story; typically successful, high profile industry creatives that Adobe can align with as part of their endorsement strategy.

For The People

Jason Little, one of FTP's co-founders, was the creative artist chosen for this chapter of the Make It campaign. He was also the leader of the project and a guest speaker at the Adobe Make It event, at which SMU Labs was exhibited. He has an ongoing relationship with Adobe and a long history of supporting design related events. He is also the NSW chairman of AGDA (Australian Graphic Design Association).

In addition to this, Jason fairly recently left his position as Creative Director of Re Brand Consultants to start For The People, with colleagues Damian Borchok (former CEO of Interbrand Australia) and Andy Wright (former Managing director of Interbrand Australia). Their reason for starting FTP was to create a different kind of agency. “[We wanted] a team unshackled from the rules, systems and restraints of holding companies and the accepted way of doing things. We wanted to be able to work with startups and big businesses. We wanted to be able to hire people just because they were smart. We wanted to abolish hierarchy, job titles and client management type rules.” (Andy Wright, 2015). It’s this sentiment that sets them apart from bigger agencies in a few ways. For example, they have worked hard to refine their process and structure so they can work with startups and smaller companies, sometimes with lower budgets, without having to “compromise the quality of thinking and execution”. Most notable is how they’ve put creativity at the centre of their business, fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, embracing the idea of the ‘smart creative’, a term originally coined by Eric Schmidt and Jonathan Rosenberg in ‘How Google Works’, meaning: “An employee that doesn’t chase compensation; they chase the ability to cause change and disrupt industries. They’re not the type to cause any workplace problems; they are the ones that are finding solutions to some major problems” (Fermin, 2014).

Adding to this, the graphic design industry has undergone a dramatic transformation over the last 20 years, as have many industries that transitioned from the pre-digital era. In fact, the number of graphic designers in Australia has increased drastically over recent years and the demand for web and mobile applications has become one of the key drivers for the future (Jokinen, 2014). This transition from page to screen also brought with it a need for more advanced strategic thinking from agencies. Which is something FTP have demonstrated with high proficiency.

Design Strategy

Design Strategy is a high-level discipline which helps firms determine what to make and do, why do it and how to innovate contextually, both immediately and over the long term. Breman believes: “Design is rapidly moving from posters and toasters to include processes, systems and organisations” (2015). Usually a characteristic of leading design firms, design strategy serves to determine business strategy, brand strategy and define the customer experience for clients. In contrast, smaller design consultants are usually more focused on creating concepts, developing designs and managing standards.

FTP’s thorough understanding of this is evident in the execution of their work and in the advice they give to their clients. For example, they recognise that many brands fall into a conventional pattern in how they see themselves. The worst thing a brand can do is let their category define who they are, and not attempt to differentiate themselves from their competitors (Borchok, 2016).

Conversely, it is widely believed that the designer’s job is to stay detached from personal taste and stylistic gestures. If we accept the notion of design as a marriage of form and function, the practice of clinging to fashionable styles is thought of as superfluous or unprofessional. Dieter Rams remarked that “Most importantly, good design is as little design as possible” (2013). The perceived simplicity of design can lead to widespread cynicism of the design and branding industry. Some people just don’t understand what designers actually do. Which is sometimes also perpetuated by a failure of the industry to demonstrate the commercial value it provides to business.

Design Thinking

Another important methodology used by FTP is Design Thinking, the practice of redeploying design principals to other areas of business. Rapid prototyping so that it is possible to fail in a safe environment and learn from mistakes. It's also about generating insights through empathy and identifying enabling technologies. For startups, this practice often means the difference between success and failure, and FTP are in a unique position to offer advice on how a startup should refine the details of their business model.

When it comes to working on projects, FTP are very efficient at ideation. The entire team is encouraged to generate insights, collaborating with each other through brain-storming sessions. Testing ideas early, often, and adjusting accordingly to find considered, well informed solutions. Working on SMU Labs was no different as the team came together to execute Jason's ambitious vision.



[Figure 1: Start-Me-Up Labs initial planning stages.]

PRACTICAL CONTEXT

The vision for the project was centred around three broad objectives; To give something back to the industry by helping startups, to educate startups about branding and to provide commentary on the branding industry through the lens of FTP's expertise. Each objective is covered in the following section.

Giving something back

There has been a lot of interest in social design in recent years and it's also something that forms part of FTP's internal strategy. In its simplest form, social design can loosely be defined as doing work for 'the public good'. However, social design doesn't just have to be do-goodism like pro bono work. It can also be real work from paying clients such as creating urban wayfinding systems (Shaughnessy, 2013), or in FTP's case, providing a branding resource for startups. One of the reasons FTP was set up was to "give back to people coming into the industry—and those already here" (Wright, 2015). They also discovered that most startups don't have the money or understanding to invest in a new brand identity, all they know is that they needed something to help them communicate and market their idea.

Despite the fact that the SMU project was commissioned by Adobe, there was a true altruistic motive at its core. FTP wanted to create something that wouldn't just be dismissed as a gimmick or a satire of industry practices. They wanted to create a genuinely useful tool to help startups get their idea to the next stage, whether that be to pitch for funding, to prototype their idea or take their product to market.

Educating Startups

One of the greatest opportunities to arise from this project was the chance to engage entrepreneurs in a conversation about branding. What we discovered is that, aside from a logo, many entrepreneurs only have a very basic understanding of what branding is. Because of this, we wanted to provide a written guide to branding that would also be used to disseminate some of FTP’s branding philosophy.

Here’s an excerpt from our Honest Guide to Branding:

“So you’ve recently started a new business? Nice one, job creator! Now, you’re probably really excited about branding it. You’re picturing branded t-shirts. Branded mugs. Branded pens. Branded pens stored in branded mugs.

But as people with a whole lot of experience in branding, we’ve got a message for you: pump the brakes.

As much as our industry might hate to admit it, branding isn’t the most important thing to you right now. Getting your product and/or service right is – and if what you’re offering is a turd, no amount of branding work will make it shine.

So focus on that first. That’s where your money should go. But if you’re extremely confident in what you’re offering, then read on – and we’ll run you through the basic brand elements that’ll get you started.”

This introduction helped to qualify potential participants and served as a reminder that branding itself will never be as important as the thing you’re trying to brand. It also helped to setup the self-guided nature of the project and reveals the brutally honest tone-of-voice used throughout the project.

Providing commentary on the branding industry

Finally, we wanted to use the project as a platform to generally comment on the branding industry. For example, it’s not uncommon for a company to spend tens of thousands of dollars on branding, attempting to make themselves appear unique and stand out from their competitors. Paradoxically, this quite often leads to many brands looking almost identical, particularly if they are in the same industry, as mentioned earlier. The messaging used throughout the project helped to reinforce this idea with relevant tongue-in-cheek commentary.

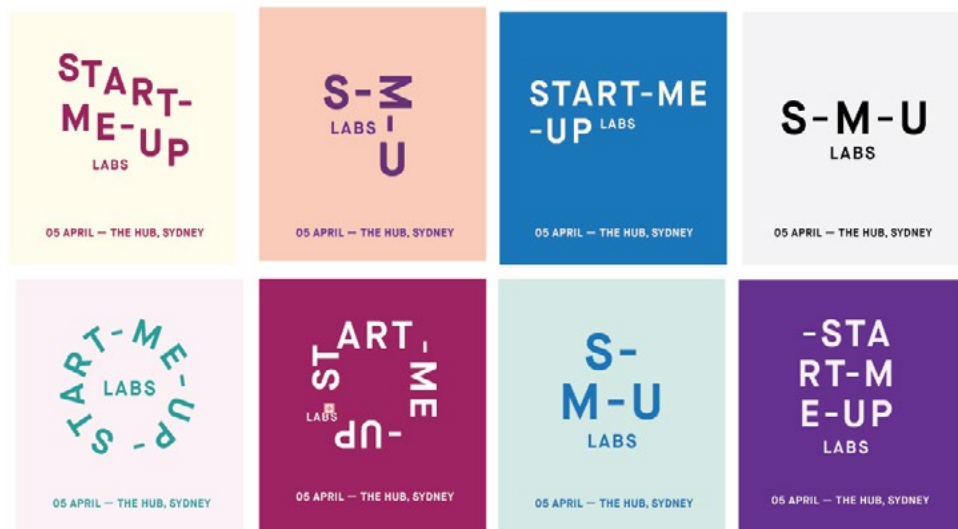
STRUCTURE OF START-ME-UP LABS

There are many components to Start-Me-Up Labs, which are categorised in the following table and described in more detail below:

Campaign identity	Brand System	Design & Construction
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Signage & Print• All messaging, instructional signage and product card design• Identity guide checklist• Promotional material; posters, flyers, tote bags, shirts, stamps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Template files for Logo, Colour Palette, Keynote, Business Cards and Website.• Fonts and licensing• Shape styles, Illustration styles• Photography packs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Floorplan and layout, determining different 'zones' for the 'products'• Design of structures for each zone.• fabrication of custom structures, including display tables, racks and light boxes.

Campaign Identity

The name of the project, Start-Me-Up Labs, was chosen from a long list of options for its quirkiness and playfulness. The name itself felt appropriate without revealing too much about the nature of the project and it also lent itself to the deliberately contrived and modern-sounding acronym 'SMU Labs'. This all helped to create a sense of intrigue from outsiders and participants that also flowed through into the identity of the campaign. We also created many interchangeable versions of the SMU logo to use throughout the campaign, along with a simple pastel colour palette.



[Figure 2: Start-Me-Up Labs logos and colours.]

A big part of the campaign was the tongue-in-cheek commentary on the branding industry, which was communicated through signage and other printed materials. A lot of the messaging was quite obscure in the way it mixed branding concepts, startup terminology and the idea of uniqueness

with aggressive sounding 'sale' headlines. Some examples include:

- All assets must go! Up to 100% off.
- Just in, new seasons fonts.
- Impress your VC with a Minimum Viable Brand.
- Get an MVB for your MVP to impress your VC and see your YOY ROI here.
- From the people who brought you logos
- Think outside the square circle blob.
- You get what you get what you choose.
- Pick a vibe: simple, playful, bold.
- All you need is logo.
- You name it, We got it.

The product cards and materials were also designed in a similar style. This included individual product cards for fonts, shapes and characters that were displayed on hanging metal hooks. There were also over 200 unique name cards that were presented in envelopes as a sort-of lucky dip, and the photography packs were displayed as posters hanging from a custom built clothes rack.

The colour wheel was perhaps the most elaborate component of the SMU shopping experience. It was a custom designed wheel comprising of 12 primary colours, that the participant would spin in order to select their colour. We then created 36 supplementary palettes of 5 colours each that corresponded to each primary colour. We also incorporated Adobe's Capture application into the process, by storing and displaying all of the palettes within the app so they could be presented to participants. In addition to this, we offered another method for colour selection: Using the Adobe Capture app to pick out colours in 'capture' mode. This is one of the headline features of the app that Adobe were keen for us to show off.



[Figure 3: Start-Me-Up Labs colour wheel with Adobe capture app.]

Another objective was to create a way to guide participants through the experience without needing too much assistance. The rationale behind this is that almost everyone is familiar with the experience of shopping for products, taking items off a shelf and putting them into a shopping basket. So this experience had to form the basis of the concept. We also needed a way for participants to indicate which elements they had chosen so we could process everything into their final brand. For this we created the identity guide that served as a checklist, with supplementary information about each product and how to interact with each area of the shop. This was given to each participant, along with a shopping basket at the beginning, and returned to us in the 'Lab' so we could check that everything was filled out correctly and begin creating their assets.

There were many additional promotional materials used for SMU Labs. This

included promotional posters and flyers used in the lead up to each event. SMU branded tote bags that were given to each participant at the the end of the experience. We also made SMU T-shirts and lanyards for our team to wear and custom rubber stamps for name product envelopes.

Brand System

The brand system went through many iterations but ultimately it had to satisfy 3 main outcomes:

Firstly, it needed to include assets that were actually going to be useful. So we spent some time figuring out what branding items were going to be most helpful for new startups. We decided on; A logo, business card template, keynote presentation template and website template. In addition to these items, each new brand would include a different shape, colour palette, photography pack, font pack and an optional illustration pack (Appendix A).

Second, the template files needed to accomodate all the stylistic variables that a participant could possibly choose from. For example, if a participant selected 'Zona' as their font choice and requested 'uppercase' and 'Bold', then our brand system template needed to be easily updated to reflect their choice before outputting. The same thing was necessary for the shape, colour palette, photography pack and illustration pack. Generally, there were 5 choices of each variable (fonts, shapes, character and so on) which resulted in a surprisingly large number of combinations and a very complex brand system.

Third was the issue of copyright and licensing. We intended for the brands to be used in the real world, so in order for this to be possible, we had to steer away from licensed content. This meant making everything our-

selves, including the stock photography packs and illustrations. We spent an entire day on-set with a professional photographer to capture a variety of images for the photography packs. Each pack was then given a category name like 'Our culture surpasses our product' or 'We're gonna disrupt your industry forever' so participants could select the pack that was most suited to them. The only content we didn't own the rights to was fonts. Stopping short of designing our own, we partnered with a New Zealand font foundry called The Designers Foundry. They supplied 5 fonts for us to use and agreed to allow our participants to purchase a font licence for \$10, should they wish to continue using their chosen font.

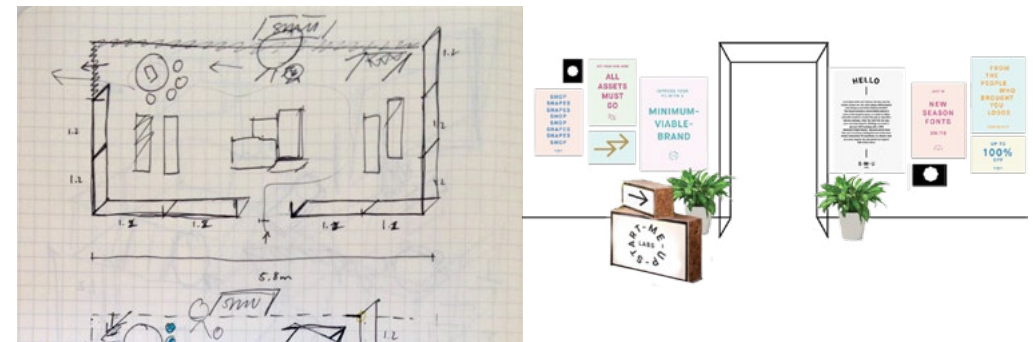


[Figure 4: Brand system template.]

Design & Construction

Like the brand system, the design and construction of SMU Labs required

a lot of consideration to accommodate all the elements we wanted to include. The primary objective was to create a retail space in which to 'sell' our 'products' in a fun and engaging way. To do this, we divided the elements into product categories that would occupy different areas of the shop; fonts, shapes, characters, names, photo/illustration packs, brand voices and colours. To really emphasise the tactile experience, we had the large colour wheel that participants would spin in order to select a primary colour.



[Figure 5: Floor plan and entrance mockup.]

A big limitation to the construction was that everything needed to be prefabricated as much as possible to keep the costs down and avoid too much custom construction. For example, we sourced many items from department stores such as Bunnings, K-mart and IKEA. This meant that everything could be easily assembled and disassembled without the use of many tools. We also used some modular tubing to create a frame around the shop which also doubled as a structure to attach signage.

For the items that we couldn't build ourselves, we outsourced them to a construction company called Guru Projects. This included a large display table, pegboard stands, hanger rack and light boxes. Again, where possible

everything had to be reasonably small and easily disassembled for easy transportation and storage between events.

The design and construction took just over a month to design and create, including preparations for the first event at the HUB in Sydney's Darlinghurst. However, many of the elements, structures and processes changed between events as we discovered problems and tweaked the overall design.



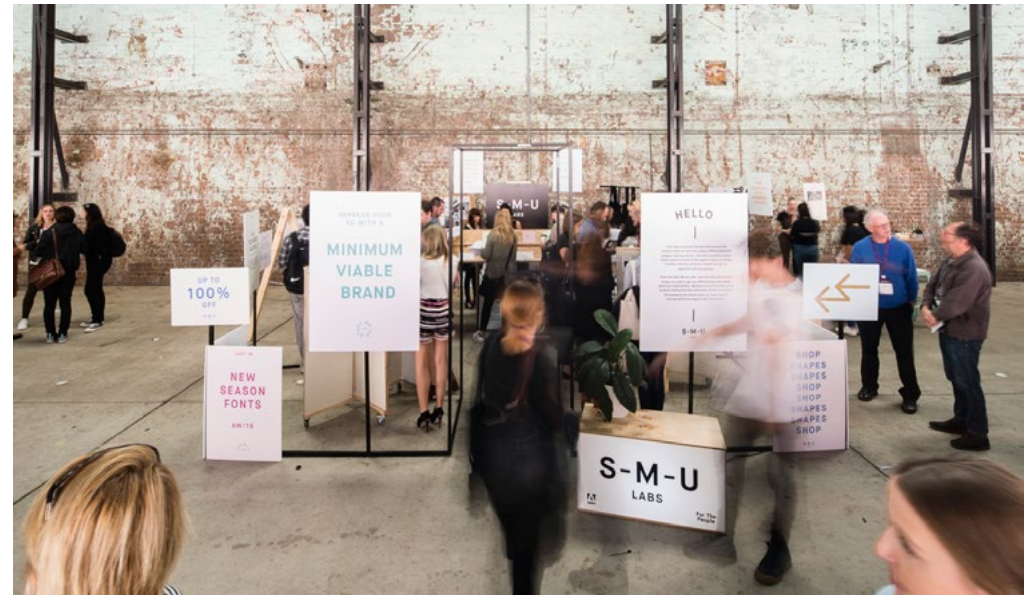
[Figure 6: Start-Me-Up Labs at the HUB]

The HUB launch event

As mentioned, the first of the three events was at The HUB, a co-working office space in Darlinghurst that is home to around 200 entrepreneurs and a hot-bed for startups. SMU Labs only ran for a few hours on a Tuesday

morning and was dismantled before lunch as we were occupying the communal break area of the building. We spent several hours the night before transporting everything to the venue and setting up. This process was recorded in a time-lapse video that can be seen in the final production video from Adobe (Appendix B).

We opened to a large crowd of people, along with an Adobe camera crew that were there to document the spectacle. We hadn't quite anticipated such a big surge of eager participants and we immediately came to realise that our original plan to design and deliver all the brand assets on-the-spot at the end of the session would be virtually impossible. Instead, we decided to have all hands on-deck to assist participants making their way through the shop. We then collected all the completed identity guide checklists for later processing.



[Figure 7: Start-Me-Up Labs at Carriageworks for Make It]

Adobe 'Make It' event at Carriageworks

The second event was not filmed by a camera crew, however, we had a professional photographer on hand to capture the event and take photos for our case study. We tweaked the format slightly so that the first 5 participants would walk away with their assets on the day, with the rest being created in the days following and emailed to participants.



[Figure 8: Start-Me-Up Labs at Carriageworks for Semi-Permanent]

Semi Permanent event at Carriageworks

This was the third and final event where SMU Labs was exhibited: a three day design festival that was host to many prominent national and interna-

tional speakers on the topics of design, the arts, advertising and entertainment. Of the three events, this was the least targeted in terms of the participants we intended to attract. This meant that the experience was less chaotic as we had more of an opportunity to engage in longer interactions with fewer participants. We were also able to leverage our experience from previous events to tell the story behind the concept and process to interested participants. Many of the attendees were designers, therefore they were more interested in the development and execution of the concept than participating themselves.

CONCLUSION

Start-Me-Up Labs began as a very ambitious idea. It was an unconventional solution to a brief that had never been done before. The real brilliance was in the juxtaposition of the retail shopping experience with the branding process which can often be remarkably intimidating and/or confusing for many startups.

When Adobe approached FTP, they wanted a creative idea to demonstrate the process from device to desktop. This open brief enabled us to imagine a whole new perspective on branding that felt in sync with FTP's innovative modus operandi. SMU Labs was successful in achieving Adobe's goals, but it also achieved the additional goal of providing a useful, educational tool for startups. The honest, no-nonsense tone of the project addressed one of the central problems with branding: that anything can work. Any mark, shape, blob or typographical concoction will do, just as long as it is deployed with ruthless efficiency and total conviction (Shaughnessy, 2013). The most important thing was that startups were learning how to talk about themselves and tell their story.

Although the project has concluded, there are already plans to create

a digital version of the SMU Labs experience as a means of engaging with potential FTP clients. The idea is to have a web app version of the project online for anyone to use. Users would select from many of the same options as in the physical version and have their assets outputted by a software algorithm at the end. There will most likely be a few technical and resource limitations to what we can produce, but we have already discovered a few logo generators out there that look encouraging and are helping to shape this idea.

For FTP, the project was a resounding success. It provided a clear and honest explanation of branding, and in turn helped to identify FTP as a leader in branding expertise. Beyond this, Adobe benefited from sponsoring an event that contributed significantly to the culture of branding and startups in Sydney. It's clear that these types of organic partnerships can have a lasting impact and be a more effective means of marketing for companies like Adobe, over more traditional advertising campaigns. This is why I expect to see the continued rise of companies engaging in this sort of culture based sponsorship in the future.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Start-Me-Up Labs Tool Kit, For The People Agency.

Appendix B: Adobe Hype Reel, Adobe Systems Incorporated.



[Figure 9: Start-Me-Up Labs The HUB]



[Figure 10: Start-Me-Up Labs The HUB]



[Figure 11: Start-Me-Up Labs The HUB]



[Figure 12: Start-Me-Up Labs The HUB]



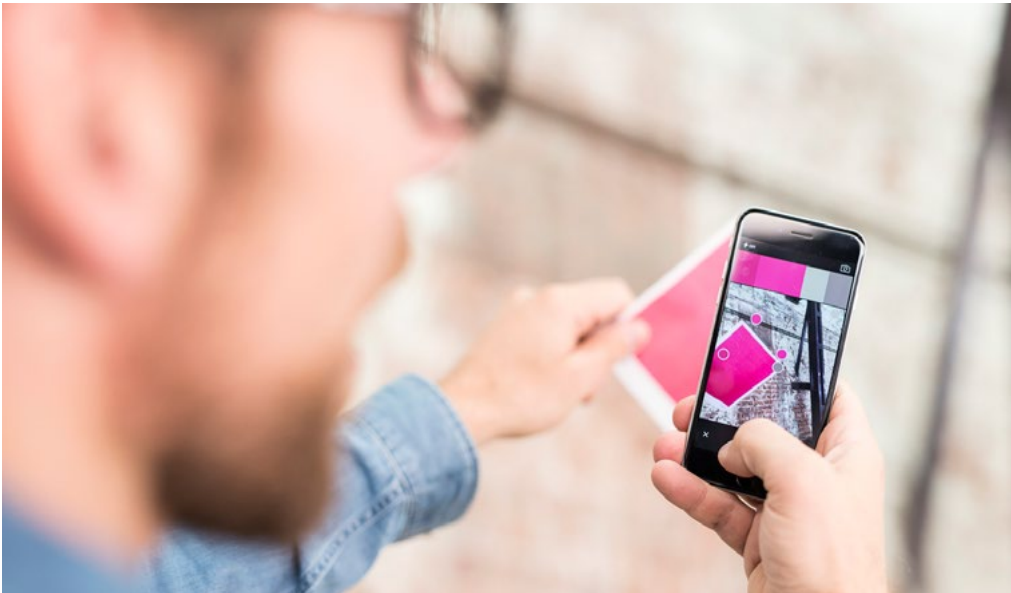
[Figure 13: Start-Me-Up Labs at Carriageworks for Make It]



[Figure 14: Start-Me-Up Labs at Carriageworks for Make It]



[Figure 15: Start-Me-Up Labs at Carriageworks for Make It]



[Figure 16: Start-Me-Up Labs at Carriageworks for Make It]



[Figure 17: Start-Me-Up Labs case study photoshoot]



[Figure 18: Start-Me-Up Labs case study photoshoot]



[Figure 19: Start-Me-Up Labs case study photoshoot]



[Figure 20: Start-Me-Up Labs case study photoshoot]



[Figure 21: Start-Me-Up Labs case study photoshoot]



[Figure 22: Start-Me-Up Labs case study photoshoot]



[Figure 23: Start-Me-Up Labs case study photoshoot]



[Figure 24: Start-Me-Up Labs case study photoshoot]