Strengthening Artisan Networking Initiative

Submitted By:

Luke Gardner

Teniola Oguntolu

Vincent Miller

Lanhao Mao

In Cooperation With:

Maud Obe, Senior Manager, Aid to Artisans

Advisors:

Professor James Hanlan

Professor Scott Jiusto

Washington, D.C., Project Center

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Abstract

Aid to Artisans U (ATAU) is an e-learning platform that was designed to educate artisans from underdeveloped countries on business skills, and connect them to buyers and markets. The goal of this project was to promote ATAU's new networking features and build connections between artisans, designers, and buyers. The team used methods including supporting users, improving the ATAU website, and promoting ATAU's networking features through email and personal interactions. The team identified core problems with ATAU's networking platform and provided recommendations to mitigate these problems.

Acknowledgements

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For further information of this project, please contact Ms. Maud Obe, Professor Scott Jiusto or Professor James Hanlan at: maudo@creativelearning.org, sjiusto@WPI.EDU and jphanlan@WPI.EDU

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Executive Summary

Industrialization and globalization threaten the livelihoods of artisans around the world. However, some organizations are harnessing the power of the connected modern world to help artisans succeed in the luxury and craft markets. One of these organizations, Aid to Artisans (ATA), a branch of Creative Learning, is devoted to improving livelihood of low-income artisans and preserving traditional art forms and craftsmanship around the world. Aid to Artisans U is a learning and networking platform. The learning portion of the site, consisting of dozens of free courses, is well established. However, the networking portion is new and needs more user engagement to become effective.

Methodology

The initial goal of this project was to launch ATAU's networking features and attract retailers and designers to ATAU. However, ATAU does not have enough artisans on the site who have completed their profile to start building a network between them and potential business partners. Thus, the project goal shifted to boosting artisan engagement and membership on ATAU. To accomplish this, these main steps have been taken:

Guides and website improvements:

Due to contractual obligations, some restrictions have been placed on the ability to make technical changes to the website. Methodology had to adapt to these restrictions. A series of user guides to help users navigate the site's essential or unused networking features was developed. These included guides on how to create an account, complete a user profile, create a product page and finding and message other users. To accommodate a diverse group of users, auto Google translate was integrated into the guides for non-English speakers and alternative guides were created for mobile users. The quality and practicality of these guides was pre-tested by the project team, project sponsors, and selected users before being officially published. Also, some website malfunctions have been fixed in cooperation with the developers.

User Engagement:

To attract users, different methods were used to interact with artisans directly. The project team provided support to user inquiries through Skype and email ranging from password resetting to course recommendations. User support helped to determine difficulties users faced using the website. Additionally, to promote the new networking features, the project team

engaged with local artisans by visiting craft fairs and exchanging business cards. Promotional emails were sent to the 2017 ATA Market Readiness class members as well as more than 1000 site visitors from the past two years.

Findings

The networking and education functions of ATAU, while serving similar purposes, have many different requirements to be effective. Whereas the education side only needs occasional site visits from people looking to learn, building a network will require users to be much more engaged with the site. ATA has focused heavily on the networking side recently. Despite this focus on networking, very few users are engaged with these features.

The methods used in this project had limited success in launching the networking features. The two categories of methods, personal interaction and email promotion, yielded different results. Personal interaction showed that there is real interest in the concept, and resulted in a small number of users completing their profiles. Email promotion, while reaching a far larger audience, still resulted in very few users returning to the site.

One of ATA's core problems with building a network on ATAU is user retention. For a network to form, users need to consistently return to the site and continue interacting with others. However, since ATAU is growing very slowly, the networking features currently provide little value, and there is very rarely new content on the site.

Recommendations

User retention was identified to be a major issue that Aid to Artisans needs to address on their e-learning platform. The following list of recommendations and options seeks to address the major problems of ATAU:

1. Pursuing a strategic Partnership with another organization

One option to explore for the future of ATAU is for ATA to seek a strategic partnership with another networking or e-commerce organization. When it was first developed, ATAU was solely an e-learning site, providing free courses and some limited resources for artisans. If ATA decided to return their focus to their educational mission on ATAU, while allowing the partnering organization to perform their networking or e-commerce expertise, it would require less maintenance and could provide significant value to both staff, users, and potential partners.

2. Implementing occasional Content Updates to their e-platform

Although challenging, the use of frequent staff-generated content updates is another method that may be feasible for ATAU. The required resources and manpower for daily content updates are not within the scope of ATA. However, as long as users can expect new content over a consistent period of time, a smaller team that can generate content would be sufficient.

3. Using Newsletters to inform users and re-engage them with the platform

Improving user retention could also be addressed with the release of a periodic newsletter to inform all users of the new features and content available on ATAU. If a consistent schedule for this distribution is kept and new content is provided, a recurring and engaged user base can be expected both on or off the platform.

4. Static Directory

If the ATA staff directs new users to fill out their profiles on ATAU with contact information, over time enough profiles could be built up to provide a repository of artisans. Although this would not be a true network as most of these users would not be active on the site, it could still be utilized as a static directory for buyers and designers to find artisans. If ATA removes their networking features, this could be enough for ATA as minimal effort is required to maintain.

5. Unfeasibility to utilize Newsfeeds to re-engage users to their platform

Larger social networks utilize feeds of user-generated content to resolve problems with user retention. While this method may work for websites that have a large user base that can provide a large amount of content to keep users engaged, it is not recommended for ATAU since users cannot generate enough valuable content.

Conclusion

Aid to Artisans U has been a successful e-learning platform and repository of resources for the past several years. The newer networking features, however, have been struggling. The major problem seems to be that ATAU has been unable to keep its users invested in the site. While over 1000 users have visited the site in the past two years, very few of them remain engaged. If ATA wants their e-platform to become a successful network, they must re-engage inactive users and encourage new users to return regularly. These solutions will require significant time and effort. ATA has an important decision to make about whether it wants to continue to use its resources on ATAU networking, or return ATAU to its core educational mission and use those resources on other initiatives.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Artisans have been threatened by factory systems since the advent of mass-production. Goods can be mass produced in greater numbers, by less well paid and skilled workers, at a lower price. Globalization has brought the threat of mass-production to even the most remote areas. In the ever-changing economic situation, it can be hard to predict what affects third-world artisans will feel from these forces. Artisans cannot compete with these methods for utilitarian items that many artistic traditions are threatened with extinction. However, globalization has also presented new opportunities which these artisans can seize. Several organizations are aiding these artisan communities to connect to the global marketplace. One of these organizations is Aid to Artisans.

The project sponsor, Aid to Artisans, is a non-profit organization which is devoted to improving livelihood of low-income artisans and preserving traditional art forms and craftsmanship around the world. In the past 40 years, they have accomplished these objectives by educating artisans, especially in developing countries, about modern product design concepts and essential business and marketing knowledge. Additionally, they also connect these artisans to mature art markets through networking and exhibition events in New York.

One of ATA's tools for accomplishing their goal is a website called Aid to Artisans U, or ATAU. This website performs two main functions, with the goal of connecting artisans with developed economies. The first function is an open e-learning platform. By creating a free account, anyone in the world can access marketing and business courses, which are important for success in modern economies. Now, ATA is looking to expand ATAU into a networking site for artisans and potential business partners to build connections.

Past WPI project teams have already made significant progress on ATAU. By using their analysis and conducting specific methods, these teams evaluated the initial development progress of ATAU, assessed the available features and resources for both current and potential members, and made recommendations based on their opinions on how the platform can be improved. The current team was tasked with driving the recruitment of new users and the development of a network of artisans, designers, and buyers. However, due to low user participation on the site, it became clear that more work would be needed in order to establish a true network. The team provided support to users, improved the ATAU website, and promoted ATAU's networking features through email and personal interactions. Despite some success in improving the website

and attracting new users, problems with an inactive user base prevented a network from being formed. While the concept of an education and networking website like ATAU has great potential, Aid to Artisans will need to address some core problems with the site and find new methods to ensure its success.

Chapter 2: Background Information

To understand the mission of Aid to Artisans and the role of ATAU, it is important to understand the reasons why their mission is important, and why artisans around the world should be protected. Since the industrial revolution, artisans have faced competition with cheaper, more efficient means of production. Now, with the advent of globalization in the 20th century, the threat is greater than ever. However, globalization can also be an opportunity to those artisans with the means to take advantage of it. By connecting artisans with buyers in other countries, Aid to Artisans is using globalization to help these artisans become more successful.

1. Industrial

Since the rise of mass-production, artisans have been on a ticking clock. Their traditional crafts endangered by industrial modes of production. This has continued from the early age of industrialization into the modern world as more advanced manufacturing processes threaten even the most complex items in the artisan market. In a global economy, the factory can be thousands of miles away and still produce products that are cheaper than the traditional artisan equivalent, and with modern manufacturing processes they can be more durable and long-lasting as well. Traditional artisans in local communities cannot compete in the modern global market for everyday use items, so they turn to luxury items and art. This has worked well in the consumer economies of developed countries where people have the extra capital to purchase the luxury art and crafts available from artisans. This strategy has also worked in heavily frequented areas all over the world. Tourists generally will eagerly purchase an expensive souvenir from a local artisan. However, artisans are now being pushed out of remote markets with no tourist presence. The local economy cannot support a luxury market and these artisans have not been able to take advantage of the globalized economy. However, some organizations are trying to change this.

1.1 Industrial Production Replacing Artisans

Since the 18th century, industry and mass production has pushed artisans out of the economy. One of the first major artisanal industries to be affected was the British textile industry. Despite the organization of the textile industry, they were unable to fend off the competition of industrial production (Bythell). Even though advanced production techniques and distribution systems have continued to repress artisanal industries, because of their central locations and limited transportation opportunities, small-scale artisans could still survive in rural

and far flung areas. However, in just the last few decades, new forces have begun to expand the mass-production influence into even the furthest corners of the world.

In the earliest stages of the Industrial Revolution, the English textile industry went through major changes as factories replaced the advanced artisan sector. Just prior to the Industrial Revolution, the English textile industry was a highly developed network of individual artisans and traders. Many artisans of the British textile industry worked out of their homes with sophisticated tools and systems of economic production (Bythell). Despite their highly developed means of production, they were quickly replaced by the factory textile-mills. As new inventions allowed for unskilled labor to mass-produce competing products, the individual artisans were unable to keep up as the factories out produced and undercut them. This was only the first of many industries replaced by mass-production. New inventions and methods allowed for almost every type of product to be made in a factory.

Artisanal production simply could not keep up with the ability to quickly and cheaply produce goods. "Mass produced, standardized and cheap factory items have replaced many of the various goods once produced by the artisans" (Scrase 449). The numbers of artisans declined as many became either factory workers or laborers. As technology advanced, the factories only became better at producing goods. Soon few, if any, goods were left for artisanal production. The artisans of the world's industrialized economies were forced to adapt or change professions.

Industrialization led to a dwindling of the numbers and economic opportunities for artisans in the world's industrialized economies. Only artisans in rural areas and underdeveloped economies to continue their traditions into modern times due to limitations in transportation. However, globalization now poses a new threat to artisans even in the most remote areas.

1.2 Artisans in a Global Economy

Globalization is threatening artisans all over the world regardless of their distance to the factory. Early in the Industrial Revolution, factories were small and only replaced nearby artisans. As better transportation methods developed, most mass-produced goods in a local market had been produced within the country or continent. However, modern globalized trade changed that reality. Goods produced in a factory halfway around the world can still be cheaper than those produced locally by artisans, threatening artisans even in the most remote areas of the

world. These artisans are turning to a method used by the artisans of more industrialized economies: luxury and artistic production.

Globalization threatens the way of life of many of the world's artisans. Locally, cheap, mass-produced goods are removing artisans' economic opportunities. "It has been estimated by the United Nations that, in India for example, over the past 30 years the numbers of artisans have declined by at least 30%" (Scrase 449). Artisans who remain are at the whims of globalized economic markets. "The trade in artisanal goods themselves is largely dominated by a handful of importing countries namely Germany, the USA, the UK and France, illustrating that the industry is largely at the beck and call of dominant first world corporations and trading regimes" (Scrase 450-451). Source materials are becoming more expensive as global supply chains can harness resources for production around the world. "Craft materials have either become too expensive for the artisans to purchase, or else have been diverted to mass production" (Scrase 449). The global markets demand quantity over quality. One study looking at Chikan production showed that, "As the artisan is paid per piece, and as the market is demanding more, the artisans themselves are becoming de-skilled" (Scrase 452). Furthermore, only a few consumer economies control the trade in artisan goods, making it much harder for artisans outside of those areas to benefit from this trade.

With the challenges posed by these economic forces, many artisanal traditions have been lost and threatened. Some artisans have been able to adapt and thrive to the new realities posed by industrialization and globalization. The next section will outline some specific examples of artisan traditions that are threatened in the modern economic state.

1.3 Case Studies in Threatened Art

In the ever-changing world of globalization and industrialization, it can be hard to predict how artisans will be affected. Presented with new opportunities and challenges, artisans may thrive or be forced to abandon their trade. However, the success of individual artisans does not always ensure the preservation of artistic traditions. This section presents two case studies of how artistic traditions are threatened, and the ways they are affected by the business success of artisans in these trades.

One example of traditional art practices being forgotten can be found in Sri Lanka's mask makers. Wooden mask making is a long-standing tradition in Sri Lanka, with very strict techniques and rules for passing down knowledge. Both the methods used and designs that emerge are highly connected to the local culture and the religion of Buddhism. The designs of masks reflect various beings in Buddhism, including deities, demons, and ghosts, as well as various rituals and social standards. Different styles of mask are reflective of both family traditions and regional culture. The knowledge required to make intricate masks is traditionally passed down from parents to children, and not shared outside the family. This means that the masks created by different families may be quite different.

Sri Lankan mask making is not traditionally done as a profession, nor to make a profit. The cultural significance of these masks includes both entertainment and spiritual purposes. Because the masks have held an important role in the culture and were not made for profit, the artists took great care to follow specific traditions. A special type of wood, *Kadaru*, was used, which requires a lot of time to season properly. It was believed that the mask maker, through the secrets of the art form, could "infuse each mask with a special power and spirit" (Handapangoda, Madukala, Withanawasam, & Saparamadu, 2016).

In the late 20th century, increased global tourism from the West brought many people to Sri Lanka. As more people in the West became aware of the intricate culture of mask making, demand for these masks grew as souvenirs and museum pieces. The demand for masks that were perceived as authentic enabled mask makers to make a profit from their craft and turn it into a profession. They could now rely on mask making as a primary source of income, proportional to the number of masks they could create (**Figure 2.1**). Naturally, this led away from time-intensive traditional practices and towards more convenient methods, such as selecting wood that is both plentiful and easy to use or mud that makes the masks look older Additionally, the loss of traditional intricacies and the change to a commodity status has caused these masks to lose their cultural significance.

Figure 2.1: A traditional Sri Lankan mask. Image from Wikipedia (link).

While traditional art practices in Sri Lanka are being forgotten due to commodification and tourist interest, another art form in India is in danger for a different reason. Ganjifa is a traditional card game in India and neighboring countries. While there are many different versions of the game, all involve hand-painted designs done by skilled artisans. This century old card game and art form is now fading from memory due to a lack of interest, as well as replacement by the modern 52 card deck (Suresh, 2014).

There is some disagreement about the origins of Ganjifa. According to author Abul Fazal, Ganjifa was played in medieval India long before the arrival of the Mughals. However, many scholars disagree, and say that the game was instead introduced to India by the Mughals in the 16th century ("A Right Royal Hand," 2003; Suresh, 2014; Lochan, 2001). At some point, the game became affiliated with Hinduism, with the most popular version depicting the 10 incarnations of the god Vishnu (Bhukya, 2014).

A significant amount of work and skill goes into the creation of these cards. The cards themselves are typically made from layered cloth in either a circular, square, or rectangular shape

(Bhukya, 2014; "A Right Royal Hand," 2003). An artist then creates a detailed painting on the card, which usually has some cultural significance, such as the depiction of Hindu deities, for example, the Ganjifa card in **Figure 2.2** displays the Buddha. These paintings, which require great skill, often take a long time to produce (Suresh, 2014). Traditionally, the most renowned Ganjifa artisans would be commissioned by kings to produce specific sets for royal courts. Commoners could purchase sets from local artists as well (Bhukya, 2014).

Figure 2.2: A Ganjifa card depicting Buddha. Image from Wikipedia (source).

In recent times, neither the game nor the art form are well known. Due to the popularity of the 52-card deck, Ganjifa is not played as frequently. If the game is only recognized for its entertainment value, or as a means of gambling, it is not appreciated as an art form (Lochan, 2001). There is an effort in India to preserve this art form and the culture associated with it. Shri Raghupathi Bhatta, a collector of Ganjifa cards, has opened two museums in the late 20th century. However, without sufficient interest, both museums eventually had to be closed (Suresh,

2014). Ganjifa cards are shown in some museums outside of India, but are not well known to the public (Lochan, 2001).

These two case studies present two very different stories, but both result in the possible abandonment of rich traditions and complexities of art forms. Sometimes, as in the case of Ganjifa painting, a larger market in the developed world would help to revive and preserve the trade. However, in cases such as Sri Lankan masks, a large market can result in commodification and loss of the intricacies of the art. Not all artisan traditions are lost; some have been able to succeed in the modern world by taking advantage of globalization to connect themselves to the large luxury markets in the world's most developed economies.

1.4 Succeeding in an Industrialized and Global World

Artisans who succeed in the modern world are those who take advantage of the limitations of mass-production and the opportunities presented by the global economy. Through luxury and tourist markets, artists can receive much more for their work than the utilitarian value.

The artisans who practice their craft under harsh economic competition must adapt to operating in new economic spaces. Overtime, handmade products have gained a premium value. The artisans of the pre-industrial world have become luxury market artists in industrialized, consumer economies. In the modern world, artisans make a living selling to the luxury markets primarily in the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, and France (Scrase 450). Within these highly developed economies enough free capital is available to support a vast and diverse artisan market. In some localities without the economy to support a luxury market, there is enough tourism to bring in consumers who will buy the goods as tokens of their trip or the local way of life (Scrase 452-453). However, many areas remain without a strong local economy or a tourist base to sell too. In these places, organizations are harnessing globalization to preserve artistic traditions.

Globalization can be used to connect artisans to consumer economies. By selling to developed markets, artisans' way of life and traditions can be preserved. The interconnected global economy enables artisans living and working in underdeveloped countries to connect with luxury markets in developed economies, in order to continue their craft and improve their economic situation. Organizations seek to educate, connect, and develop artisans using the

modern tools of the connected world. Some organizations partner with artisans to share in the opportunity. Others help artisans to succeed on their own. Ten Thousand Villages uses e-commerce and the global marketplace to connect artisans throughout the world to customers (Ten Thousand Villages). Creations for a Cause is also harnessing this economic opportunity, purchasing artisanal crafts and marketing them to consumers (Newman). The Artisan Enterprise Network teaches artisans business and entrepreneurship skills (Scrase 457). Many more organizations are active in this space including those outlined in the Scrase source.

While globalization can harm artisans who are disconnected from modern transportation and communication systems, it can also help to improve their lives and save artistic traditions. it can also help to improve their lives and save artistic traditions. This project's sponsor, Aid to Artisans, is one of the many organizations working in this sector.

2. Aid to Artisans

Aid to Artisans is a non-profit organization based in Washington D.C. ATA was founded in 1976 by James S. Plaut (former Secretary General of the World Crafts Council) and his wife Mary. Since then the organization has assisted artisans in over 110 countries. This section will explain ATA's' mission and methods as well as evaluate their current impact on the art sector and their effectiveness at assisting their clients.

2.1 Art and Developing Economies

In many countries, the art and craft sector are a crucial part of economy, contributing millions of dollars in revenue towards national GDP. In some countries, as much as 15% came from the artisan sector. (Noella Richard, 2007). In Colombia, for example, it raises an average of $400 million annually, bringing local artisans a monthly income of $140-510 USD on average. (Marilyn Hnatow, 2009) The industry also generates many job opportunities, providing the means of livelihood to over 10 million people in India alone. (Creative Economy Report, 2013)

The technological revolution of the last 50 years promoted automated manufacturing, technology and internet centered businesses to the center of the world economy. However, because of artwork's deep cultural roots, complexity, creativity and uniqueness, skilled artisans are not easily replaced by automation. Facing the challenge of today's highly competitive market, under-developed countries rely on the art and craft sector to provide stable jobs and

possible economic growth. In fact, within the creative sector, developing countries' exports have nearly doubled within ten years, increasing from $7.7 billion in 1996 to $13.8 billion in 2005. Thus, since 2005, developing countries have been leading exports within this sector, accounting for more than 60% of world's total art exports. (Creative Economy Report, 2008) These goods are mostly imported by developed regions such as the United States and Europe. In 2005, the United States art and craft market, counting international import alone, has a market size of $72.4 billion. (Marilyn Hnatow, 2009) With such highly profitable markets and immense job opportunity growth, organizations such as Aid to Artisans are looking to help less fortunate artisans to build art and craft businesses and compete in the global market.

2.2 Aid to Artisans' Mission

"[Aid to Artisans] creates opportunities for low-income artisans around the world to build profitable businesses inspired by handmade traditions. We offer access to new markets, business training, eco-effective processes and design innovation through a network of partners to promote sustainable growth and community well-being." ("aidtoartisans", 2017)

As the mission statement on Aid to Artisans' website explains, they set out to help low-income artisans, especially individuals in developing countries, to build successful art and craft enterprises to improve their financial conditions and preserve traditional art forms. Aid to Artisans integrates modern design concepts, production methods, business models, and marketing strategies with artisans' traditional craftsmanship. ATA then introduces and connects these artisans with prosperous markets, creating economic opportunities which were not possible within their home communities. ATA became a branch of the Creative Learning organization in 2012. Together, Creative Learning and ATA are exploring new possibilities in economic development, job creation and organized internationalization through digitization.

3. ATA's Approach

3.1 General Approach

"[ATA] accomplish [their] mission by working together with partners in the countries where we work and in the markets we connect artisans with, leaving behind an infrastructure that continues to support the artisan community long after we complete our mentoring" ("Aid to Artisans", 2017). Aid to Artisans developed its programs around the idea of networking. Through educating more financially capable artisans who can travel to the United States, ATA use them to extend this education network and pass the knowledge and skills to local artisans with less access outside their communities. Through building divisions and extension in 13 developing countries, ATA has created a successful network to teach and guide local artisans to build successful, self-sustaining businesses. Aid to Artisans delivers these goals by developing their programs around two service models:

Development Assistance

Product development encompasses all aspects of a market-ready product: design, technical production issues, costing and pricing, merchandising, packaging, and presentation. ATA's design consultants mentor local designers in-person and long-distance to provide market perspective to these in-country creative visionaries. When design consultants work side-by-side in an artisan's workshop accompanied by a local designer, their exchange of ideas is invaluable.

Business Training

Aid to Artisans has comprehensive programs to assist artisans, designers and exporters on learning necessary business skills such as finance, marketing, e-commerce, laws and regulations, and more.

Market Readiness Program

The Market Readiness Program is the most successful program ATA has run. Since its foundation in 1993, it has been a unique hands-on training experience for all those associated with the artisan sector. Held every August concurrently with NY NOW, the premier Home and Lifestyle trade show, the four-and-a-half-day program is designed for international artisan producers, designers, exporters as well as the leadership of craft-based enterprises. The program

provides intensive preparation for entry into the US market and vital information for building successful export businesses. This program helps artisans to:

• Gain insight and improved understanding of the diverse structure of US retail market

• Identify the characteristics of artisans' target market

• Learn directly from industry experts in product development, design and marketing

• Have artisans' product reviewed by designers and potential buyers by exhibiting products in the ATA Display Room at NY NOW

• Work daily in small groups with industry mentors

• Develop actionable strategies for Artisans' organization/business

• Network with artisans and key stakeholders in the international craft sector

• Transfer the acquired knowledge to members' organization/business" (Aid to Artisans, 2017)

ATAU & Creative Learning

In October 2012, ATA joined Creative Learning, a Washington, DC-based non-profit organization, to strengthen and expand its ability to implement artisan development initiatives worldwide. In collaboration with ATA program management staff and Creative Learning experts, Creative Learning is dedicated to making ATA and its mission an integral part of international enterprise development, cultural preservation, income and job generation, and economic development initiatives.

To approach this new mission, Aid to Artisans U was created to be an e-learning platform for those associated with the international artisan sector. The portal offers online courses, including an introduction to ATA's Market Readiness Program, and the opportunity to connect and share with others in the sector.

4. ATA's Effectiveness

During the past four decades, Aid to Artisans has developed a mature network of charities, artisans and businesses. This section reviews ATA's effectiveness and impact through statistics and personal evaluation. Now, each year, more than 30,000 professionals attend ATA's programs. ATA has aided more than 150,000 artisans and generated over $270 million revenue for artisans around the world in the past decade ("Aid to Artisans", 2017), transforming the lives of thousands of artisans. ATA has an effective method to educate selected artisans and promote

successful, long-lasting businesses. In the United States alone, dozens of successful art businesses have been established under ATA's guidance. Additionally, ATA has inspired the creation of many similar non-government organizations with help from organizations such as the Central Asia Crafts Support Association ("CACSA", 2017). However, there are some limitations in ATA's methodology and operation. Almost all ATA-associated artisans generate most of their sales revenue from ATA events. However, physical stores are limited to a specific group of customers compared to online stores. In comparison, Ten Thousand Villages' online art sales platform generates over $27 million in revenue annually. Additionally, ATA primarily uses in-person events to educate and network artisans, including NY NOW and the newly developed Las Vegas event. Although these events attract the participation of nearly a thousand artisans annually, they are less able to reach global audiences. Many artisans, particularly those from underdeveloped countries, cannot access these programs. To solve this problem, ATA is looking for methods to reach artisans outside of their annual events. One such method is an online platform developed to educate artisans in distant countries and expand their networks.

5. An Evaluation of Aid to Artisans U

ATAU, or Aid to Artisans University, is primarily a distance learning platform created to teach business and marketing skills to artisans in developing countries. However, the site also has functionality to establish connections between artisans, so that they may aid one another. Connections can also be created between artisans and potential buyers, and designers who might pay for the creation of various artisanal works. In this section, the utility of ATAU is examined, both in terms of functionality and frequency of use.
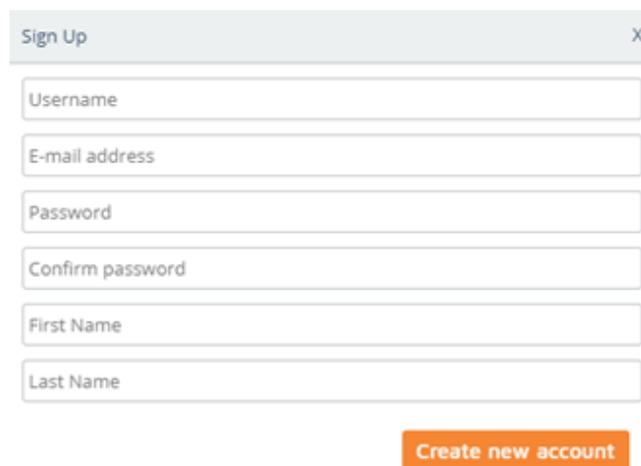
Figure 2.3: Information required for account. Image from ATAU.

When accessing the site, a user must log into an account to access most features. This account is free to create, shown in **Figure 2.3,** and should enable a level of personalization and adaptivity in the course content. While this login does provide a small barrier to entry, the benefits outweigh the small amount of time it requires. A larger problem in terms of the accessibility of site is the response time. Nearly all modern websites load within a second on a fast connection. However, ATAU may take several seconds to load each page.

The main content advertised on the front page of the website is the Market Readiness Program in New York, which seems to be the most successful program of ATA. This page also contains links to the rest of the site, divided into three categories: learn, connect, and find as shown in **Figure 2.4** below. These are further divided into subsections.

Figure 2.4: Three main sections of the website. Image from ATAU.

The Learn section links to the ATAU e-learning platform. Its subsections are all links to featured courses that are available. Clicking the section itself directs to a list of all courses. Each listing shows the name, a review score, a price, and the number of people enrolled. While this may indicate the popularity of the course, it does not show which users are enrolled. The price is always shown as free, as the site doesn't contain paid courses. The review score would be particularly helpful if actual text reviews could be viewed, and if more users had submitted reviews. As it is, most courses have zero to two reviews, with no text explanation of why the users gave that score.
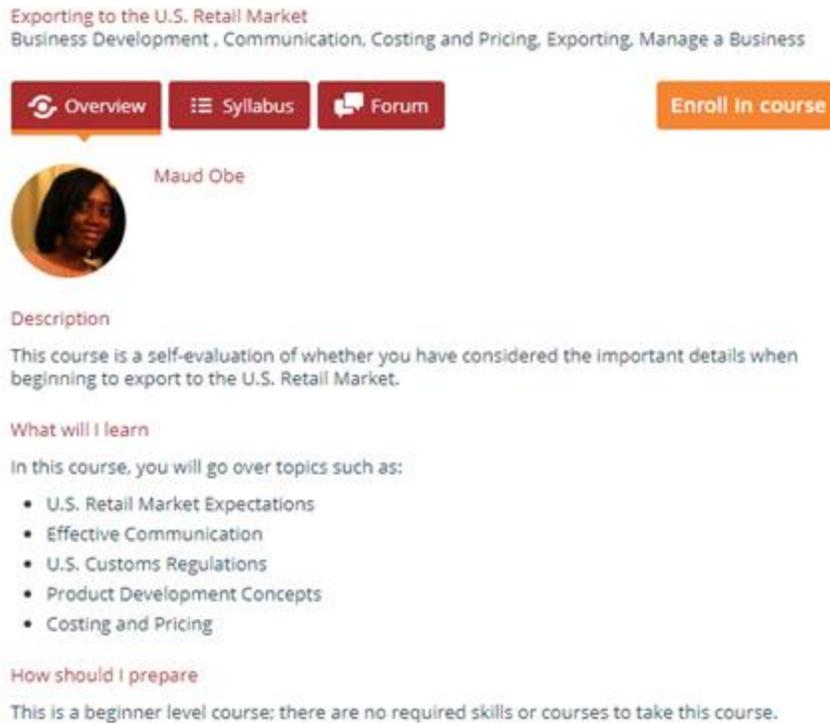
Figure 2.5: Information on a course page. Image from ATAU.

When clicking on a course, the user is taken to a more detailed page, which contains a summary of the course and a short description. It also has a syllabus and forum for each course, but these are all empty. The bottom of the page shows the prerequisite courses. When the user clicks 'enroll,' they are immediately taken to the course content. This content is in the form of an interactive slideshow, which consists mostly of clicking a 'next' button. There are some quizzes that require a correct answer to be selected, and some ambiguous quizzes which have no correct answer, but provide feedback based on the answer given. If the user leaves the course, they can resume where they left off, but this is not advertised anywhere on the page. These courses also appear to have some accessibility issues. There is no audio available, so they might be less helpful to people who learn by listening. Perhaps more importantly, the courses cannot be viewed on a mobile browser, restricting them to users who have desktop or laptop computers.

The Connect section lists graduating classes from the Market Readiness Program. These graduating classes are groups, which contain a list of members and a forum they can post in. Users can create their own groups as well, but that feature does not appear to be widely used. While each of the graduating class groups contains around 30 members, there is no activity on

the forum. The ATA staff have attempted to engage users by posting questions, but nobody has responded.
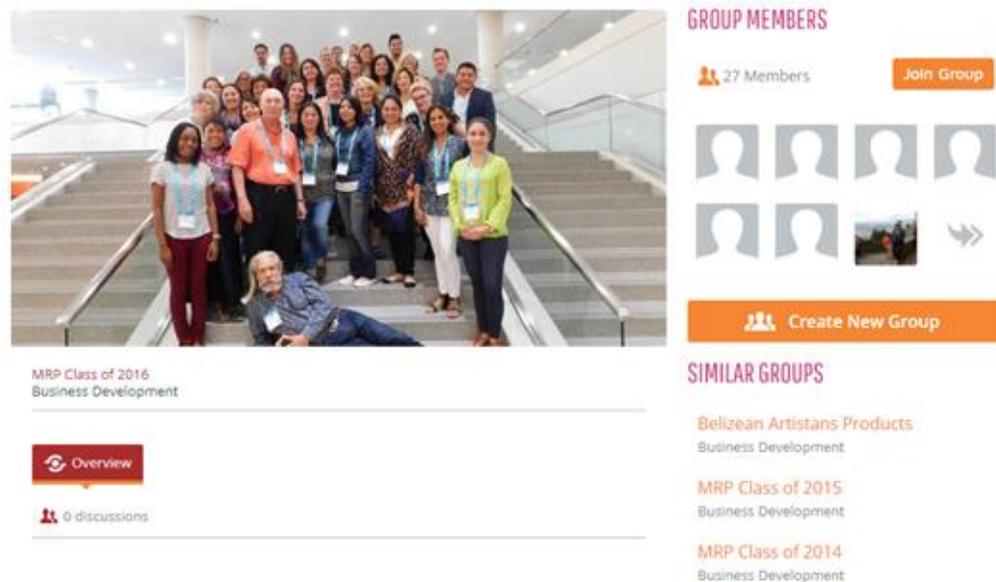
Figure 2.6: The empty discussion page on a MRP class group. Image from ATAU.

The Find section contains three separate subsections: resources, products, and people. The resources subsection lists links that may be helpful to artisans. It is not clear how many people have used these links, but only three are available, indicating that the section is not widely used. The products subsection allows artisans to list their products for others to see and potentially buy. However, once again, there are very few listings. These listings contain a small amount of information about a product, with no way of purchasing it without visiting the country in which the artisan lives.

Figure 2.7: All the information on a product page. Image from ATAU.

The last subsection, people, lists all users of the site. This is where artisans would theoretically connect to buyers and designers, as well as other artisans to share their knowledge. However, from this list of people, it is impossible to get any useful information. Nearly all the

profiles have no information entered other than the user's name. The friends feature, which allows users to form connections, is not used at all. There are filters to view only artisans, designers, or buyers, but using any of these shows no results.

Overall, the largest problem with the social features of ATAU is that nobody is using them. Any social network such as Facebook or Twitter is only useful because it is widely used. Therefore, the only way to make these social features useful is to find a way to get people to start engaging with them, through social media awareness and community outreach. The learning side of ATAU seems to be functional. The largest problem to address here is accessibility, especially on mobile devices. Many of the issues with ATAU are not new information to ATA. Past IQP teams have investigated these issues in the past, and have already begun the process of developing fixes and a plan for the future.

6. Past IQP Work

ATA has hosted WPI project teams in 2015 and 2016. These teams helped the organization by improving membership and features of ATAU.

In 2015, Aid to Artisans U had been established as a means of interaction between ATA's members, potential donors, and other partnering communities. The 2015 project team set out to develop a three-year marketing plan for ATAU to increase online membership. The team created an outline detailing five interrelated steps to accomplish this: define the organization's mission, identify the projects of interest, understand the demographics of the market, publicize the platform, and locate sources of funding for this effort. First, the project team defined ATAU's mission as "a platform which offers online courses applicable to artisan-based enterprises and an opportunity for members to connect and share with one another" (Bell et al. 2015). Next, they defined the significant piece as the various resources available to the site's members. To gauge community views of the website, they created online opinion-based surveys. Although the surveys produced meaningful feedback, the team found this method to be inadequate because their audience preferred personal interaction. Nonetheless, the team was able to assess the current needs of Aid to Artisans U and offer short-term marketing solutions to ATA. They then addressed other concerns with ATAU. The team assessed the ability of ATAU to interact with buyers, retailers, and artisan leaders. They proposed other short-term marketing strategies to gain online traction and conducted interviews with international artisans and other nonprofit organizations to share the potential benefits of ATAU. Finally, the project team helped promote

ATAU using social media and email, and gathered a list of potential donors. At the end of the project, they composed a set of recommendations for ATA and oversaw an increase in resource usage and new members.

The 2016 project team planned to evaluate and improve the utilities of Aid to Artisans U, and to continue expanding the site's user base. The project team devised an outline involving analysis of two aspects of ATAU: web platform and marketing. Before evaluating the website, they needed to understand the needs of the users. To this end, the project team conducted interviews with current and potential users. This enabled the team to address the other objectives. To improve the web platform, the team conducted an evaluation of the site's strengths and weaknesses. The criteria for this evaluation included the website's layout, functionality, learning content, personalization utilities, usability, and accessibility. This evaluation, along with feedback gained earlier, allowed them to assess which features were beneficial or lacking. Next, the team observed and redesigned current marketing strategies, which they later recommended based on the research they had conducted. The team performed a SWOT analysis to develop a framework for evaluating the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats from a business perspective. This analysis also gave the team an opportunity to design and implement strategies to promote ATAU. One effective strategy that arose was writing an article on the organization and sharing it through social media. This method increased the awareness of both Aid to Artisans and ATAU, and helped build connections with similar organizations. From their research, the team created a list of recommendations and identified areas to focus on to boost membership.

The work of the previous WPI projects has led to many benefits for ATA, including a growth in online membership. The project team has also benefited from reviewing the methodology and strategies of previous teams. Information from this review has helped us to form realistic goals and strategies for the project.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The initial goal of this project was to attract retailers and designers to ATAU. The ATA staff felt that there were enough artisans on the site to start building a network. However, upon an inspection of the site, it was clear that the networking features were not being utilized Building a network on ATAU depends on finding users with the advanced search functions and examining their profiles. At the beginning of the project, hardly any users had completed their profile. Any retailers or designers looking for artisans on the site would not be able to find artisans to network with. Due to this issue, the project goal shifted to boosting engagement and membership on ATAU, with the primary goal of preparing the site to attract retailers and designers. To accomplish this, three main steps have been taken:

1. Develop a series of user guides highlighting essential or unused features.
2. Engage with existing users to boost their interaction with the networking features and strengthening their profiles, as well as providing technical support and advice.
3. Attract new users to the site.

1. Restrictions

Due to contractual obligations between ATA and their website developers, major restrictions have been placed on the ability to make technical changes. This contract lasts until the end of 2017, preventing us from making any functionality changes or accessing the code directly. Nonetheless, some minor changes were implemented following discussion with the website developers. Furthermore, the site's content can be directly accessed through a backend editing system. Methodology had to adapt to these restrictions.

2. Guides

2.1 Reasoning

Given the goals outlined by the sponsor and the restrictions on the ability to make changes to the website, it was determined that a series of user guides was the best step toward long-term success. The contributing factors to this decision included empty and incomplete profiles, unused features, and frequently asked questions from users.

In order to fulfill ATA's value proposition for buyers, the website must have a collection of artisans to connect with. However, while many users have registered on the site, their profiles, which are necessary for the networking to be successful, are not completed. The profiles give the opportunity for the users to display many pieces of information about themselves including their role (Artisan, Designer, Buyer, Social Entrepreneur, Other), location, profile picture, and a personal summary. Aid to Artisans U has over 650 users according to the site's backend statistics. Of these users, few had their profile filled out enough for the searching functions to distinguish their role. Without these profiles filled out the platform provides no value to the buyers ATA wants to attract.

In early interactions with users and evaluation of the website, it became clear that several features were seeing minimal use, and that many of the site's functions were not immediately evident. For example, the profile edit section is hidden behind a down arrow icon. Many of the site's features, especially those related to networking, are hidden behind similarly vague icons or behind multiple layers of searching or menus.
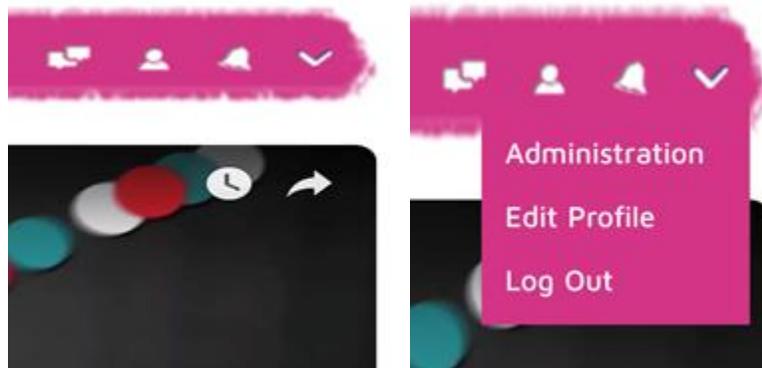
Figure 3.1: Steps to edit profile on ATAU. Image from ATAU

Users often have to resort to contacting Aid to Artisans directly to resolve simple tech problems with the site. While some human technical support will likely always be necessary for the audience of this platform, the guides should help to reduce these problems allowing the limited manpower of ATA to focus on improving and promoting the site for new users.

The restrictions on the project prevented any non-developers from fixing most of these problems directly. Therefore, it was determined that user guides would help mitigate these problems and would continue to be useful to ATA after the conclusion of this project. These guides can also be used as part of a campaign of user engagement and site promotion to attract

new users to the site and direct existing users to fill out their profile. While not an ideal solution to the problems ATAU faces, the guides are a practical solution that fits within the time period of the project and conforms to the contractual obligations of ATA.

2.2 Challenges

Language

The website is designed to serve users all over the world. However, the user interface and content are only available in English. Non-native English-speakers have trouble navigating the website, preventing them from signing up and utilizing the networking features. To serve these clients effectively, ATAU should provide content in different languages, or provide automatic translation.

Mobile and Desktop differences

As artisans from underdeveloped countries often lack access to personal computers, many will access the site through mobile devices. However, ATAU has a different format for desktop and mobile platforms. This slightly different interface may cause confusion to mobile users. To access functions on the website, mobile users typically have to go through different steps and menus. Thus, the guides should offer alternate steps depending on the device type.

2.3 Implementation

To teach users how to effectively use the site, four key sets of interactions which need to be covered were identified. These four areas are:

· Creating an account and logging in
· Completing the user's profile
· Creating pages to show products
· Finding other users, adding friends, and sending messages

Because users may have varying levels of experience and varying needs, they may wish to view a specific guide. To accomplish this, a central guide index with links to the four guides was created.

The guides are meant to be highly visual, and show users exactly how to navigate ATAU. To accomplish this, a large number of screenshots were used, accompanied by written

instructions. However, as noted before, some aspects of the site appear different when accessed in a mobile browser, as opposed to a desktop.

Figure 3.2: The initial sign-up screen on a desktop browser

Figure 3.3: The sign-up screen on a mobile browser

To account for this, a separate set of screenshots for mobile devices was captured. This can be seen in **Figures 3.2 and 3.3**. Using a small amount of JavaScript code, the guides can automatically detect which type of device is accessing the guide, and show the appropriate screenshots. A drop-down menu is also included, in case the user wishes to manually specify the device type.
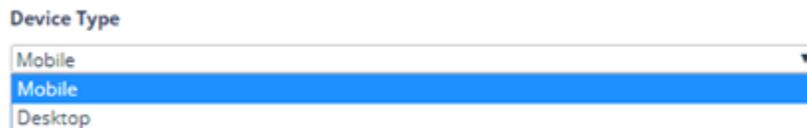
Figure 3.4: Manual device selection

In addition to selecting the device type, incorporation of JavaScript code enables the guides to be translated into other languages. By leveraging Google Translate services, the guides can be instantly translated into hundreds of other languages, making them far more accessible to users in other countries. Like the device selection menu, this functionality will automatically detect what language the user's computer is set to, and automatically translate the guide if it is not English.

a. Testing and Deployment

Prior to user distribution, a testing phase was needed to ensure that the guides were both a functional and effective tool for navigation through the website. This phase helped to detect any technical or usability issues with the guides. The results and feedback from testing helped to make necessary revisions to improve overall quality and practicality before deployment.

b. Pretesting

Prior to sending out the guides to the preliminary group for feedback and engagement measurement, self-testing of the guides was important for two reasons. First, self-testing helped to assess the ease of use, viability, and simplicity of the guides during initial development and make the necessary changes. Additionally, pretesting the guides in a similar setting as the intended audience helped to see the practicality of the guides from a client's perspective. A trial-run of the guides was conducted on both a computer and cell phone at an internet cafe. The goal of this test was to understand the challenges faced by artisans who do not have direct access to an internet connection. Overall, self-evaluation helped to determine the effectiveness of the guides and what issues needed to be resolved.

c. Evaluated by advisors and sponsor

Along with self-testing, the guides had also been analyzed by both the WPI team advisors and the project sponsor. The feedback acquired from the team advisors had been crucial to assess how effective the guides were in meeting their desired goal. In addition to effectiveness, the advisors evaluated the difficulty in understanding the guides from an outside perspective. This response was particularly important because it led to the development of device specificity and a translation tool integrated into the website. With the addition to device specificity, users are no longer restricted to accessing the platform through solely a desktop. The implementation of a translation tool into the user interface now allows users to navigate through the website with reduced difficulty. The project sponsor's evaluation of the guides had aided with the revision of the guides and determined whether additional content needed to be added. Since the sponsor had a greater understanding of the needs of users in third-world countries, this response was especially helpful in developing the guides to be more successful.

d. Test group with users

Once the guides had been thoroughly reviewed, two participants were selected to assess its advantage to the user. This study was needed to gauge the effectiveness of the guides from a user perspective prior to sending them out to the intended groups. The two participants used the guides to complete their profiles thoroughly, upload products to the product page, and message other users on the platform. After completing these tasks, the participants provided feedback to determine whether guides had been instructive and advantageous. Once this feedback was evaluated and final revisions were made, the guides were distributed to over 1000 users in an email campaign.

3. Website Bugs

At the beginning of the project, several defects and usability issues existed in the website, which made it less effective. Some product pages would not appear on the site unless a category was selected. The categories available to products were incorrect, as they were taken from the course categories. Additionally, the product pages were forcing the images into a landscape aspect ratio, causing square and portrait images to appear cropped. Finally, the password requirements included numbers, special characters, and uppercase letters. This amount of complexity is unnecessary for accounts that contain no sensitive information, and was causing many users to forget their passwords. These malfunctions have significantly impacted the functionality and usability of the site, and caused many users to leave. Fortunately, Shift, the developer of ATAU, agreed to fix these issues without additional charge. The issues with display of products have been resolved, and the password requirements have been simplified to require only letters. As work on ATAU continues and more issues are found, it is likely that the developer will be able to fix them quickly.

4. User Engagement

In an effort to attract new users to the website, different methods were implemented to interact with artisans directly. These methods included attending craft fairs and conducting interviews with potential users interested in joining the platform. In order to encourage them to join the website, the benefits of the educational and networking features were promoted.

4.1 User Support

Since the initial launch of ATAU, many inquiries have been received from users who had difficulty operating the website. These inquiries range from questions about which courses should be taken, to how to contact other users on the platform. One method of user engagement that was found to be effective was providing support to users through Skype and email. This helped with determination of the difficult areas that users are having with the platform and direct engagement with clients.

Recommending courses and guides

Some inquiries received were from users coming to the website for the first time. To provide support to these users, a list of courses and resources was recommended to each individual specific to either their interests or business challenges they encountered. Along with this, newly developed guides were suggested to users to inform them of the resources available on the platform and directions for taking advantages of them.

Helping users log in

Another method of support was aiding users who had difficulty logging into the website. Many of the inquiries received from users were related to complications with their login information, specifically their password. As discussed prior, the complexity of the password requirements prompted a challenge for users attempting to access the platform. In order to minimize the difficulty, the Shift development team was contacted to simplify the password requirements to require only letters.

Live session with a user

A unique user inquiry that had been received came from an artisan leader from Uganda. This user was hoping to learn about artisan business training courses. In order to support this user effectively, a Skype session was conducted to assist the user in outlining which courses to take and which of the platform's resources would be advantageous for them to utilize. From this help session the user was given quality knowledge about the many benefits that can be found on the e-platform.

4.2 Emails to users

From ATA's prior experience, it is evident that the best method to inform users of ATAU functionality is through email. For this reason, an email campaign was employed with the goal of promoting the new networking features, introducing the platform guides, and encouraging users to complete their profiles and engage in networking. The single most important sub-goal of this campaign was to encourage users to categorize themselves as an artisan, designer, social entrepreneur, or buyer. This email campaign was first tested with the 50 most recent ATAU users, with the hope that many of them would respond. These emails were personalized with each user's name in an effort to increase the response rate. After the emails were sent to the test group and some feedback was collected, email addresses of users who have visited ATAU within the past 2 years were extracted and emails were sent to this more general audience.

4.3 Craft fairs

In addition to engaging with users online, part of the outreach component involved traveling to craft fairs and meeting potential users in person. Most of the artisans were happy to talk about joining ATAU. While talking to these potential users, business cards with a link to join the site, as well as the email to reach ATAU team were handed out. Local artisans' business cards were also collected, allowing future contacts to happen.

Chapter 4: Findings

ATAU's Duality

ATAU currently attempts to perform two main functions: education and networking. During its initial development in 2015, the platform was designed purely for sharing knowledge and information, without any intention to connect users. In 2016, ATA decided to expand the platform to include networking functionality. ATAU is largely designed around the educational features, with the networking aspects a secondary addition. The requirements to operate these two sectors are distinct. For the courses, the site acts as an information repository that can be accessed. To build networks, however, ATAU needs to facilitate user engagement with new content.

Networking

ATA has recently put major focus into the networking side of the site leading to this project. ATA hopes that the networking features will be used by designers and retailers looking for artisans to partner with. After significant development was made on these features, including the addition of an advanced search tool that allow users to search artisans and products by location and category, ATA believed that ATAU was ready to attract buyers and designers to the site. However, despite the addition of these new features and a large set of registered users, very few users have entered enough information into their profiles for the advanced search to be effective. The dual-purpose nature of the site led to a massive overestimation of the number of active users available for networking. Many users create an account, view the courses relevant to them, and then never return to the site. To truly begin building a network, ATAU will need to convince users to return to the site, and to use these features regularly. There are several ways this could be accomplished, with varying degrees of feasibility for a small non-profit. The methods employed in this project did see some success, but were limited in what they could accomplish. If ATA wishes to continue pursuing the creation of successful networks, new methods will be required.

Method Effectiveness

In analyzing the effectiveness of the methods used by this project to further networking use on ATAU, there are two major categories to consider: email promotion and personal interactions. The email campaign was released to existing users of ATAU to re-engage them. Over 1000 emails were sent to users who had accessed the site over the last 2 years. It was determined that users who had already registered on the site might be more willing to return and try out the new networking features. However, this campaign received very low returns, indicating that past users are not engaged with the site. Fewer than 1% of recipients responded to this campaign, indicating a small set of truly active users.

Nevertheless, promotion through personal interactions such as supporting users through skype, meeting potential users at craft fairs, and responding to email inquiries received much more enthusiastic interactions and yielded much better response rates than the email campaigns. Unfortunately, only so many people can be reached through personal interaction, leaving the numerical returns still in low numbers. However, these interactions revealed an enthusiasm for the core idea of an artisan and buyer network, revealing that a networking site for artisans can provide value in the industry though ATAU is struggling to attract large numbers of users to the platform currently.

User Retention

In reviewing the results of email campaigns and the low use of newer features it became clear that many users who registered on the site were no longer returning. The finding that most users do not return to the site is often associated with a statistic called user retention. User retention is a measure of how many users returned to a site over some period. Low user retention typically shows that users either do not find the site useful or valuable on their initial visits, or find everything they need and see no reason to return.

Google Analytics provided data on ATAU's user retention, shown in the table below. The table describes six sets of users. Each group first visited ATAU in a particular week, shown in the first column. User Retention was measured by how many of that group returned in subsequent weeks. **Figure 4.1** shows that the highest number of users that ever returned to the site in a specific week after their first visit was 2. The low numbers in the data confirm suspicions that users are not remaining engaged with the site beyond their initial visits. Since

networking requires users to keep returning to the site to make new connections, this problem must be addressed if ATA wishes to create a successful network.

Group		User Retention					
Week	New Users	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Week of 9/10	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
Week of 9/17	35	1	1	0	1	1	0
Week of 9/24	36	1	0	1	2	1	1
Week of 10/1	29	0	1	1	1	1	1
Week of 10/8	39	0	0	0	1	0	0
Week of 10/15	38	0	0	0	0	0	0

Figure 4.1: User retention over six weeks

To retain users, ATAU must provide three elements: support, content, and value. User support was a main piece of methodology for this project, but it must be continued year-round. If users cannot understand the platform, or they find pieces which are broken, they will not return. Content must also be updated; without new content to explore, there is little reason for users to return to the site. A new user might return several times to see if there is anything new, but if they consistently find nothing, they will stop returning entirely. Users must expect new content if they are to return to the site. Finally, value must be provided to these users. Fortunately, users do find the courses on ATAU valuable, which has been confirmed through personal interactions. However, all that value is provided at one time, as there is little value in taking a course more than once. Additionally, this value is purely on the educational side of ATAU. Since this is separate from the networking functionality, it might not improve user retention for networking. Value must be provided consistently for users to return multiple times and stay engaged with the site and any potential network.

Chapter 5: Recommendations

User retention is a challenge faced by most websites. It is addressed in many ways, and methods that work on one site will not work on others. This can be a difficult problem to solve, especially on a platform that is already developed. The following list of options and recommendations seeks to address this problem for ATAU.

1. Pursuing a strategic Partnership with another organization

One option to explore for the future of ATAU is for ATA to seek a strategic partnership with another organization. When it was first developed, ATAU was solely an e-learning site, providing free courses and some limited resources for artisans. It still provides this core component well. In leveraging this core competency, ATA could explore strategic partnerships with another networking or e-commerce organizations. They might have a more successful networking or online marketing platform but could be limited in their e-learning resources. If ATA decided to return their focus to their educational mission on ATAU, while allowing the partnering organization to perform their networking or e-commerce expertise, it would require less maintenance and could provide significant value to both staff, users, and potential partners.

2. Implementing occasional Content Updates to their e-platform

Another method commonly used is frequent staff-generated content updates. This is a common method for news websites, where a large team generates content for their users which is updated constantly so that users will return daily. The required resources and manpower for daily content updates may not be within the scope of ATA. However, ATA does not require ATAU users to return daily, or even weekly. Users returning several times a year should be sufficient to establish a network. If users can expect new content over a consistent period, they will come back to view new content. Therefore, a smaller team would be sufficient to generate content over a longer period.

3. Using Newsletters to inform users and re-engage them with the platform

This challenge could also be addressed with the release of a periodic newsletter to let users know what new features and content are available on ATAU. This should be distributed to all registered users. If a consistent schedule for release is kept and new content is provided, users

will begin to expect the newsletter and will remain engaged with the site. This will provide a recurring user base which can be leveraged for new initiatives both on and off the platform.

4. Static Directory

If the ATA staff directs new users to fill out their profiles on ATAU with contact information, over time enough profiles could be built up to provide a repository of artisans. Although this would not be a true network as most of these users would not be active on the site, it could still be utilized as a static directory for buyers and designers to find artisans. If ATA removes their networking features, this could be sufficient for ATA as minimal effort is required to maintain a static directory.

5. Unfeasibility to utilize Newsfeeds to re-engage users to their platform

Several large social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, use feeds of user-generated content to solve the user retention problem. Users of these sites provide content for each other, requiring minimal effort from site staff. While this method may work for websites that have a large user base that can provide a large amount of content to keep users engaged, it is not recommended for ATAU since users cannot generate enough valuable content.

Conclusion

Aid to Artisans U has been a successful e-learning platform and repository of resources for the past several years. The newer networking features, however, have been struggling. The major problem seems to be that ATAU has been unable to keep its users invested in the site. While over 1000 users have visited the site in the past two years, very few of them remain engaged. If ATA wants their e-platform to become a successful network, they must re-engage inactive users and encourage new users to return regularly. These solutions will require significant time and effort. ATA has an important decision to make about whether it wants to continue to use its resources on ATAU networking, or return ATAU to its core educational mission and use those resources on other initiatives.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Aid to Artisans is addressing a significant challenge for artisans in the modern world. Currently, their most effective method is the NY NOW meetup, which helps many artisans from around the world to network and learn new skills. While successful, this method is limited in several ways: it only takes place once per year, the attendance is limited to a small group, and participation in this event is limited to those who have the means to travel to New York to meet in person. ATA is attempting to adapt their online platform ATAU to address these shortcomings.

ATAU has the potential to reach a large, global audience. The limitations of an annual in-person meetup are avoided with a website, which can be accessed from anywhere with internet. While access to computers is not universal in developing countries, the potential audience is still far larger. Since anyone can create an account and the content is free there is a much lower financial barrier to access. Whereas more participants would pose a challenge to in-person events, the website can accommodate them effectively. ATAU could facilitate a network of artisans, buyers, and designers from around the world, without being limited to those who can travel to the NY NOW event.

At the beginning of the project, ATAU had approximately 650 users. Most of these users were artisans who had made accounts for taking courses. ATA believed that this was enough artisans to begin attracting buyers and designers to the site for networking. However, it became clear that despite 650 accounts created, most of these users no longer returned to the site. When the networking features of the site were extended over the previous two years, these users did not complete their profiles and start using these features. Without a large active user base of artisans with completed profiles, the site was not prepared to provide value to buyers and designers. Therefore, the project shifted to focus on increasing the active user count and number of filled-out profiles among artisans. While the team's methods did see some success, the findings of the project suggest that ATA needs to reevaluate plans for ATAU. The main issue lies with user retention. Users do not come back to the site, meaning that the user base consists mostly of abandoned accounts. The continued development of ATAU will require business decisions on the future of ATAU. ATA has limited resources, which they must balance between ATAU and other initiatives.

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Appendix A: MRP 2017 Email

Dear _____,

We are the team that will be managing Aid to Artisans U for the next few months. We have seen that you participated in the 2017 Market Readiness Program with Aid to Artisans. A user group on Aid to Artisans U has been created to help connect participants and we are inviting you to join. You can join the group by logging in to Aid to Artisans U and then clicking on the "join group" button on the right of the Class of 2017 page. We hope you will find this group helpful in connecting with your peers. Please let us know if you have any problems!

Sincerely,
The Aid to Artisans U team
atauteam@creativelearning.org

Appendix B: Email Campaign Templates

Hello __name__,

We are the Aid to Artisans U team who spoke to you yesterday at the craft fair. We would like to thank you for taking the time to talk to us yesterday, and to help you get started with ATAU. As we mentioned in person, the website facilitates learning of business skills through open courses, as well as networking between artisans, buyers, designers, and social entrepreneurs. To get started using the site, you'll need to create an account and fill out your profile. You may then wish to enroll in courses, create pages to show your products, and search for other users. If you need help with any of these things, we have created several guides, which you can find [here](). If you have any further questions, or wish to contact us for any reason, please send us an email at atauteam@creativelearning.org

Thanks again for your time,
the Aid to Artisans U team

Hello _____,

We noticed that you have recently been active on Aid to Artisans U. We are so glad you have joined us! ATAU offers free online courses on business development and management, marketing, presenting your products, basic computer skills and much more. The platform also allows you to connect with artisans in the sector and find interested buyers and designers looking for specific craft or design.

It looks like you haven't completely filled out your profile, preventing you from getting the most out of ATAU. In order to take advantage of the networking features of ATAU, we strongly encourage you to fill out some fields including your country and role (Artisan/Designer/Buyer/Social Entrepreneur). In addition to filling out your profile, we encourage you to create pages for your best products, to further help other users find you.

We have recently created several guides to help you navigate the site's features, which can be found [here](). This includes completing your profile, creating product pages, and messaging

users. If you have any questions or concerns, we are available to be reached on Skype (atauteam) or through email at atauteam@creativelearning.org.

Sincerely,
The ATAU Team

Hello _____,

Thank you for your participation in the 2017 Market Readiness Program with Aid to Artisans. A user group on Aid to Artisans U has been created to help connect participants and we are inviting you to join. You can join the group by logging into Aid to Artisans U and then clicking on the "join group" button on the right of the Class of 2017 page.

It looks like you haven't completely filled out your profile, preventing you from getting the most out of ATAU. In order to take advantage of the networking features of ATAU, we strongly encourage you to fill out some fields including your country and role (Artisan/Designer/Buyer/Social Entrepreneur). In addition to filling out your profile, we encourage you to create pages for your best products, to further help other users find you.

We have recently created several guides to help you navigate the site's features, which can be found here. This includes completing your profile, creating product pages, and messaging users. If you have any questions or concerns, we are available to be reached on Skype (atauteam) or through email at atauteam@creativelearning.org.

Sincerely,
The ATAU Team

Appendix C: Business Cards

Aid to Artisans U

LEARN, CONNECT AND SHARE WITH
ARTISANS, DESIGNERS, BUYERS AND MORE
AT:
AIDTOARTISANS.CREATIVEU.COM

CONTACT US AT
ATAUTEAM@CREATIVELEARNING.ORG

Appendix D: Creating an Account Guide

Guide Index

1. Creating an Account

2. Completing your Profile

3. Showing your Products

4. Finding and Messaging Users

Device Type

Desktop ▼

1. Go to Aid to Artisans U webpage

2. Click "Sign Up" in the top right corner

3. Enter your information to fill out the fields

Sign Up	X
Username	
E-mail address	
Password	
Confirm password	
First Name	
Last Name	

Create new account

Your username must not already be taken by another user, and cannot contain spaces.

If you do not have an e-mail address, you can create one for free with gmail.

Password requires at least eight characters, one number, uppercase letter, and special character (!@#$%^&*).

4. Select "Create new account"

5. You have now created your account! Congratulations! The next step is to create your profile, a guide for that can be found here.

Appendix E: User Profile Creation Guide

Select Language ▼

Powered by Google Translate

Guide Index

1. Creating an Account

2. Completing your Profile

3. Showing your Products

4. Finding and Messaging Users

Device Type

Desktop ▼

This guide will show you how to develop a complete profile on Aid to Artisans U. A complete profile is essential for networking on ATAU. Filling out a few important fields will enable potential business partners to find you and your products using the advanced search functionality.

1. Log in to ATAU, or create an account if you haven't done so already. Refer to our guide if you need help with this.

2. From the main page (found here) navigate to the Edit Profile page by selecting the arrow on the right of the top bar, then "Edit Profile":

3. You should now be on the Edit Profile page which looks like this:

Edit Profile:

General Information:

☐ Delete picture

ATAU Upload picture

Choose File   No file chosen

Allowed extensions: png jpg jpeg.
Minimum dimensions: 160 x 160 pixel.

First Name *

Example

Last Name *

User

E-mail address *

ExampleEmail@email.com

From here you can edit the information shown on your profile.

4. Make sure to scroll down to User Type and select the appropriate option.
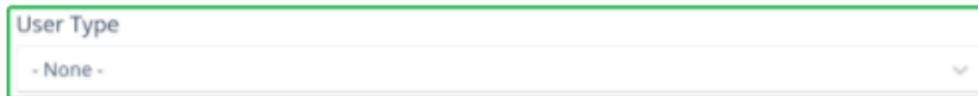
User Type

- None - ⌄

5. The next piece of information to fill out is your Country. This makes it easier for people to connect with you when searching by countries. You may want to enter your City as well.
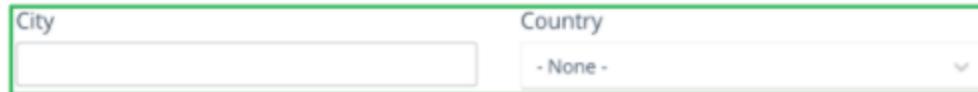
City	Country
	- None - ⌄

6. We also recommend uploading a Profile Picture. This could be a picture of you, your business, or your products or anything that you think represents you.
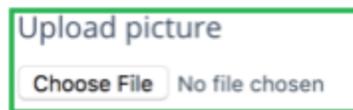
Upload picture

Choose File | No file chosen

7. The last important field to fill in is the Summary, here you can further introduce you and your business:
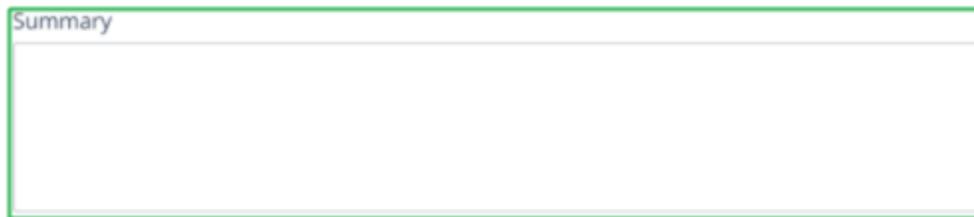
Summary

If you are unsure what to include in the summary box, here are some ideas:

- What do you do?
- Do you work with an organization or business?
- What kind of products do you produce?
- What makes your work unique?
- Include your contact information (email or phone numbers) and a link to your portfolio, website or store.

8. We recommend that you fill out the remaining fields on the page as well so that there is more information available to find you using the advanced search function, which will be covered in another guide.

Congratulations on filling out your profile! You are now ready to create a product page or add and message other users.

Appendix F: Product Page Guide

Select Language ▼

Powered by **Google** Translate

Guide Index

1. Creating an Account

2. Completing your Profile

3. Showing your Products

4. Finding and Messaging Users

Device Type

Desktop ▼

This guide will show you how to create your first product page on Aid to Artisans U. This will enable potential business partners to find your products, and give people examples of your work. You can post multiple products to ATAU, but we suggest using only your best proucts. If you have a large number of products, you can link to the full catalog on your profile. By combining this with a complete profile, potential business partners and customers will be able to find you easily.

1. Log in to ATAU, or create an account if you haven't done so already. Refer to our guide if you need help with this.

2. From the main page (found here) navigate to your profile by clicking on your name or photo on the top right:

LEARN \ CONNECT \ FIND ▼ Master

3. On your profile, scroll down to the products section. Find anc click the button to create your first product.

LATEST PRODUCTS

✎ Create your first product ...
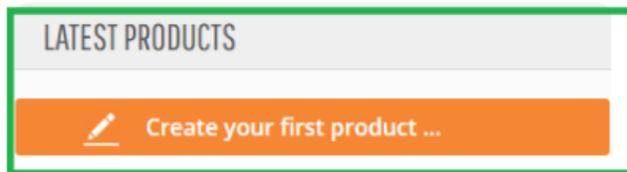
4. You should now be on the product creation page. There are several fields here to fill out. We will start by entering a name and description for our product. To fill out the description, you can either type the description directly on the page, or write it in a Word document and paste it.

Title *

Description
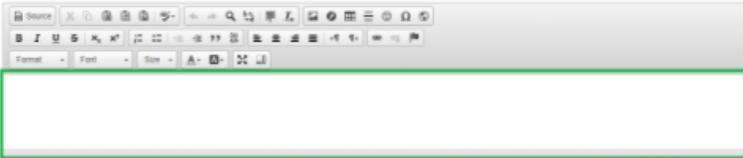
5. A very important part of your product page is the picture. You should add at least one picture of your product by going to the "images" section and adding a new file. We encourage you to upload as many images as necesary to give other users a strong sense of your product.

IMAGES

Add a new file   [Choose Files] No file chosen

Files must be less than 15.63 GB.
Allowed file types: png jpg jpeg.

6. The last required step for your product to appear is to select a category. You should select the 'Products' category.

Category *   Products
              Team Support

7. Finally, you may have a longer document with more details about your product or company. You can attach this using the PDF field. If you do not have a document to add here, you can skip this step.

PDF   [Choose File] No file chosen

Files must be less than 15.63 GB.
Allowed file types: pdf.

8. You've now filled out all of the fields! Just click save in the bottom right corner, and you're all done!.

Save

Congratulations! You have now created your first product! It should appear on the Products page!

Appendix G: Finding and Messaging Users Guide

Select Language ▼

Powered by Google Translate

Guide Index

1. Creating an Account

2. Completing your Profile

3. Showing your Products

4. Finding and Messaging Users

Device Type

Desktop ▼

This guide will show you how to find other users on ATAU, add them as friends, and send messages to them. By connecting with other users, you can expand your network and find potential business partners.

Finding Users and Adding Friends

1. Log in to ATAU, or create an account if you haven't done so already. Refer to our guide if you need help with this.

2. From the main page (found here) navigate to Find People page by selecting "People" under the "Find" section:

3. Here, you can see a list of all users. If you are looking for people in a specific location, you can enter the country here:

  👤 People

Sort by: Date ▾   Location: [   ]

Khadija ADDAIDI
Other From Rabat, Morocco

👥 0 friends   📁 0 Products

Janine Mikaella Chiong

👥 0 friends   📁 0 Products

Sophia Aitken

👥 0 friends   📁 0 Products
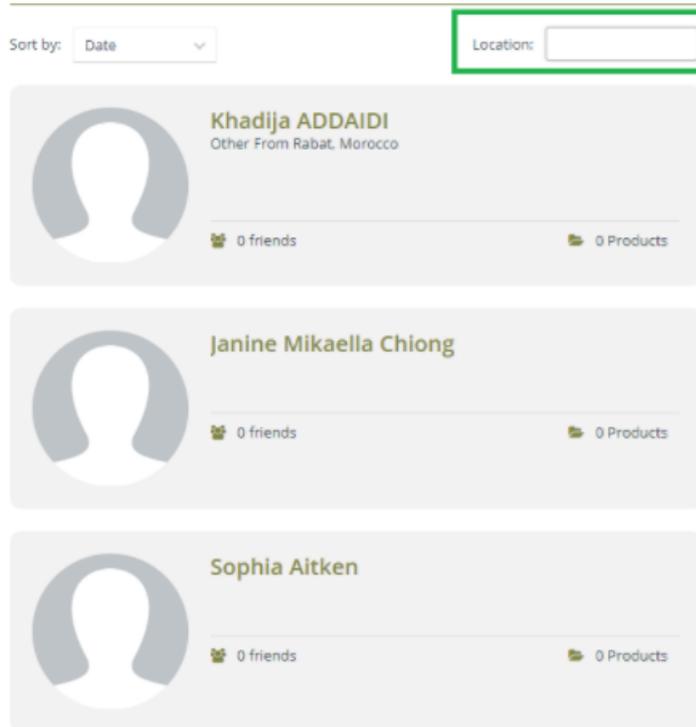
You can also view users of a specific type. For example, you might just be looking for artisans. If so, click on "artisans" in the user types:

USER TYPE

Artisan   Buyer   Designer   Other

If you want to search for a specific person, simply enter their name into the search bar at the top:

LEARN \ CONNECT ➡   [🔍] 📇 ⬅   👤 🔔 ⌄

4. Once you have found a user you wish to add as a friend, click on their name. This will take you to their profile, where you can click "Send Friend Request.":

Aid to ArtisansU ATAU

Washington, DC,
Aid to ArtisansU

👁 Overview	
🧑‍🤝‍🧑 Friends	**1**
🖥 Courses	**4**
📖 Articles	**0**
👥	**1**
🏆	**0**
📅	**1**
👁 Products	**1**

🧑₀ | Send friend request
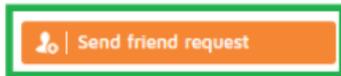
5. After a second or two, you should see that the request has been sent and is awaiting a reply:

🧑₀ | 🧑₀ | Waiting for request
approval

Accepting Friend Requests

1. If a user sends you a friend request, you will be able to see a notification at the top right corner. Click the notification.

LEARN \ CONNECT \ FIND ▼   🔍

2. This will take you to a page where you can either accept or decline the request.

Master User
2 friends
Approve   Decline
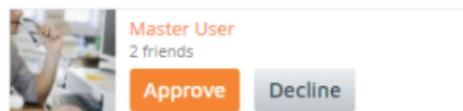
Messaging Friends

1. Once a user has accepted your friend request, you can send them a message. To do this, you must first go to their profile. Start by going to your profile:

2. Now click on the "friends" section on the left side:

Master User

O   Egypt
We   eloper
Shi usiness

👁 **Overvie**

💬 Messages

👥 Friends   3

🖥 Courses   18

📰 Articles   3

👥 Groups   6

🏆 Badges   6

📅 Calendar   0

👁 Products   0
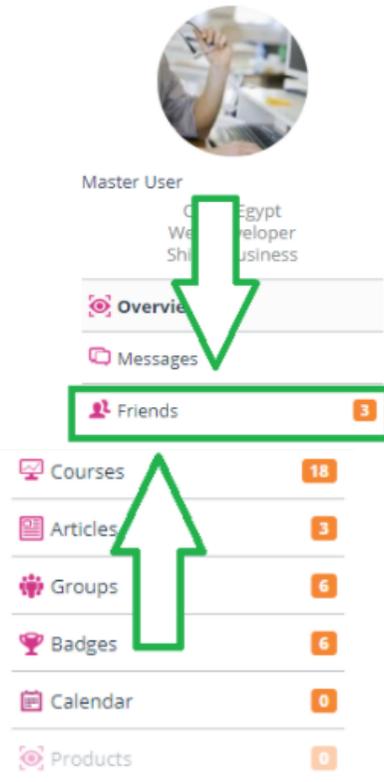
3. From here you can see your list of friends. Click on the friend that you want to message:

Aid to ArtisansU ATAU
1 friends
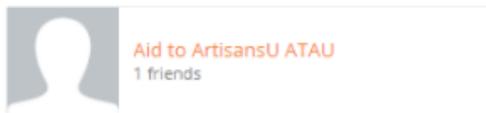
4. This will take you to the friend's profile. Now, just click on the "Message" button on the left side:

Aid to ArtisansU ATAU

Overview	
Friends	1
Courses	0
Articles	0
Groups	0
B	0
	0
Pro ts	0

Message Profile
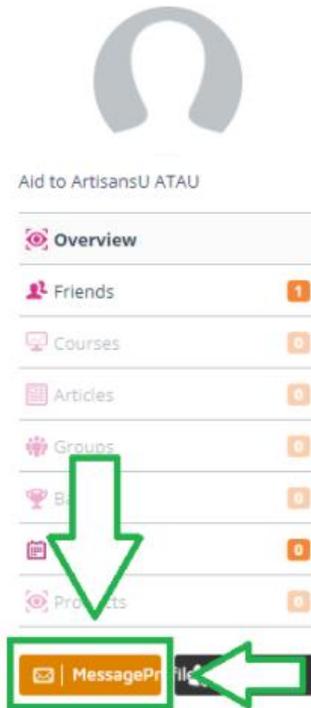
5. Enter your message in the form, and click send!:

New Message	X

Aid to ArtisansU ATAU

write your message here

Send Message

Viewing and Replying to Messages

1. If another user messages you, you can view your messages by clicking the chat button on the top right:

LEARN \ CONNECT \ FIND ▾

2. Here you can see all the messages that users have sent you:

Master User

Master User: hi

09 Nov. 2017
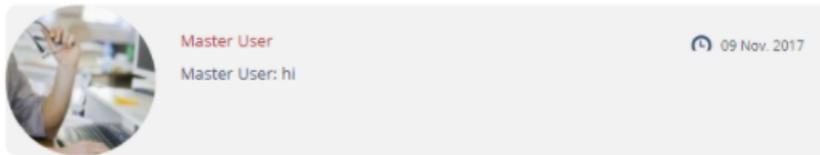
3. Clicking on the conversation here allows you to reply and read the conversation:

write your message here

Send Message

Master User   09 Nov. 2017

hi
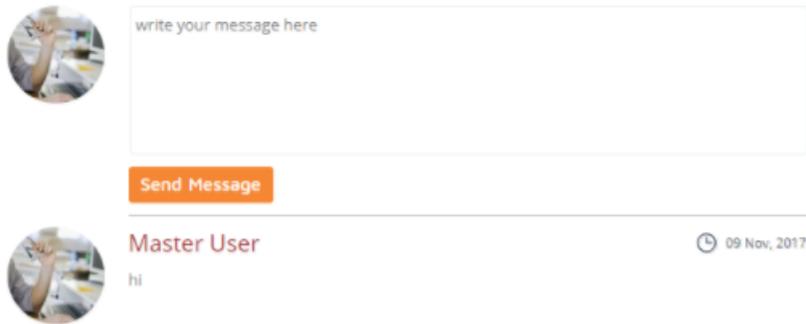
Congratulations! You are now able to find and message users, and expand your business using Aid to Artisans U!

Appendix H: Artisan/Designer Interview Plan

Methodological Notes:

There will be one main interviewer and a note taker. If extra members of the team are available at the specified time then they will join as secondary notetakers, switching off at the end of the interview so everyone gets the chance to ask follow-ups.

Responsibilities:

Will be defined depending on the individual availability of the team members at the time specified by the interviewee. We should have <u>at least</u> two members free at all times specified in our email.

Questions and General Order:

- How did you find ATA?

- What is your current relationship with ATA?

- What kinds of products do you design (e.g. home decor)?

- What are some of the challenges you face (eg. length of time or language barriers)?

- As a designer, what kinds of considerations do you make when looking for artisans?
    - Past work?
    - Ability to be nimble, collaborate?
    - Similar aesthetic?
- How do you currently find artisans to connect with?

- What do you hope to learn by connecting with artisans?

- What is your mission working on this sector?

- Do you look for artisans from specific countries?

Appendix I: Project Poster