

Originally sent via email May 30, 2018

Hello Jake, Chris & Laura,

About a week after the workshop, Jake and I got together at Hogwarts (aka the Chicago Athletic Association) and continued the sparky conversation from the table-in-the-back. We riffed on all sorts of things, including the merits of a Made in Chicago campaign. Once an idea gets in my head, it swirls and steeps and either becomes a bigger idea or joins the crowd in miscellany storage. Some ideas take years (ask me about the math musical sometime, an idea born halfway down a coffee cup that is now a licensed thing).

My blink was that Made in Chicago is MAGA writ city and a zero sum game that can't be won. Part of the problem is that it puts the emphasis on the actual manufacture of a product, when that is just one part of a greater whole that includes everything from finance to marketing. It's also biased toward finished products rather than parts. These days finished products in any category, including food, are assemblages. It's the parts that are actually made somewhere and even then there can be a long tail of suppliers, including the companies that supply the tools and machines to make the parts.

In short, it's a tangle.

Too often, the "Made In X" approach throws a lot of financial and promotional support behind small startups that can never scale, at least in ways that are meaningful for the broader economy (i.e., jobs). It's about photo ops more than substance. There is simply no way a city can bootstrap its way into the future no matter how clever new products or services may be. Most startups fail.

This is not to say that entrepreneurs shouldn't be nurtured, but rather that that alone is not a strategy for enduring urban prosperity.

Chicago's edge (by Chicago I mean the greater metro area) is its diverse economy. There is hardly a product manufactured or assembled in US—and even beyond—that doesn't in some way benefit from and/or bring benefit to a Chicago-based company.

Switch the tagline to **Made Better In Chicago** or **The Chicago Difference** and there's a much more interesting story to tell. It's a twist on the Shenzhen story of strength in nested networks and depth/breadth/bench in proximity.

For example, an ad campaign developed by a Chicago studio for a product designed in California and manufactured in China requires local copywriters, producers, graphic designers, actors, etc. That's a cascade of Chicago jobs—far more than a startup could hope to generate.

Chicago has depth in a whole lot of verticals, but the strength is found in the connections between:

advertising | marketing

cs | coding

logistics | transportation

design

- product

- graphic

engineering

- civil

- industrial

manufacturing

- multi-sector: car parts to fashion

architecture

construction

media production

- copy, video, photo, VR

theatre | music | art

health tech | biotech

finance | insurance

business services

education tech | research | IP

food: products | services | urban ag

water tech

clean energy tech

robotics

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The “spaces between” is where I thrive, which is why perhaps I am a little more attuned to this than most. Silos serve a purpose. Focused expertise matters. Yet there is tremendous potential to be mined in combinations.

Tangent: How many of you have heard of a company called Schawk? It's a Chicago-based multi-national catalog house <http://www.schawk.com/>. A few months ago they hosted a Creative Mornings lecture, which is how I got a tour of their studio, which is an unassuming one story building on Elm, spitting

distance from ICNC. It's a staggering operation employing dozens of fashion and food stylists, photographers, VR-scanners, warehouse staff, UX designers, coders, etc. Most of their work is for major national and international brands. E-tailing speeds up the marketing cycle, so these companies need digital assets ASAP that they can use in all sorts of ways, including Amazon listings. Products need to be scanned for 360 viewing, which is kind of neat trick. Now it's moving to AR/VR (<https://hbr.org/2017/11/a-managers-guide-to-augmented-reality> & <https://mashable.com/2017/09/24/download-this-ikea-place-ar-kit-app/#BkbagppBgiq3>)

Schawk has studios all over the world that together make it a 24/7 operation. Files digitally fly from one location to the next throughout the production cycle. The distributed studio network makes it easier for multinationals to ship product to the nearest studio, saving time, which is money.

So what's Made in Chicago? What's Made Better in Chicago? The second story dwarfs the first.

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Chris and I riffed about this re Cubii, which was invented in Chicago and has headquarters here, but the product is manufactured in China. What if everything has a sort of nutrition label detailing the various parts of a product / business: design, engineering, production, packaging, logistics, marketing, fulfillment, business services. Develop metrics based on jobs and profits. Tally up and then you'll be able see how much of a product is Made in Chicago and how much is Made Better by Chicago.

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This shift in perspective has all kinds of cascading implications. For example, anything that supports Chicago as a place that knows how to do things better is good. Anything that's chest-thumping fluff gets cut. This means rather than producing marketing videos promoting mHub, mHub would create a branded series of Kahn Academy-ish videos to help product developers *everywhere* learn relevant skills. For example, I would love to see a video on different kinds of packaging. Really, I would. I know... sigh...

The Hatchery could produce videos on food safety codes. Big companies such as Edelman could produce videos on the nuts and bolts of whatever they do (in this case, a promotional campaign). All these videos could go onto a Made Better in Chicago portal. It's walk-the-talk marketing.

This also speaks to resilience because it heightens the awareness of how much talent there really is here — perhaps sparking some creative collaborations in the process.

So there you have it: an idea turned into a thought. Pardon any typos — I just sat down and wrote.

Now discuss!

best,

Janet