

# TICCO

go-ticco.co

## Condensed Business Plan

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# Executive Summary

## Summary

Ticco is a network of professionals whose work intersects with cities, communities, and the built environment. Together these individuals comprise an audience of over 1.2 Million across the United States who are largely dismissed, despite their significant purchasing power. By unifying and contemporizing services that are currently split among many different niche outlets and rolling out high-quality, one-of-a-kind experiences that cater to the next generation of decision makers in these practices, Ticco simplifies professional networking and development.

## Business Description

Ticco offers an online platform and in-person experiences which together provide high-quality and desirable professional development for individuals who work in fields that intersect with cities, communities, and the built environment.

In its next phase of development Ticco will offer its online platform through a ‘freemium’ model, in which general users will be able to sign up at no cost and utilize the service while select users will pay through a SAAS model monthly to access additional features and benefits. By participating in the online platform all users are able to engage in social networking with their peers in more than 15 related disciplines, utilize unique and highly-valuable search tools to find and be found by fellow professionals, and access job and career-related resources that appeal to their interests.

In addition to users, Ticco caters directly to employers in the industry who are seeking talent that meets their specific qualifications. These employers experience significant drawbacks and challenges from mainstream online employment services (LinkedIn, Indeed, etc.) due to the niche nature of their roles to fill. To meet their needs, Ticco provides job postings, RFP/RFQ postings, advertising, and head hunting services directly to businesses.

Ticco compliments its online platform with retreats, in-person gatherings designed to bring members together along with new partners in communities across the country for adventures, meaningful dialogue, and continuing education. Retreats draw together professionals from a specific region, and invite firms and agencies that service that region to partner and sponsor in organizing the event.

As it carries out these services, Ticco is guided by its three core values found on page 5 of this business plan.

## Background

Ticco’s founder Katie Rispoli Keaotamai has been a leading voice in the industry since 2014. In 2012 (at the age of 22,) Katie began working in construction overseeing the renovation of historic buildings. After working in the sector for some time, she experienced the stagnation of services for professionals, the lack of collaboration across disciplines, and the lack of engagement among young audiences that professions in this industry face. Katie began advocating for a more inclusive industry that embraces technology. She quickly became an ally of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and has been considered a thought leader on a national level within the preservation profession as a result.

The idea for Ticco began in August of 2017 when Katie was approached by a design firm located in Kent, Ohio who hoped to replicate her California-based project in their community. Though interested in helping replicate the project, she realized she did not have a reliable network of professionals who shared her skill-set in their area she could recommend. She began searching for individuals and was again faced with the challenge of finding qualified practitioners and partners in this niche industry using online tools designed for an audience of tens of millions of individuals.

Katie began expressing her frustration with the lack of specific resources to her peers, and discovered that nearly all she spoke to had faced this challenge in their own work or practice. To investigate further, Katie

contacted more than 50 practicing leaders in Ticco's target professions and found through in-person and phone interviews that they additionally had this experience and desired a unified network and multi-disciplinary professional resources. With their feedback, Katie developed a model for what became Ticco and requested feedback through a market research survey taken by over 100 respondents nationwide in the spring of 2018. In this research survey, over 90% of respondents indicated that they would pay for a service like Ticco, which showed great promise. In pursuit of this venture, Katie recruited a design firm (Each + Every) to build the Ticco platform and began planning the path to incorporation in the fall of 2018.

From January through April 2019, Katie and the team at Each + Every carefully built and planned the initial rollout of Ticco's alpha platform. This version of the platform was intended for a small audience to test viability, with the capability to be expanded upon over time in order to service a growing network of Ticco members. The platform opened on April 24, 2019 to an exclusive base of test users who have grown in number over the last eight months.

In this time period, Ticco has come to be seen as a resource for multidisciplinary collaboration within the architectural, engineering, and construction industry as well as peer disciplines which fall into this same category including construction, urban planning, government, and historic preservation. Over the course of its first year, Ticco has organized two retreats in Long Beach, California and Detroit, Michigan.

### **Where does the name Ticco come from?**

Ticco gets its name from "Old Tjikko," a clonal tree in Sweden. For nearly 10,000 years, Old Tjikko has sprouted new saplings and fostered an diverse ecosystem. Our team saw similarities between the many professions that come together to shape our cities, and the characteristics of this historic tree.

### **Vision Statement**

Ticco is seen as a vital tool for up-and-coming professionals who aim to work with cities, communities, and the built environment. In compliment to professional associations, Ticco offers a comprehensive suite of social networking, career resources, and professional development opportunities.

Ticco maintains an online platform that caters to a base of tens of thousands of users, and organizes in-person retreats which consistently sell out on a quarterly basis. With such a robust user base, employers and service providers who desire to reach professionals in the industry see Ticco as a primary resource to advertise, share job opportunities, or access customized recruitment services.

### **Mission Statement**

Our mission is to enable people who shape cities to embrace each other and collaborate as they usher our urban areas into the future.

### **Value Proposition**

- Ticco offers a contemporary alternative to old-school networking which has shown to be unappealing to Millennial and subsequent generations.
- With the first ever all-disciplinary industry search function, Ticco enables its user base to find and connect with their peers in over 15 different practices related to their own
- Ticco provides members with a platform to ask burning career questions and seek input on projects and initiatives from fellow members of the Ticco community
- Users are able to access professional resources including job opportunities, work opportunities, and collaboration opportunities in order to learn about and secure paid work
- Ticco offers employers a competitive rate to advertise work opportunities and promote their services to a targeted audience that simply cannot be achieved through any other existing outlet (online or in-person) due to its multi-disciplinary nature

- Ticco offers recruitment tools for employers, matching them with a specific set of Ticco members who meet the qualifications for work opportunities in order to simplify the hiring process
- Ticco does not dismiss the longstanding value proposition of established industry associations, but rather collaborates with them to unite services and centralize resources in order to make professional networking and development streamlined and more efficient for participants

### **Core Values**

In all of its work, Ticco is guided by three core values:

1. **Break Barriers:** Encourage collaboration and help professionals to look beyond what divides us
2. **Create a Culture of Compensation:** Advocate for fair pay in our members' professions and the elimination of unpaid internships
3. **Support Future Leaders:** Provide a space where the next generation of professionals feels comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives

## **Market Analysis**

### **Primary Research**

In order to understand the demand for Ticco, we've completed primary market research. Findings have been as follows:

#### **Initial market research survey distributed in May 2018:**

- The majority of respondents have a graduate degree. Though they overwhelmingly are employed full-time in their field of practice, most earn less than \$60,000/year.
- Most respondents think the services offered by traditional membership organizations in their fields are beneficial, but if they have to pay for them on their own the value of those services doesn't outweigh costly membership dues.
- For more than 25% of respondents, "I don't feel welcome among members" or "I don't agree with their conduct or disapprove of their leadership" ranks in the top 3 reasons why they choose to not engage or infrequently engage with traditional membership organizations.
- While a number of respondents said they would pay \$5 - \$10/month to be a member of the network, 43% shared that they would pay \$15/month or more.
- By and large, most respondents stated their favorite component of the company is that it offers the ability to network within other fields. After networking options, earning income by working on projects for cities came in second with 46% of respondents selecting it as a favorable attribute.

### **Member feedback survey distributed in September 2019**

- The majority of respondents said they felt the primary focus of Ticco should be on “breaking down the barriers between professionals who shape cities to foster a culture of collaboration within our fields.”
- Respondents felt the following characteristics of Ticco were its greatest strengths:
  - Ticco offers career development and networking for those on a budget
  - Ticco enables you to network with your peers in a wide variety of professions
  - Ticco brings together people who care about creating stronger cities and communities
  - Ticco saves you time by offering you a curated network of professionals whose work aligns with your own.

### **Member feedback survey distributed in December 2019**

- Respondents on average rated their agreement a 4.7/5 that they or their company have a strong desire to collaborate or work with peers in related professions.
- Most respondents work in their chosen profession because they
  - Make a positive difference in their community or city (100% of respondents)
  - Personally enjoy the tasks required to do their work (90% of respondents)
  - Enjoy the relationships they have with their colleagues/professional dynamics (70% of respondents)
  - Like the financial stability of their chosen profession (20% of respondents)
- Most respondents value these commitments made by Ticco:
  - To advocate for professionals who work with cities, communities, and the built environment (80% of respondents)
  - To never sell user data to third parties (70% of respondents)
  - To advocate for a culture of compensation, pushing for fair pay in our members’ professions (50% of respondents)

### **Member demographics as of February 1, 2020**

To understand the audience we serve, the following are demographics captured pertaining to those who have created Ticco accounts throughout all-time.

- Participants have 7 years of experience on average
- The median age of participants is 30
- The median income of participants is \$63,000 per year
- The median student loan debt of participants is \$60,000

- The most prominent professions represented are:
  - Architecture and Urban Design (19% of participants)
  - Urban Planning (14% of participants)
  - Historic Preservation (13% of participants)
  - Government (8% of participants)
- Of those who chose to share their racial identity, participants are:
  - White (66% of participants)
  - Latinx/o (14% of participants)
  - Asian/Pacific Islander (12% of participants)
  - Black (7% of participants)
  - Native American (1% of participants)
- Of those who shared their highest level of education:
  - 65% held a Master's degree or higher
  - 31% held a Bachelor's degree
- Of those who stated their preferred pronouns:
  - 63% use she/her pronouns
  - 36% use he/him pronouns
  - 1% use they/them pronouns

## Secondary Research

Secondary sources were consulted to gather data on Ticco's prospective user base. Findings include:

- Transparency is important. When Millennials are choosing to purchase a product or service, 59% say being given more information than the minimum required inspires trust in any given brand. 54% of Millennials surveyed said that if they switched to a brand because of its dedication to transparency, they planned to stay loyal to that brand for life.
- In his research as an economist at the University of Chicago, John List found that job listings including language on a company's dedication to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) increased the rate of applicants by 33%, roughly the same as a 27% wage increase.

## Target Market / Customer Summary

Ticco will have three types of customers: Users, employers and agencies, and advertisers/sponsors. Each type of customer has been assessed here for a holistic look into the network's target market.

### Ideal Customer: Users

- **Demographics:** Users are an increasingly-diverse group from a range of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Though professionals in fields targeted by Ticco are overwhelmingly white, Ticco makes a substantial effort to ensure its users represent the racial demographics of the Millennial population

in the United States, which is roughly: 56% white, 18% Latino, 16% black, and 10% asian and others. The ideal user will be in the early stages of their career (indicating the highest level of interest in job opportunities and career resources) and will therefore be likely to earn less than \$75,000 annually.

- **Location:** Ticco users live across the country (currently representing 23 states nationwide.) Residential trends among users indicate that the majority live in a metropolitan area which is known for its creative workforce or cultural community. Examples of such cities include: Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Houston, Portland, Austin, Denver, Oakland, Akron, Philadelphia, Detroit, etc.
- **Career:** The ideal Ticco user has less than fifteen years of professional work experience, though there are some who are more experienced. The ideal user has a formal education, and aims to become certified (or meet other required qualifications) in order to practice in one of Ticco's targeted professions. These fields include various types of design (architecture, landscape architecture, environmental design,) housing, historic preservation, economic development, and more.
- **Lifestyle:** As illustrated by Ticco's existing user base, our message clearly resonates with the Millennial generation. A generation which overwhelmingly desires to be self-employed, Millennials are not engaging in traditional workspaces as have prior generations. These individuals often lack an employer to subsidize or cover costs associated with professional development, and as a result are not engaging with traditional membership-based organizations in their fields. As a result of this disengagement, they lack a sense of community and are craving a culture and multi-disciplinary network they can turn to for questions, ideas, and work opportunities.
- **Communication:** The ideal customer for Ticco utilizes technological tools for communication. Whether communicating with family, friends, or professional contacts, the network's target audience prefers to use digital tools. As a digital platform, it is expected that prospective members will view Ticco as a viable resource for professional communication and collaboration. However, Ticco members will also find value in in-person events hosted and organized by Ticco beyond the digital platform. These events will center around small-group conversations and retreats offering intimate, meaningful opportunities to build relationships with peers in a wide variety of related professions. The Millennial generation in particular has demonstrated a strong desire to participate in these types of intimate events compared to more traditional conference structures and panel discussion type formats.

## Market Size

Ticco targets individuals who meet the above criteria in a number of professions. In order to estimate the total potential market, we gathered the number of individuals who are known to be members of industry-related professional associations.

What we discovered is that there are just over 460,000 individuals in the United States who are members of the professional organizations we observed, and 62% of Ticco users to-date have indicated that they are not members of any of the above or other associations. If this percentage indicates a trend among Ticco's target audience, then the identified number of individuals may be as little as 38% of the total market in the United States. By this calculation, the total potential market in the United States is just over 1.2 Million.



## Customer Acquisition Strategy

Ticco will utilize the following approaches to customer acquisition:

1. **Social Media Marketing:** Paid ads on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook will attract Ticco's target audience.
2. **Word of Mouth / Referrals:** Members of the Ticco community will tell their peers about the service and grow interest in Ticco's offerings.
3. **Strategic Partnerships:** By working with professional associations, industry leaders, and relevant media outlets, we will position Ticco in front of our target audience. Content will appear in e-newsletters, social media channels, and blogs as well as other formats (such as webinars) as agreed upon with each partner.
4. **Online PR:** Proactive outreach to industry-relevant publishers (online and in print.)
5. **Search Marketing:** Search Engine Optimization (SEO,) paid search, and pay-per-click (PPC) campaigns.
6. **In-Person Marketing:** Ticco staff will visit select industry conferences to attract our target audience. At these events we will connect with users, employers and agencies, and prospective advertisers or sponsors.
7. **Opt-in Email:** Ticco will manage a digital newsletter sent to those who opt-in on our website.

## Go-To-Market (GTM) Strategy

Ticco's GTM strategy will engage existing and potential users, employers and agencies, and prospective advertisers or sponsors in the early stages of the platform and over the course of its rollout.

### Stage 1: Market Research (Complete)

In completing market research, Ticco will interview and receive responses from professionals and representatives of government agencies. When interviewing professionals, Ticco will gather contact information and receive responses that indicate an individual's interest in utilizing the service, and will follow up accordingly in later stages. When interviewing government representatives, Ticco will gauge interest in utilizing the service to post RFP/RFQ and employment opportunities.

### Stage 2: Initial Announcement (Complete)

In January 2019, Ticco's PR team will distribute a press release to share news of the platform and announce that Ticco is now inviting early users to create their profiles, which will become active when the service launches in the spring. Ticco will additionally spread word of open applications through its social media channels, and will encourage Ticco Ambassadors to share this news with their network.

### Stage 3: Alpha Release (Complete)

In April 2019, the first users will gain access to the alpha version of the platform. These individuals will consent to use an early version of Ticco when creating their account, and will use the platform normally. Throughout this early period, Ticco's team will work diligently to personally thank each member for their participation, to reach out to members for feedback, and to closely monitor the types of interactions between members. Each Ticco team member will be responsible for customer service and sales, wholeheartedly working to grow the platform and ensure it achieves optimal results. For efficiency, the team will use Airtable, a project management software, to manage user data and insights, to coordinate marketing efforts, and to track projects.

### Stage 4: Modification (Complete)

In July 2019, Ticco will reach out to each active user to gather insights and identify bugs within the platform. Users will report issues and share feedback through surveys distributed by messaging through the platform and by email, by phone, by email directly, and by messaging through the platform with Ticco admins.

Feedback will be reconciled to review common concerns and the greatest demand for features, and an approach will be developed to best-tackle these issues and continue in the lead-up to the release of Ticco’s Beta platform.

During this time, users will continue using the platform. However, as updates are made and bugs are fixed, users will receive a notice with each login alerting them to differences since their last login. This will ensure users know we are working to make changes, and that they feel they’re investing in a productive and meaningful experience.

**Brand Positioning**

For professionals, Ticco is the network that delivers multidisciplinary communication, resource and knowledge-sharing, and the ability to find work in a niche industry.

**Price/Cost**

Customer	Price	Reasoning
Base User	Free	Many will join Ticco as base users to gain access to the simplest offerings of the platform at no cost. By joining the platform, they will contribute to activity and enhance the experience of the platform for all users. Additionally, through their presence Ticco will grow its reach and will have increased leverage to sell advertising and business-facing services.
Sponsor	\$250 to \$5,000	Sponsorships for Ticco Retreats will vary depending on the nature of the sponsor and the sponsorship. However, most sponsorships are expected to be in the range of \$500 to \$1,500 (based upon trends observed in retreats to-date.) Retreats will be held twice per year in 2020, and four times per year beginning in 2021. All retreats will come with sponsorship opportunities.

# Services + Products

## Services

- **Networking through the platform (Free plan)**
  - **Description:** Through our online platform, users maintain a profile outlining their experience, interests, and activity. Users can see the profiles of their peers and message those whose work they find intriguing or would like get to know better. Users also engage through Discussions, a section of the platform in which users can ask questions or seek advice from the community. Once developed in 2020, free users will be able to view job postings, RFP opportunities, and posts from those seeking collaboration in the opportunities center.
  - **Why?:** Networking through the platform offers an opportunity for professionals to identify those with similar interests, work histories, or career trajectories and build a relationship with them. Offering this feature build's Ticco's brand as a resource for authentic relationship-building and interdisciplinary collaboration.
  - **Where?:** This service is available through our online platform, found at [app.go-ticco.co](http://app.go-ticco.co).
  - **Who?:** This service is targeted towards Ticco users, who are professionals in fields that center around cities, communities, and the built environment. These include design and architecture, historic preservation, urban planning, community and economic development, civil engineering, and aligned practices.
  - **Cost:** There is no cost to join and utilize this service.
  
- **Advertising and Sponsorships**
  - **Description:** Professional associations, media outlets, employers, and agencies who serve Ticco's primary user base pay to advertise opportunities, events, and professional development services on Ticco. Advertisements are offered through the Ticco platform, in Ticco's e-newsletter, on the Ticco blog, and on Ticco's social media channels. These entities can also promote their message by sponsoring a Ticco retreat.
  - **Why?:** These agencies aim to share opportunities, events, and professional development services with Ticco's primary user base. Once Ticco releases its freemium model and its user base quickly grows, Ticco will become a desirable outlet to advertise a message with a targeted base of professionals.
  - **Where?:** This service is available through our online platform, found at [app.go-ticco.co](http://app.go-ticco.co). Additional advertising will take place on Twitter and Instagram @go\_ticco, on Facebook at [facebook.com/ticcocommunity](https://facebook.com/ticcocommunity), and on the Ticco blog at [go-ticco.co/blog](http://go-ticco.co/blog).
  - **Who?:** Advertisers and sponsors are professional associations, media outlets, employers, and agencies who serve Ticco's primary user base.
  - **Cost:** The cost for advertisements for 2020 are as follows:
    - In-platform advertisements: \$50
    - E-Newsletter advertisement: \$75
    - Sponsored social media post: \$250
    - Sponsored blog post: \$150
    - Sponsorship opportunities for Ticco retreats range from \$500 to \$5,000

- **Webinars and E-Learning**
  - **Description:** Beginning in February 2020, Ticco will begin offering monthly webinars (digital broadcasts of lectures and presentations for educational purposes.)
  - **Why?:** Webinars are an increasingly-popular form of consuming professional development content in the industry. They offer an ideal format to share a message with viewers, as well as feature a partner or sponsor for an additional revenue opportunity. Webinars are additionally beneficial in that they offer an opportunity to capture email addresses from attendees which can be leveraged to up-sell additional products and offerings after the event has concluded. Once Ticco is licensed to offer continuing education credits to those who attend a webinar, the cost of attending webinars which offer those credits can be increased substantially as individuals are able to justify a higher cost to their employers.
  - **Where?:** Webinars will be hosted through a third-party service provider, and will be linked to directly from email confirmations sent to those who register. Registrations and payment for registrations will be made directly on Ticco's website at go-ticco.co.
  - **Who?:** Ticco users and prospective users will attend webinars.
  - **Cost:** The cost for a webinar will vary depending on the nature of the webinar and the amount of continuing education credits offered. A general breakdown of pricing for webinars provided in 2020 is as follows:
    - General informational webinar or webinar promoting Ticco: Free
    - Training webinars hosted by Ticco or in partnership with other groups which do not offer continuing education credits: Free for Pro members / \$10 General Registration
    - Training webinars which offer continuing education credits: \$25 for Pro members / \$50 General Registration
  
- **Retreats**
  - **Description:** Retreats are networking events which center around hands-on learning and offer individuals a chance to find and build connections with their peers in a wide range of related practices. Over one or two days, participants get to know one another, explore a new city, and participate in activities which help them set a foundation for working and professional relationships.
  - **Why?:** Ticco's initial market research indicated that target market individuals are hungry for affordable yet meaningful in-person networking opportunities. Additionally, there is a high demand for these networking opportunities to include a cross-disciplinary base of participants. To-date Ticco has hosted two retreats, both of which have sold out. The high demand for these experiences indicates their importance to the professional community and likelihood to generate a strong financial return.
  - **Where?:** Retreats take place in cities across the country. Initially retreats will take place in larger cities with populations of around 500,000 or more to ensure a sizable market is present. Destinations will be chosen based upon confirmed interest from local partners who can help promote the retreat, a complimentary or low-cost venue provided, and the regional population. 2019 retreats were hosted in Long Beach, California and Detroit, Michigan. The Spring 2020 retreat will be held in New York City, while other future locations include Savannah, Georgia, San Antonio, Texas, and Tulsa, Oklahoma.
  - **Who?:** Participants in retreats will be individuals who align with the criteria for Ticco's ideal customer (user.)
  - **Cost:** Registration for a Ticco retreat ranges from \$250 to \$500. The cost of registration is determined by travel costs associated with the retreat, the venue, meals and provisions, sleeping quarters (if applicable,) staff expenses, and other event expenses.

# Strategy + Implementation / Promotion

## Social Media Marketing

The ideal Ticco user prefers to consume content through online spaces such as Twitter, Instagram, and Youtube, along with Facebook occasionally. Ticco's ideal business clients are also using these outlets, as well as LinkedIn in some instances, to communicate.

Ad placements to-date have reinforced our initial expectation that Instagram will be Ticco's most effective outlet for marketing. However, Ticco will continue to pay for promoted content on professional channels such as LinkedIn and popular media outlets that reach our target demographic such as NextCity, CityLab, and Planetizen.

As we make changes to the Ticco platform in 2020 and roll out new services, we will promote those services through those media outlets and on Ticco's primary social channel (Instagram) most frequently. On Instagram, content will be primarily visual and will showcase mock-ups of the Ticco platform, features highlighting Pro users, images of individuals who embody the spirit of the Ticco network, content generated by Ticco and the Ticco community, and data which highlights the value offered by Ticco and its continued growth.

In order to be efficient and stay on top of social media content production and scheduling, we utilize Planoly to schedule social posts and Airtable to track success and growth among our various social media channels.

## Other Digital Marketing

- **Public Relations:** When appropriate, Ticco will write and distribute press releases to raise awareness among its target audiences.
- **Blogging:** Ticco maintains a blog visible to users and site visitors at [go-ticco.co/blog](http://go-ticco.co/blog). Content is created on a routine basis which centers around Ticco announcements, promoted blog posts, and helpful career content. Posts are often promoted through the network's e-newsletter in order to direct e-newsletter readers to [go-ticco.co](http://go-ticco.co).
- **Email Marketing:** E-newsletters are sent twice monthly to Ticco's general mailing list. Individuals can sign up for this newsletter at [go-ticco.co/newsletter](http://go-ticco.co/newsletter). Newsletters summarize Ticco's recent activities, feature members, share insight into upcoming Ticco retreats, and highlight recent activity on the Ticco platform. Monthly, a newsletter will be sent to all subscribers announcing recently-admitted members of the network and other more infrequent updates.
- **Search Engine Optimization:** Ticco has gained Search Engine Optimization (SEO) by being mentioned in relevant media outlets and by growing its online following. At this time, Ticco is the primary result on major search engines and generally dominates the first page of search results. As our user base continues to grow, SEO will improve even further. Additionally, the name "Ticco" was specifically chosen to increase SEO. Due to the lack of other companies or phrases containing the word, the name allows Ticco to accurately and easily track SEO and ensure an increase in performance over time.
- **Online Advertising:** Beginning in 2020, Ticco will advertise its platform through major search engines using tools including Google Ads, as well as on the websites and materials of media outlets and professional associations within the industry for maximum exposure.

## Offline Marketing

- **Events:** Ticco attends conferences targeting our ideal customers, hosting happy hours and events, as well as maintaining exhibitor tables in order to share its services with attendees.