

THE ART OF CRAFT

Add to your offering by selling arts and crafts materials. There's more to it than you think.

JANE SMITH

Like the office supplies industry was many years ago, the craft industry is today 'fertile soil' with room for everyone and some 'rich pickings'! Still very fragmented and full of small independent manufacturers and re-sellers, 96% of craft businesses are one or two people with three quarters of craftspeople operating as sole traders.* But the evidence is that interest is indeed growing with many bigger companies now taking a very active interest.

When talking about the art and crafts industry as a whole we should first try to define exactly what we mean. The Crafts Council was established with a remit to focus on textiles, ceramics, wood, metal, jewellery, glass, leather toys, musical instruments and the graphic crafts. Almost exclusively, the main influence has been from USA (which is not unexpected) although in some areas we are actually more advanced. The total crafts market in the UK is estimated to be worth around £400m and is showing

steady and healthy growth (with some sectors including graphic crafts reporting 30% pa annum growth).

But a word of warning, trends also show that to succeed the products need to have 'Anglo' appeal!

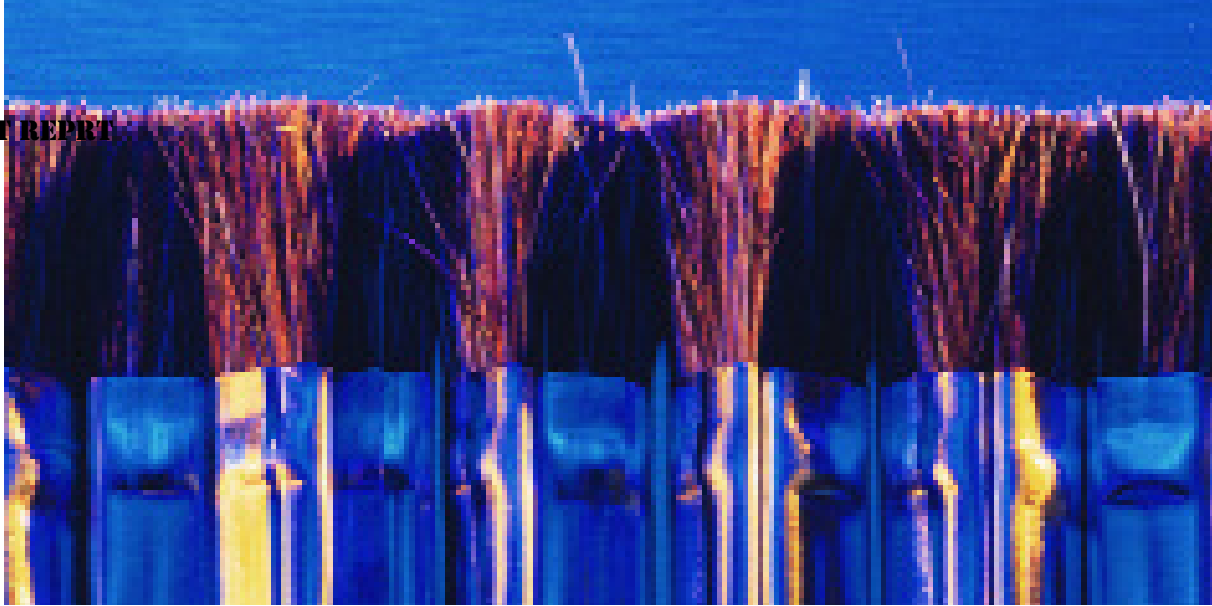
Of all the categories covered within the 'catchall' Arts and Crafts category it is the graphic crafts that will interest us in the office supplies industry as there are distinct areas of cross over and evidence that there is potential to tap into this high margin marketplace.

Anyone who has been in the office products industry for a while will remember the rise and fall of the graphic supplies market. At the time this predominantly had a commercial only focus, mainly towards technical drawing and typesetting. Today most of this has been replaced by computer graphics but there is now a rise in the 'hobby' and 'leisure' side of crafts. In particular card making is now very popular here and according to Tollit & Harvey,

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who recognised the potential of this market over two years ago, the UK is far more advanced in the art of card making than the US. The market in the US is predominantly centred around scrap-booking or memory books, as they are better known and this is currently starting to take shape here, but is still some way behind.

There's no doubt that this new market area is going to be of greater interest to the high street stationer where, alongside commercial custom, the revenue stream is generated by the general public. But there is also potential within the commercial sector through internet based solutions which are very popular with this audience. Specific 'crafters' products are now available from companies such as Tollit & Harvey, 3M, Letraset, Fantastak, Glue Dots International, Geographics and Seigel and are proving to be successful whether for stationery, art and craft stockists or both. >>



Letraset moved into the craft market relatively recently and found its vast experience in the graphics supply sector invaluable. Claire Rea, Letraset's marketing manager told us, "The craft market offers dealers with retail outlets a profitable new opportunity that is more accessible than they might imagine because many items clearly cross over from office to craft. We've been helped enormously with the Letraset brand name that most people had an association with. It enabled us to quickly establish a niche for quality products, for example, StudioTac, which is a specially formulated dry-tac adhesive that transfers by pressure and is used by crafters and office workers alike."

Fantastak offers a range of glue dots on a roll which are 'fantastic' (forgive the pun) for crafters and office workers too. And Glue Dots International also has a full range of craft adhesive products. Mike Silson, general manager of Glue Dots International says, 'Glue Dots launch into the office market at PaperWorld 2005 was based on our confidence that craft products deliver a sound business opportunity for office products dealers.'

So what other kinds of products are associated with this potentially new audience. Well, for Tollit & Harvey it is its new CarlaCraft range of punches, trimmers, scissors and polypropylene craft storage products developed specifically for the market. Crafters have special sizes, for example 12x12" is very common for paper and storage. A4 and A3 retail packs of card, board and paper as well as art pads sheets, boards and pressboard are also very popular.

Designer papers would also fall both into the office use market and craft/hobby market. Pre-printed designs for all occasions are available from brands such as Geographics (now available from BDS Supreme) and Seigel. A great 'margin booster'. While computers are capable of producing such graphics it does become very expensive in terms of ink and toner to run off many copies. These pre-printed papers are ideal for certificates, invitations, posters, special notices and menus etc.

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go and, hence, has a broad appeal. Crafters also have a tendency to be less price conscious so the margin potential is much greater. To find out more about the market it is a great idea to visit one of many craft exhibitions to see the potential growth.

From Tollit & Harvey's point of view it hasn't even started getting into pure craft outlets yet as the interest has been so great with the company's existing stationery dealers. If that is not testament to the potential then we don't know what is. Nick Parry, director of marketing for Tollit & Harvey told us, "Everywhere you look there is some new activity in the craft market. The fact that it offers a serious alternative to the 'PlayStation Nation' trend and gets people of all ages back into doing real things again with tangible and often very rewarding results, I think, will keep it developing progressively for many years to come."

All the signs are that this is an area to investigate further. The potential appears to be very well worth it.

** source: The Crafts Council*