

Intrepid entrepreneurs

With graduate unemployment at its highest level in fifteen years and the current financial climate making job hunting a challenge, some recent Goldsmiths graduates have decided to take a different career path. Genevieve Kantoch spoke to these enterprising alumni who are turning their passion into a business.

The Papered Parlour



Claire Heafford
MA Cultural Studies 2006

Enter a green door off a small street in Clapham in South London and you step into The Papered Parlour. Founded by Claire Heafford, the company has become a fixture on the London craft scene in the last 18 months. After graduation, Claire set up the studio with a friend running weekly workshops in craft and design which were in an instant hit. They subsequently won a small business competition and were awarded £50,000 which allowed them to develop their premises and expand their programme. The studio soon caught the attention of the press with a 5-star review in Time Out's 'Best of London' followed by recommendations in publications as diverse as Elle Decoration, Marie Claire and even the New York Times. Building on the success of their initial classes, they have now introduced additional workshops including recycled jewellery, book printing and shoe making.

What do you most enjoy about being your own boss?

The thing I enjoy most about running my own company is the freedom I have to learn and explore whatever I choose. My learning is never complete,

because there is always something I can improve on. I also love the challenge of being responsible for so many aspects of operations, from the artistic direction through to end-of-year accounts.

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What have you learnt in the process?

Whilst studying I worked as a temp for a number of small businesses during the holidays. I enjoyed the pace and atmosphere in these organisations but was always thinking 'if I were the boss I'd run the place more efficiently or motivate my team more effectively'. I've learnt that there was a reason my old bosses struggled and did not always perform to the best of their abilities! Being in charge of an organisation is hard work. It's impossible to excel in every area of business and management, so clever strategies are needed to lead a team of totally different personalities. It's a wonderful but sometimes difficult challenge!



What advice would you give to others?

There are three pieces of advice I'd give to anyone wanting to set up their own company. Firstly, take the seed of your idea and develop it into a strong and coherent vision. Any project worth doing will involve the co-operation of other people so you will need to show your team a clear picture of where you are all going and how you are going to get there. Secondly, there is no such thing as failure, only feedback, so be flexible in your approach and allow yourself to make adjustments in response to feedback. Thirdly, surround yourself with people who believe in your idea: you'll need their positive energy to get you through the tougher times.

Salad Days



Mark Prove
BA Politics and Economics, 2008

Since leaving Goldsmiths three years ago, Mark has taken the rather unconventional route for a Politics graduate into event catering. A regular festival-goer, Mark was always disappointed with the same array of greasy food served up at outdoor events. This gave him the inspiration to set up a company with a completely different concept – takeaway salad boxes. Salad Days was born, with a vision



to create fast food that tastes great, is good for you and is also environmentally friendly. The company strives to source the best local ingredients and also ensure all their packaging is fully biodegradable. Salad Days trade at a number of public music festivals from Glastonbury to the Isle of Wight Festival, and in the summer months last year sold over 22,000 salads. With sales rising they are now expanding the company with a private events catering service.

What prompted you to set up your own company?

I met my business partner who spends more time thinking about lunch than anyone! The British summer is famously disappointing, so we really wanted to make the most of it and create proper summer food – tasty, rustic, and at an affordable price. We also thought we would benefit from the current health food trend we're witnessing at the moment. We're lucky that our sector enjoys a certain recession immunity as people generally

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budget to buy food at festivals rather than bring their own.

Did any of the skills you learnt at Goldsmiths help you?

I think there are many things that I have taken from Goldsmiths that have helped me with what I do. Creativity, diversity and discovery to name but a few. One of the things I have learnt through this experience is to talk to everyone – but make your own decision.

What are some of the highlights and the downsides?

In 2009 we traded at celebrity farmer Jimmy Doherty's festival in the Suffolk countryside. The weather was fantastic and we had the biggest queue I have ever seen! The downsides are you can never mentally or physically not be at work. The list of 'things to do' only seems to grow.

Juno Says Hello



Rebecca Rose
MA Contemporary Art Theory, 2007

Rebecca has been a long-time fan of vintage clothing and when friends were regularly asking to borrow her clothes she realised she had an eye for picking good second-hand pieces. Although the trend for vintage clothing had become much more mainstream, Rebecca could see there was a niche in the market for a website offering a specific product and service. She decided to go into business and set up Juno Says Hello, an online boutique selling luxury vintage dresses. The company offers their customers a personal consultation as well as alterations service, combining the convenience of an online shop with a bespoke personal service.

The brand has been featured in numerous magazines from Vogue to the Herald Tribune and their dresses have been photographed on the red carpet at the Elle Style Awards, BAFTAs and Academy Awards.

Building a company takes a lot of hard work but the rewards are endless

What have been your highlights so far?

Building a company takes a lot of hard work but the rewards are endless. Highlights have included taking the boutique 'live' after five months of careful planning; finding the right employees first time; making that first big sale and helping customers find the perfect dress for a really special occasion. A few months ago a client bought a dress online and when I rang her to confirm the delivery time, she told me she was going to wear it to the Royal Wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton - I nearly fell off my chair!

What do you enjoy most about running your own business?

One of the things I enjoy most is having freedom over my schedule. Although I work more hours than I did before, I am able to decide when I am needed in the office. Very often I am able to work from home or away from London. In addition, I've been lucky enough to find two brilliant women to work for the company – their talent and creativity are fundamental to the company's success.



What advice would you give to others looking to set up their own company?

Don't be afraid of approaching people in a similar field and asking them for advice. Particularly in the creative industries, you are much less likely to have direct competitors, so you won't put anybody's nose out of joint by asking for help. In the world of vintage clothing, there is a strong sense of community and dealers are usually very happy to share clients. Before starting Juno Says Hello, I read through various kinds of business plans and manuals, hoping to glean as many tips as possible, but there is no substitute for real experience. When things go wrong, there is only one person who can sort it out...you! That can mean a lot of headaches and long hours, but it always pays off.

Streets on Demand



Fadah Jassem
BA Anthropology and Media, 2010

After graduating in September last year Fadah wanted to put the journalism skills she had honed in her degree to good use. Along with a friend she co-founded a new website, Streets on Demand, which was inspired by their passion for urban music. The site serves as a gateway to an eclectic mix of musicians and performers. It is a hub of reviews, news, videos and interviews with the latest offering in urban music and street culture. The site also provides a platform for the development of young writers, contributors and artists.

What prompted you to set up your own company?

The job market and prospects were very slim after I graduated last year. I've always wanted to create something for myself and didn't really want to work for someone else. The concept was a joint idea with a friend of mine. After working for an online music publication, I found many restrictions in the music being published. The idea for streetsondemand.com was to provide wider access to the music we enjoyed.

I love that I'm in total control and doing something that I'm passionate about

What skills did you learn at Goldsmiths that have helped you?

The meaning of being a gatekeeper and the media skills I developed through my course. Also, the insight and understanding about groups, culture and sub cultures of people through Anthropology. Since we started the site I've discovered the super-power of social networking and having to juggle many roles at once. I've learnt to take time to plan and re-plan all aspects and to come up with a strategy plan - this is very important!

What have you enjoyed most so far?

As the editor-in-chief of the site, securing exciting exclusives, and interviewing the musician Ed Sheeran was a real highlight. I've really enjoyed the networking, hiring contributors and also the perks like film screenings. Most of all, I love that I'm in total control and I'm doing something that I'm passionate about, helping to promote talented artists.

Find out more at:
www.thepaperedparlour.co.uk
www.saladdaysonline.com
www.streetsondemand.com
www.junosayshello.com