

**Crafts Council**

# **The Power of Experiences**

Bringing Craft Experiences  
to your Business: A Guide

**November 2021**





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# A Guide to Craft Experiences

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## What is this guide about?

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen millions of people turn to making things with their hands as a source of comfort in turbulent times. Live experiences and connecting with others have become even more significant. As the public looks afresh at craft and what it can offer them, the role of makers and the experiences they can offer are more in demand than ever.

A craft experience is an opportunity for a participant or consumer to engage in a craft activity or session. Having a go at making can include:

- experiencing a location, tourist venue, or event that includes craft;
- choosing a have-a-go taster session for fun;
- participating in a craft course or workshop;
- accessing a making session online;
- consuming craft in a setting that boosts a maker's or other business's brand.

Evidence suggests that when people understand the skills involved in making they more readily engage with craft and are more likely to buy a maker's work; such experiences indirectly add value to the maker's

business. Makers themselves have also found inspiration in sharing their skills and ideas with others, while offering hands-on experiences in galleries, private-sector developments, and temporary 'meanwhile' spaces helps to attract public interest and business.

Together with the film and case studies that follow, this guide builds an understanding about the motivations behind, and approaches to, the craft experience economy:

- What motivates makers to deliver experiences?
- How do the experiences connect to other opportunities?
- How can makers set up and deliver experiences?
- What is the impact of such experiences on makers' businesses?

**Who is this guide for?**

This guide is aimed at makers and craft businesses that earn income from creating and selling pieces of work; and/or those of you who would like to use your skills to create an additional income stream by offering craft experiences.

This guide will also be useful for other creative businesses and brands that want to:

- diversify their business;
  - generate income through participation in craft;
  - animate or programme spaces using unique craft objects.
- Or you may simply be looking to share your long-honed skills in helping others have fun.



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## What is a craft experience?

A craft experience is an opportunity for a participant or consumer to engage in a craft activity or session, for the reasons we describe below. It is a hands-on experience.

The craft experience market offers everything from soap-making to stone-carving, creative collage to cartographic embroidery. It also includes exposure to craft; for example, through studio visits or retail promotions. Experiences can be enjoyed face-to-face or online, in large groups or individually, as a one-off or in a series.

We are social beings who crave experiences in which we can gather with others, either in-person or online. Experiences generate memories and give meaning to our lives.

Often an experience has economic value (people pay to be part of it, and the cost of the experience suggests its worth) and it has tie-ins to other merchandise that is sold alongside.

We all know about this in the context of cultural tourism, where the focus is often on visiting built

heritage, museums, and monuments. Creative tourism focuses instead on experiencing image, identity, lifestyles, atmosphere, narratives, and media.

Participants in craft experiences may be motivated by:

- a desire for self-improvement;
- mindfulness and well-being;
- slow tourism, immersing themselves in something new;
- authentic experiences or souvenirs;
- finding status (can I share it?);
- convenience (it is either nearby, online, or happening simultaneously);
- or simply delight.

If you would like to know more about the experience economy have a look at our [‘Further reading’](#) section.



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## Why is this relevant now?

Our research (see [‘The Market for Craft’](#) report and [Data Tool](#)) shows that 73% of adults in the UK are in the market for craft, snapping up almost 25 million handcrafted objects in 2019, and driving craft sales over £3 billion.

The population survey underpinning our research identified an ongoing appetite for paid-for craft experiences, with 20% of the overall market for craft (7% definitely and 13% probably) indicating that they would pay to attend a craft workshop in the future. One in five (21%) has paid to take part in a craft class, workshop, or course, with 5% (2.5million) having done so in the past 12 months and a further 16% (7.1million) at some point in the past. The report defines a set of market sub-groups and how likely they are to have attended a paid-for class or workshop.

Craft has become a mainstay of entertainment television, pushing it firmly into the public’s radar. Viewing figures for craft-based programmes such as ‘The Great British Sewing Bee’ and ‘The Great Pottery Throw Down’ are continually increasing.

The craft sector is able to offer products and experiences that create lasting and meaningful memories; the rise in online selling platforms in the last decade has meant that makers can now reach

wider audiences. Good design, marketing, and delivery are every bit as important for experiences as they are for products. As well as offering active craft experiences some makers, who may be constrained by a lack of time or workshop space to offer courses, have diversified into offering behind-the-scenes tours that provide insight into the making process without being hands-on.

As craft becomes more visible – and as the rise of kitchen-table makers selling lower-cost items challenges our understanding of what constitutes ‘craft’ – many makers may find themselves having to compete with mainstream markets and the retail expectations they create.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, people will expect brands to adapt to meeting their new needs, providing experiences that have a lasting and positive impact on their lives. The pandemic has reminded us that there is more to life than material possessions. It has also shown us what is possible when we act collectively.

## Why would you offer craft experiences?

A craft experience might provide a route for you to:

- develop your business model;
- generate an additional income stream;
- engage audiences to feed into your research;
- provide access to education;
- provide added value and profile to your brand.

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## Film and case studies of craft experiences

Have a look at the range of craft experiences on offer in the film and case studies that accompany this guide. The experiences generate a creative energy that inspires both the participants and the hosts, as well as bringing in additional income.

This graphic summarises the key characteristics of each case study business.

<b>NAME</b> <b>Nafisi Studio</b>	<b>NAME</b> <b>Brookfield Properties</b>
<b>BUSINESS</b> Furniture designer 	<b>BUSINESS</b> Global real estate management company 
<b>EXPERIENCE AIM</b> Sharing knowledge through experiences	<b>EXPERIENCE AIM</b> Nurturing the cultural value of craft experiences
<b>EXPERIENCE OFFER</b> Tailored experiences	<b>EXPERIENCE OFFER</b> Public facing tenant experiences

NAME

**Deborette Clarke**

BUSINESS

**Leatherwork designer**



EXPERIENCE AIM

**Skills based craft experiences**

EXPERIENCE OFFER

**Tailored learning experiences**

NAME

**Karen Thompson**

BUSINESS

**Ceramic artist**



EXPERIENCE AIM

**Tourism experiences**

EXPERIENCE OFFER

**Bite sized workshop experiences**

NAME

## Turning Earth

BUSINESS

Open access  
ceramics studio



EXPERIENCE AIM

Gym style membership experience

EXPERIENCE OFFER

On-demand experiences

NAME

## Yodomo

BUSINESS

Social venture  
technology platform:  
marketplace and agency



EXPERIENCE AIM

Facilitating and promoting  
craft experiences

EXPERIENCE OFFER

Accessible craft experiences



## Models of craft experiences

Craft experiences can help generate an additional income stream. Most experiences offer added value (beyond selling pieces of work directly), or a monetised product or service.

There are many different business models and drivers for offering craft experiences. Here are a few examples:

- **Social venture**  
Yodomo – Encouraging participation through craft kits and workshops;
- **Commercial**  
The Biscuit Factory – Arts venue, workshop space, café, and shop;  
Ochre Print Studio (social enterprise with a commercial arm) – Open-access print studio offering training for creatives, including vulnerable adults;
- **Participatory**  
The National Festival of Making – UK-wide festival of making and manufacturing;  
WILDHOOD Festival – A children’s festival of creativity;
- **Brand promotion**  
Brookfield Properties – Curated spaces and environments that promote investment in real estate;  
Toast – Clothing brand that organises public workshops and events that highlight craft’s role in the fashion economy;
- **Sector promotion to makers and other audiences**  
FORGE – Creative jewellery hub and retail outlet in Hatton Garden, London, offering workshops, equipment hire, talks, and demonstrations;  
The JQ Set – Jewellery workshop for learners, makers, and creatives in Birmingham’s Jewellery Quarter;
- **Cultural promotion**  
Culture Mile – City of London’s cultural district;
- **Craft as tourism**  
Etsy and Airbnb – A new collaboration that combines hosting with product sales;  
Les Soeurs Anglaises – Offers residential, creative workshops and events in southwest France;
- **Design**  
Morag Myerscough – Designer who creates installations that champion community and public interaction;
- **Teaching craft skills**  
Leszek Sikoń – Blacksmith and knifemaker who hosts workshops;  
Jane Ponsford – Teaches paper-making in museums, fairs, and colleges.

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Activities might include:

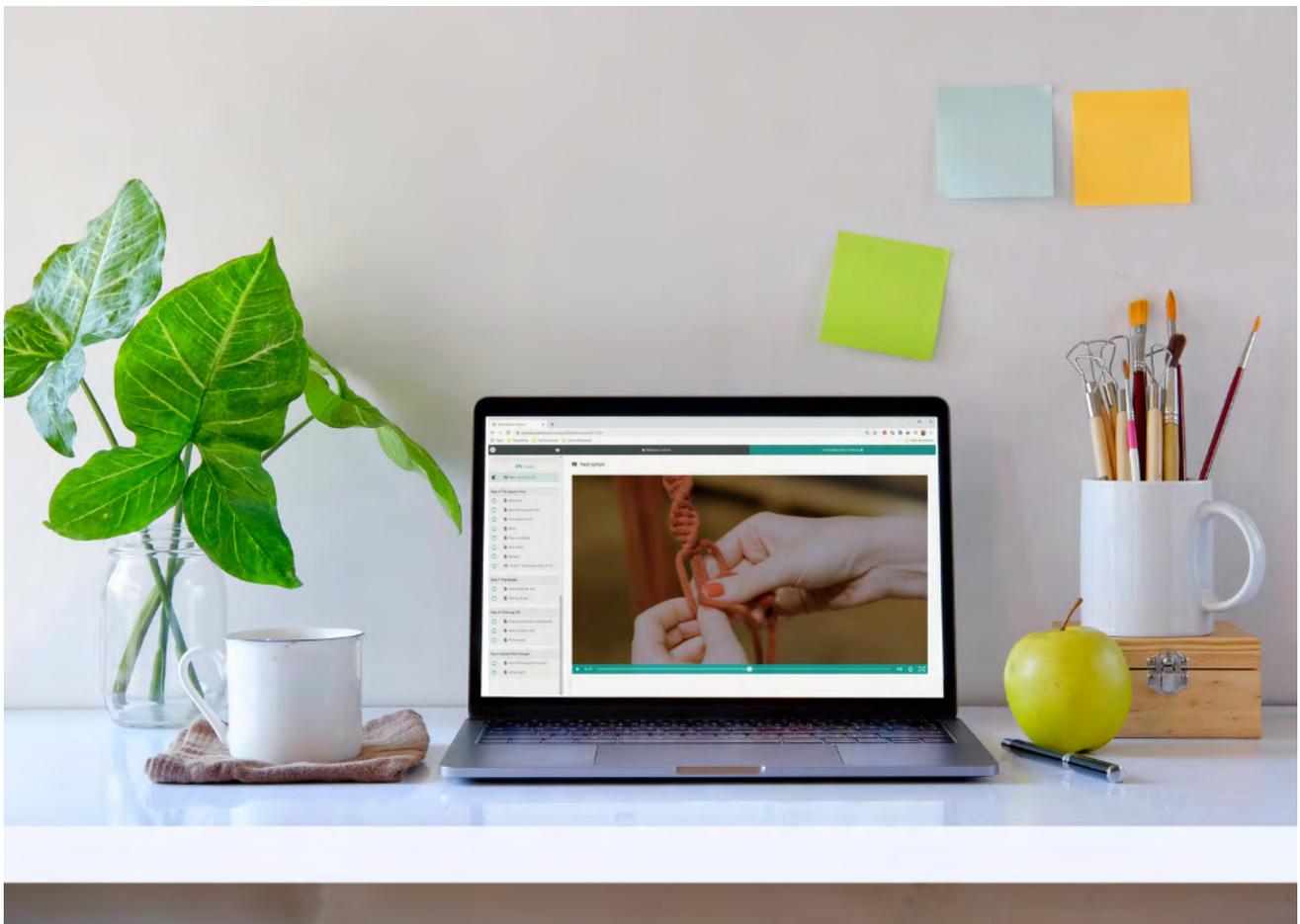
- **Talks and lecturing**  
Darren Appiagyei – Woodturner who offers talks to students and gallery events;
- **Wellbeing**  
Ruth Wheeler – Artist and sculptor who combines skills in making, community engagement, facilitation, and yoga teaching to provide well-being experiences;
- **Merchandise**  
Maija Nygren – Mother and designer who has created *Almaborealis*, convertible clothing kits for kids;  
Wood turner Geoffrey Fisher and ceramicist Linda Bloomfield – Illustrated books about craft (how-to);
- **Networking and skill-sharing**  
Textile artist Alice Burnhope hosts ‘Click ‘n’ Sew’, an online community that shares sustainable craft techniques;
- **Subscriptions and studio memberships**  
Laura Matthews Art recruits subscribing members who receive offers and access to events, using the Patreon platform;  
The Kiln Rooms – Open-access ceramics studios in Peckham, London;  
East London printmakers – Not-for-profit artist-run studio in Mile End, London;
- **Open studio events**  
Artists At Home – Open studios (on- and offline) in Chiswick, Hammersmith and Shepherd’s Bush, London;  
Spring Fling – Open studios in Scotland, UK;
- **Supporting product research**  
Aquanautia – Designer Rishi Thornhill invites individuals and brands to experience his products, leading to endorsements and invitations to discuss future collaborations.
- **Campaigning through education**  
The Big Draw – World-wide drawing festival;  
Get Creative – National celebration of creativity.

## What are the challenges?

All new business activities require skills development and knowledge such as:

- Market research, consumer engagement, public speaking, and digital skills;
- Providing insights into your creative process without giving away the trade secrets;
- Creating the right balance across work streams – designing, marketing, and delivering – in order to offer experiences;
- Practical requirements – for example, space, duplicate tools, and charging policy (see the section below and our [Checklist](#)).

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## How can you take advantage of the experience economy?

Here are some practical pointers to help you to develop an experience offer:

- Think through your objectives in offering craft experiences;
- What are the brand values that you wish to communicate to your clients and future collaborators? Have a look at our online resource, '[Identify your brand values](#)'.
- Design your charging plan, including offers (e.g. vouchers), refund policy, and cancellation fees;
- Consider what support is on offer nationally or locally; for example:
  - [Crafts Council's business resources](#); [Crafts Council resources on how to create a craft programme](#)
  - The UK Government's new [Tourism Recovery Plan](#) and resources on [domestic tourism](#);
  - Applied Arts Scotland's [DISTANCE Project](#) (Digital Immersive Technologies and Craft Engagement) that supports makers in experimenting with virtual and augmented reality in order to continue making at a distance;
  - Coventry Libraries Service's [Digital Culture Programme](#) offers virtual reality and audio experiences, with artists working with local communities to create content and shape cultural provision); or in the private sector (e.g. [Holition](#) innovation studio).
- Make a plan to keep track of your to-do list, your sales, and your products;
- Create a campaign to market your offer, collecting data on who attends your experiences so as to help your business planning in the long term;
- What can you learn from the delivery of your experience? You will need to review your delivery, consider what worked and what didn't, and then make adjustments. Is your experience commercially viable? Does it add value to your brand?

For more details, have a look at our [checklist](#).

## Further reading

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'The Market for Craft' report (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre for Crafts Council, 2020).

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