

Finding and Working With a Manufacturer

(First published by Cockpit Arts, March 2011)

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Finding a Manufacturer

For designers in the creative sector finding a manufacturer can be a difficult and daunting task. Indeed, even for the more established designer, finding an alternative manufacturer can also be pretty difficult. Many manufacturers in the UK tend not to be too good at promoting themselves. So how are you supposed to find them? And when you do find them how do you know they are right for your production needs?

Well it must be possible, otherwise how would the big design names of today have got started?

Today's UK manufacturers tend to be sophisticated, specialised, smaller, more flexible companies. They have to concentrate on making higher value products – products that are better, more innovative, more creative and possibly more difficult to make – products that people will pay more for. And this inevitably means lower volumes, smaller factories, a greater emphasis on flexibility and skills. All the things that the creative sector needs from them, in fact!

How to find them

So now to the nitty-gritty of where to look for a UK manufacturer.

The three main places to look are:

- a) Your friends, colleagues and acquaintances – word-of-mouth;
- b) The internet;
- c) Trade Associations.

Of course, by far the best way to find a suitable manufacturer is by **word-of-mouth**. So don't be afraid to ask everyone you know if they can suggest someone. You don't have to give away your trade secrets to do this.

Unfortunately word-of-mouth doesn't always work, and might even limit your search somewhat. So there may be no alternative but to trawl **the internet**.

You need to find web directories that allow you to search for quite specific criteria. To narrow down your search you need to know quite specifically what type of manufacturer you are looking for. For example: fashion designers could be looking for high-end or couture manufacturers that have certain specialisations and that are based in London. Fortunately two very good directories have been launched in recent years to help you find a number of companies that fit these criteria: www.fashioncapital.co.uk (Industry/Manufacturers Online Showroom) and www.fashionalliance.co.uk (directory).

There are several **Trade Associations** that will have manufacturers as members and that should be only too willing to help put you in touch with them. There are regional associations, such as the East Midlands Textile Association (EMTEK), and trade specialist associations. Some will have lists of manufacturers on their websites, others may need to be called.

Selection

So once you have used the above tips to draw up your short list, you have now reached a critical point in your search – the selection phase.

Selecting the right company is not easy. But there are processes that can help you get it right:

- Draw up a checklist of your requirements;
- Look at the websites of your shortlisted companies;
- Call them and talk about what you are looking for;
- Visit the ones that sound good;
- Don't forget your checklist when you visit them!

Working with a manufacturer

To make a success of your business you need to be able to trust and rely on your manufacturer(s). To do this you need to have a good working relationship with them. The relationship also has to be built on good working practices like:

- Confirm everything in writing;
- Have a clear specification;
- Make sure the price, quality, delivery etc are agreed in advance;
- Have proper terms and conditions (you may have to use theirs but read them before accepting them).

You can then build on these basics and build up a rapport that makes sure the working relationship grows. The days of designers and manufacturers not understanding each other are not quite dead yet – but we are working on it.