

Power Leads – Creative outcomes, commercial reality

by JENNIFER MORS

It's what we all do – all the time.

It's about the balancing act of remaining financially viable as we go about presenting art that will entice, educate, challenge and entertain our audiences.

With increased importance placed on financial outcomes, a greater challenge has been created for the arts community and, as a consequence, greater expectations. We need to find ways to work which will support those expectations.

In this session, I will be speaking about alternative ways for organisations to make money without compromising what they do; business models that develop supportive relationships with the creators of the art which then support other activities or, indeed, the organisation or institution itself.

Certainly, I don't claim to have all the answers however I do hope to be able to provide you with some practical examples to assist you make the most of what, in many cases, you already have. Another view, I suppose.

I will be providing information on three particular Craft Australia projects; the Best in Sydney retail marketing consortium, the Australian Craft and Design Development Company and the Craft At Work project.

I will then be presenting a brief outline of the national accreditation scheme which underlies all these projects, Craftmark.

Firstly, and very briefly in view of the time, a little about Craft Australia.

CRAFT AUSTRALIA is the national organisation for professional craft.

Funded by the Australia Council, our particular focus is the creation of sustainable economic advantages for the sector by supporting existing markets for Australian craft and developing audiences both here and overseas.

We have a number of national marketing initiatives specifically developed to support the craft sector as well as established international marketing programs and networks for the crafts.

We initiate special exhibitions and act as commissioner for international awards and exhibitions.

Our website is the contact point for the world to professional Australian craft and accessed by commissioners, curators, publishers and collectors of high quality craft. The site features the profiles of over 300 professional practitioners as well as featuring organisations, educational institutions, exhibitions, a calendar of national and international events and information on our project areas. The Regional galleries in NSW and Victoria are currently listed on our site; a number of whom are also members of Craft Australia.

My specific role as National Program Manager compasses the promotion and management of Craftmark Accreditation, Professional Affiliation for Individuals, Graduate Affiliation, Organisational Membership and Craftsite (our website). Plus other projects as required. You will all be familiar with such job descriptions.

Over the past five years, Craft Australia has developed new models of practice which we believe are crucial for the arts and artists in the community.

Different approaches to gain greater leverage in the marketplace and increased outcomes for the stakeholder.

One of these initiatives is the BEST IN SYDNEY RETAIL MARKETING CONSORTIUM whose brochure has been included in your package for your reference.

Best in Sydney, a pilot project developed in 1998, is about collectivism, collaboration, cooperation & networking. It is a 'group approach' rather than individual.

It is my understanding that delegates at this conference include arts professionals from a multitude of organisations, government representatives, volunteers working in the cultural sector and artists. Many of you will be represented in more than one of these so-called categories. Working in the arts is about multi skilling after all.

Collectivism allows for peer support and the maximisation of available resources while limiting individual exposure. It changes the relationship from competitive to co-operative. This was the impetus behind the establishment of the consortium of Craftmark accredited galleries and outlets that make up the Best in Sydney.

Funded by the Australia Council in its initial 12-month introductory phase, the members of Best in Sydney are like-minded decorative arts dealers who seek to expand their share of the tourist and local market by promoting themselves collectively.

With the very specific aim of increasing awareness of Australian craft in the minds of international as well as interstate visitors to Sydney while increasing sales, Best in Sydney engages in collaborative marketing activities to enhance each business using a collective approach to financial investment and human resources for each project.

- Australian Craftworks (Michael Griggs)
- Ceramic Art Gallery (Janet Mansfield)
- Cooee Aboriginal Emporium & Art Gallery (Adrian Newstead)
- Craft Australia at David Jones (Susan Johnson)
- Glass Artists Gallery (Maureen Cahill)
- Hogarth Galleries (Melissa Collins)
- Mura Clay Gallery (Irene Schroder)
- Naturally Australian (Clive Barker)

So, how do they achieve this within their busy schedules and where did it begin ?

After considerable research and selection of appropriate outlets, the original group of 10 outlets set out to establish a recognisable brand name "Best in Sydney". The name explained their location, and where their product was situated in the marketplace ... clearly at the top end!

The name was initially marketed to the meetings and conventions (MICE) industry through a brochure and then through agreed promotional activities such as a media launch, presence at Trade Fairs and functions for tourist agencies.

It was important for the group to position themselves as the key access point for convention organisers and tourist guides to source quality Australian craft products and services, in a cost effective and efficient manner.

Best in Sydney are an easily accessible service provider of a cultural experience and product for delegates and tourists, adding value to conventions and tours by providing a unique experience for visitors; the opportunity to discover a wide range of Australian contemporary craft within easy travelling distance.

Over the past 3 years, and now consisting of 8 members, Best in Sydney continues to work toward establishing itself in the Sydney convention and tourist markets with some successes to their credit; one of which was the Olympics project last year.

Approached by the Australian Tourist Commission to provide an exhibition of high quality craft for the two VIP lounges at the Olympic Games, Craft Australia put forward Best in Sydney to undertake the project. Ideally suited to sourcing the product required, and already working as a consortium, this group was able to share the load of developing two major exhibitions of work within the constraints of their usual business regime.

In addition to this, the Tourist Commission provided promotional support through the production and distribution of a full colour catalogue and, in later months, promoted the consortium in a trade show in Brisbane.

This co-operative approach provided them with a greater capacity to promote themselves by undertaking such projects without increasing their financial commitment for marketing. By pooling resources and expertise from each partner, the galleries can take on this type of project which would have been too large to undertake independently. This then opens up new areas of endeavour.

Initiated by Craft Australia, it is a good example of a publicly funded arts organisation working with businesses in the commercial sector to reach a mutually satisfactory outcome. The art is promoted, the galleries are supported and the artists have representation to a broader audience. Most importantly for the participating galleries, the workload is shared.

And, as Craftmark accredited galleries, Best in Sydney can provide government agencies, the tourist sector and convention organisers with a guarantee of quality and professionalism to give them an edge on other operation.

Initiated as a pilot program with the view to expanding to other locations throughout Australia, this model would be well suited to regional as well as urban areas. Regional galleries and museums that have retail outlets, or are in the process of developing the retail component of their gallery, could adapt this model in conjunction with other regional galleries or with outlets in their areas.

For those who already work in an organisational framework, the opportunity for this approach is even more accessible. Although you may indeed work in isolation, you will have access to a broad group of professionals with similar goals and aims.

There is also the opportunity to customise cultural products and services to suit a specific purpose or target.

Some of you may have developed product to accompany an exhibition or to promote an event. Other will have wanted to do so but were limited by resources. Product development and merchandising can be rewarding and challenging ... and is certainly time consuming.

It was for this reason that the AUSTRALIAN CRAFT & DESIGN DEVELOPMENT COMPANY (ACDDC) was developed.

A company in its own right, housed within Craft Australia, ACDDC was set up to enable organisations to respond to commissioning opportunities from the corporate, private and government sectors by providing support to meet a specific brief on time and within budget.

ACDDC was established to address the imbalance between ever decreasing funding to organisations and the demands being placed on them to generate increased levels of income.

It also seeks to support craft practitioners who express the desire (and the need) to create more income as well as being able to spend more of their time working in their chosen field rather than supplementing with 'other work'.

And there was the knowledge that the market for high quality craft could be expanded. This has proven to be true.

The Australian Craft & Design Development Company is an 'industry owned' company which acts as a broker or agent between craft practitioners and the market.

Developed by Craft Australia, we work closely with ACDDC's manager, Judy Grady, who in turn reports to her shareholder companies,

- Craft Australia
- Object, Australian Centre for Craft & Design
- Craftwest, Western Australia
- JamFactory, South Australia
- Tandanya: National Aboriginal Cultural Institute, South Australia

ACDDC seeks orders for products from government, business and corporate sectors which are then matched to the appropriate maker with the order. Assistance with the design and prototyping process, through to fulfillment of the order, is facilitated by Judy concentrating on product development to match client demand as well as aggregation of products to satisfy large orders.

ACDDC offers a unique range of Australian designed and made craft as successful solutions to merchandise requirements – be that a launch, special event, commemorative item or as gifts. This assists the client in identifying their merchandise needs by creating new or modifying existing products to meet their requirements.

ACDDC also provides access to a wide range and large number of designer makers across Australia effectively matching client and craft practitioner. It takes the hard work away from such decisions and therefore makes Australian craft accessible to a wide range of companies and organisations who quite often overlook their local markets as they simply don't know where to look or how to go about the process.

It also enables practitioners to work toward a guaranteed buyer for their product and the opportunity for fulfillment of larger orders as well as special series and limited edition production runs.

Following an approach to Craft Australia from the management of Sydney International Airport, ACDDC sourced product for Discover Art Australia, the high profile retail outlet at the airport. In a prime position, and managed by a highly experienced retail partnership, it has the look of a gallery while functioning as a retail outlet. Australian Craft & Design Development Company has sourced product for the outlet and worked with the retail management and practitioners to fulfil orders and supply product in response to client demand.

ACDDC has also been working in close partnership with the National Gallery in Canberra to develop product to accompany the Centenary of Federation exhibition and gifts and is currently sourcing product for the Australian Museum in Canberra.

It is true to say that all these can be achieved by the individual practitioner and the gallery or outlet. However, ACDDC is able to provide the mechanism for enabling this process to proceed with a high degree of guidance and a low level of anxiety for the parties involved. This process is paid for through a sliding scale of commission, which is dependent on the size of the order and degree of product development undertaken.

A product catalogue on Craft Australia's website provides a comprehensive database of quality craft as a key sales tool and gives the makers effective promotion.

As a follow on from Australian Craft and Design Development Company, I will introduce the concept of clustering into my presentation as another way to increase outcome and expand into additional revenue streams.

Clustering is about working in groups to give increased capability to meet demand. This works for the individual artist as well as the organisation.

THE CRAFT AT WORK CLUSTER PROJECT has enabled a number of merchandising opportunities for practitioners while producing high quality Australian products for major galleries and government clients .

Funded by Department of Education, Workplace Relations and Small Business, and Grow Employment Council in its pilot stage, Craft at Work is a business development model to assist clusters of craftspeople to work together and expand their business opportunities ... and through this, increase employment and income in the crafts sector.

Managed by Australian Craft & Design Development Company, Craft at Work assists craft practitioners to work in a group either with a lead designer co-ordinating other practitioners; or various makers working on different aspects of a job: ACDDC provides business and product development skills for the group, allowing makers to fulfil larger jobs than they would by themselves. Larger production capability, more confidence in being able to win a contract.

Craft At Work clusters have been involved in developing product for the National Gallery in Canberra (as mentioned previously), creating works both inspired by and as replicas from the gallery's collection. By working in a production cluster, the groups were able to supply merchandise to accompany the Centenary of Federation exhibition and gifts for related government and corporate events.

The participants, from Gippsland VIC, Sydney and Northern NSW have a mix of disciplines however all have committed the time to take on new and different commissions over the longer term.

The Australian Craft & Design Development Company delivered the product development component of the programme and provides the on-going sales & marketing function, working with professional craftspeople with an interest and commitment to working with others to develop opportunities in their chosen field.

So what is there in place to provide the guarantee that is expected by organisations, galleries, corporations, business and funding agencies that the product will be appropriate?

How do you know what you are getting ?

and how do you support, or even justify at times, your decision to choose the appropriate work for all the right reasons ?

The underlying program to all these projects is CRAFTMARK ACCREDITATION.

Craftmark is the quality assurance scheme that guarantees the integrity of the Australian craft designer-makers and outlets involved in all these projects.

Craftmark is a marketing tool for the promotion and sale of Australian craft developed in response to the craft sector's need for 'something' to identify the work of professional Australian practitioners.

Craftmark was introduced to support the Australian craft sector by:

- distinguishing Australian craft from imported / manufactured goods
- adding prestige to the craft 'product'
- providing a quality assurance to assist consumers make an informed purchase
- It aims
 - to increase sales of Australian craft
 - to expand the range of distribution
 - to (further) improve the profile of, and increase audiences for Australian contemporary craft

CRAFTMARK is awarded to both craft practitioners and retailers.

For practitioners, Craftmark identifies that the work is high quality, created using specialised skills, it demonstrates a high level of experience and technical expertise on the part of the maker and shows the work has been created by a professional Australian craftspeople.

When displayed by a retailer or gallery, Craftmark confirms the outlet supports the work of professional Australian craftspeople and is a reputable retailer of high quality Australian craft.

Now three years old, Craftmark is still a 'baby' in terms of market place adoption and consumer recognition, however it is increasingly successful in providing the guarantee that the corporate and government sectors are seeking for project support.

All Craftmark accredited practitioners have undergone a selection process by a national industry review panel elected by craft professionals.

All Craftmark retail outlets and galleries have been awarded accreditation based on assessment of the business history and information supplied by business referees as well as the professional craftspeople and designer makers whose work the outlet promotes and sells. It is also expected that the outlet will represent Craftmark accredited practitioners and be able to speak knowledgeably about the work they sell and promote.

Craftmark accreditation is signified through the display of the logo used in a variety of ways. While some attach it directly to the work, others incorporate it into their promotional materials, business stationery and websites; accredited galleries use the tag for display and to accompany the sale of Craftmark accredited work.

Craftmark accreditation costs \$88 for practitioners and \$148.50 for retailers which is renewable on an annual basis and provides a range of benefits for both makers and retailers of Australian craft including a profile on the website. Incredibly affordable promotion quite apart from the other benefits offered as part of Craftmark accreditation.

One of the most important functions of Craftmark is that it connects the makers of quality craft to outlets for the sale of their work while providing those galleries and retail outlets with a source of high quality work.

This is particularly important in regional areas where such criteria can support the gallery director's 'choice' of product and assist them to represent local artists. It also provides access to a high profile / visitor focused outlet for accredited craft practitioners and encourages others to work toward accreditation as a mark of their professionalism.

Putting this into practice, that is working with other industries, sectors and businesses, opens up many doors for future endeavours. Tourism agencies, councils, museums and galleries, conferences, local industry, etc are continually seeking high quality product and experiences for their clientele.

Craftmark can enable you to fulfil this need while supporting your gallery, organisation or individual needs.

New models of working and new connections.

It's about making the most of the resources that are already in place to support you as you work toward increased outcomes.

There is support available at Craft Australia to work together toward the development of such initiatives; and I would welcome the opportunity to work with you to introduce these models or to adapt them to your purposes. ■

CONTACT Jennifer on 02 9211 1445 or j.mors@craftaus.com.au for information on Craftmark Accreditation, Membership and the website

CONTACT Judy Grady on 02 9211 1445 or j.grady@craftaus.com.au for information on Australian Craft and Design Development Company

Craft Australia's website can be viewed at www.craftaus.com.au