

CURATED
makers

A MAKER'S GUIDE TO GETTING RETAIL READY



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SO YOU'D LIKE TO STOCK YOUR PRODUCTS IN A SHOP? AMAZING!



Hello! Megan here, founder of Curated Makers. My team and I have created this guide thinking about what questions we find ourselves answering and explaining to makers often. It also considers what golden nuggets of information could really help a creative selling their products when it comes to taking that next big step into the world of third party retailers and stockists.

Here's our stab at it. It may not be the perfect guide and it definitely doesn't cover everything you need to know but it's a starting point. Consider it as a thought prompter that can provide support to some small businesses on their journey of navigating working with retail experiences like ours. For those starting to embark on wholesaling and commission-based opportunities, we want to help you grow your brand further than you could do alone.



FIRSTLY, GROWTH ISN'T FOR EVERYONE AND THAT'S OK!

Something I've learnt is that to make money, you have to spend money! There is no quick fix here, growth comes with a cost and a risk factor that you have to be comfortable with.

I've come across many small business owners over the past few years, trying to keep below that dreaded VAT threshold because of the admin it brings with it and I get it! Hitting the £80k-ish turnover mark may sound impressive, but that's turnover, not profit. Once you hit these numbers, it's likely you've got very high costs behind the scenes, perhaps other people working with you, which also comes at a significant cost.

If you don't want to grow bigger than the threshold then I applaud you for knowing what you want. If you're not in a financial position right now to spend money on growth, then don't. There's no set speed for growing a business. I know it's difficult to turn down work and opportunities but you need to do what works for you and pursue your desired work/life balance.

IF YOU DO WANT TO PURSUE GROWTH VIA STOCKISTS, ENSURE YOU HAVE THE MARGIN TO DO SO!

To work with shops, galleries and similar, you need to ensure your products are profitable for both you and the third party seller that you're selling through.

More often than not, third party sellers are not greedy. They have very high costs of their own that need covering... as well as the dreaded 20% VAT I mentioned that they'll need to add onto their services. This money doesn't go to the Company itself, it's not profit, the Company is just acting as a tax collector for HMRC.



Everyone works with tight margins

The margin of 50-60% (2.4-2.5 markup) is not greedy, it's essential to most retailers.

Out of their margin 20% will go to HMRC (yes some will be offset but not all), business rates, rent, staffing, shop fittings, insurance, corporations tax, utilities and all of the same costs brands incur in terms of marketing and website hosting.

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WE CAN'T REDUCE OUR COSTS, SO HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE YOUR MARGINS?



Suppliers

What can you do to renegotiate with your suppliers for a better rate? Are you aware of what the volume thresholds are for lower rates?

Have you looked at alternative suppliers recently? You can get comfortable with the ones you use for ease, but are they still the best fit for you? Has anyone else come up in the meantime since you found them? Always keep your eyes peeled as this can help your negotiations.

Review your Product Range

Are there certain products that just don't work for wholesale margins? Which ones do work? Know each line and the profit it makes you. Reserve those that don't commercially work for stockists just for your markets or online platforms. Use those that you do have more wiggle room with for wholesaling and shops. It's fine to do that, you get the benefits of growing your brand further through third parties, retain the profits you need, and hopefully get those customers back when they return to you directly and buy more from you when they see your full range.

Other Costs

Have a look at your costs as they may be high in areas that you don't need anymore. Have you outgrown certain services that you're paying for and don't need? Are you utilising all of your tax efficiencies and have you spoken to an accountant for some advice?

Also, reflect on some of the retailer's costs too; the rent, rates, shop staffing, training, fixtures and fittings etc. By working with a retailer, you get access to all of this without having to directly spend the money on it.

Pricing

Are you charging enough? Pricing products is HARD and there's no right answer. It's also not all down to manufacture costs - consider how Primark charges the prices they do compared to Chanel. How Vauxhall differs from Tesla. How Cava is much cheaper than Champagne. They do have different costs yes but, part of their pricing is down to their perceived brand value and exclusivity vs. the mass market.

Where do you want your brand and products to sit on the scale? It may take some trial and error to figure that out! We're still learning too, our fee and commission structure has evolved over the years and we'll regularly review it, I advise you to regularly review yours too.



YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR MIND, MAKE IT UP, TEST, LEARN FAST, CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE!



How can you compare two completely different brands, with two completely different people standing behind a market stall, with different techniques of selling, different products, and different price points? It all depends on who walks through that door at the end of the day, some of it is pure luck, some of it is tactical, but you'll never know if you don't try! Markets are a great way to test out products, packaging, prices etc and learn from your fellow stallholders.

So get out there, try things your own way, go against the curve, choose tips to follow, make up your own theories and explore them, constantly reflect, review, develop and learn.

It's full-on this business life isn't it...but it's never dull!

DO YOUR PRODUCTS WORK IN A SHOP SETTING?

We once invited a beautiful fudge brand to stock at one of our Pop-Ups but after making contact discovered that they don't offer them individually packaged like we needed them to be. Consider what adaptations you can make to your products and packaging to make them retail ready, or, decide if you want to just stick to trading opportunities like markets where you can sell them as they are.

When it comes to products types, there are lots of decisions to make for displaying your work ready for a shop. Take jewellery for example, you could use big boxes, small boxes, glass tubes, big backing cards, small backing cards, cards with a hole in for hanging. You should also think about the size of the packaging and how that impacts the amount that can fit on a shelf or fixture.

Stockists will assess how 'shoppable' your products are and how they can work within the layout of their store.

What works for one shop may not work for another. What works at a trade show may not work at a market.

Do your homework on the type of retailer you would like to stock with then consider how you can adapt your packaging to make your product more sellable and to make the shopkeeper's life easy too.





BE RESPONSIVE AND STAY POSITIVE!

As a retailer and small business, we really struggle if we don't hear back from emails quickly or if our invitations or stock requests to makers go unanswered. Communicating to 40-50 makers per pop-up is no easy task and the success of the outlet relies on the team effort between us, the retailer and our makers. When our makers are engaged, responsive, polite, keen and active it makes such a difference, which shows in sales too. So my advice is to be on top of your communications, as non-creative as it is, it's a major part of success when it comes to working with 3rd parties.

Relationship building is priceless and often you only have to be yourself, follow instructions and be pleasant! Also, try to be positive, it helps me so much - I love working with fellow glass-half-full enthusiasts! If something doesn't go quite right, then see it as a learning opportunity. Try not to be defensive when opportunities don't go as you'd hoped, this is business, it's never personal and you don't want to burn a bridge that could take you to a great place someday!

YOU CAN'T STOCK EVERYWHERE OR BE EVERYONE'S CUP OF TEA

When choosing which retailers you would like to work with, keep the following in mind:

- Different shops have different target audiences and every location has differing demographics - **who are you trying to sell to?**
- Footfall varies from quirky shopping streets to out-of-town shopping centres, to city centre high streets - **where is your customer shopping?**
- Every shop only has a limited amount of space and its own planned curations - **where does your product fit?**

There are SO many variables to consider. Don't be disheartened if it's a no from your dream stockist, it'll be a commercial decision based on them knowing their customer base and current product range. They don't want to waste your time, or precious stock, and also can't afford to have products on their shelves that they don't think resonate with their customers, they need them to sell to survive!

Not every shop can stock the same products. That would make for pretty boring shopping! Your work isn't right for every shop and that's OK. Take the time to find the shops that are the perfect match. Who do you want your brand to align with? Which shops make you feel super proud to be a part of? If you're in too many shops...could that be a disadvantage? Focus on quality over quantity.





My team and I are always discovering makers that we love, but that doesn't mean they're right for one or even any of our events. This could be due to their price point, their niche, their colour-ways, the space their products would take up etc. It's based on sales history and previous experience, sometimes it's also a gut reaction. We always try to think, if not this event, where else? You may not be suited to our current stores but you could be perfect for a future shop, market or partnership.

So, if you don't hear from us, it may well be we have you earmarked for a different event in the future. We can't reply to everyone to let them know our thoughts on their business, I wish we could but it's impossible due to demand. Please do know that we're present on social media and we notice who's doing exciting things, making new products and engaging with us. We enjoy seeing your progress and cheer-leading you from afar and could be in touch in the future!

TAKE ADVICE... BUT ALSO LISTEN TO YOUR GUT!



I've shared my personal opinions but that's exactly what they are, my opinions, they're not gold dust. So take the information you want and act on it where you see fit but leave what doesn't serve you. I get 'advice' all the time but I choose what to really listen to, absorb the nuggets but leave the rest and understand that the majority of the time going with your gut is the right thing to do. It's a second brain your gut, it's a powerful tool so use it. OK, so it may not always be right, but just seek the positive and feel proud you were bold!

When I was first building Curated Makers, I'd sign up for every free course I could fit into my schedule. I'd be bombarded with advice, tips, and tricks but I couldn't do it all! I'd say half of it was just common sense or stating the obvious but there were definitely gems that I took in amongst the jargon. There were points that reinforced what I already knew which helped increase my confidence. I met and spoke to people I would have never usually met and was inspired by their grit and determination which just fuelled me further.

So go to the course, meet the people, absorb what you can and always know that you can never know it all! Continue to adapt and develop, enjoy the ride and learn as much as you can along the way!

Hope this helped a little bit!
Megan

VISIT THE SUPPORT PAGE ON THE CURATED MAKERS WEBSITE FOR SOME QUICK TIP VIDEOS FROM MYSELF AND THE TEAM, PLUS SOME SMALL BUSINESS TOOLS.

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