



**South East Museum**  
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Effective Retail for Small Museums

Developing Bespoke Products

## **Contents**

1. Audiences .....	2
2. Range planning .....	2
3. Products.....	3
4. Quantity.....	4
5. Suppliers.....	5
6. Designer Makers.....	9

To enhance the range of products available in the museum shop, many museums choose to commission a range of bespoke items incorporating a star image or the museum logo. As higher margins are often achievable, if they sell well this can prove to be very profitable. However it's not essential for a small museum with limited budgets to develop their own range as there are probably plenty of items that can be sourced from wholesalers that will match the themes of the museum.

There is a risk involved in over-ordering as this will tie up budgets that then can't be spent on other lines. Before embarking on a new product development project there are other key points to consider.

### **1. Audiences**

When planning a range of bespoke items it is vital to consider how closely the proposed range matches the target market as getting the match right will be essential to success. For example you may want to introduce a range for children of fun, colourful novelty items at 'pocket-money' prices for the young visitors to the museum. Alternatively a range of unique, quality gifts may have more appeal to your visitor profile, for instance you may decide to commission a range of fine bone china featuring a strong design from the museum collection for which the museum has copyright.

### **2. Range planning**

The same approach should be taken to developing bespoke product ranges as is taken to other shop purchases and should be based on themes relevant to the museum. For example you might theme the products to:

- Key collections and 'star' objects taking the lead from the exhibition and interpretation spaces
- Historical eras linked to the museum
- Museum location, region and landscape
- Architectural features of the museum if applicable
- Characters linked to the museum

Other factors to consider are:

- A product with an interesting design or feature is likely to be more successful than a 'corporate gift' type product which simply has the museum name and address printed on the side
- The product range must appeal to the target market so consider carefully who will be likely to purchase the item and in what quantity. A similar type of product could be sourced from a wholesaler and a test run performed to gauge take up before committing to a bespoke range
- Quantities ordered and the price points should be realistic

### **3. Products**

Do remember when sourcing any products, including bespoke products, that items should be of good quality and they represent good value for money. Always ask for samples in advance of ordering so that you can check the quality is as understood and colours as expected.

In particular before ordering a range of low priced souvenirs consider the following:

- All items should be well made and not of a flimsy nature as these will break easily resulting in refunds having to be given, leading to customer disappointment which won't reflect well on the museum
- Small items displayed in bulk may be regularly handled by customers and may become scratched and damaged and the stock will inevitably end up being written off
- Similarly, consider items with working parts carefully as items of this nature, if low cost, quite frequently malfunction

- Consider each item and how it is packaged and how it will be displayed. E.g. unwrapped erasers become grubby with regular handling
- Edit the selection to a small range of key lines E.g. there is no need to stock several different pen styles, each in a range of colours where one or two will suffice. This will also make it easier to display the range if space is limited. Items grouped together in bulk will create more impact in store
- If you find a range of wholesale textile products that relate to the themes of the museum e.g. scarves; consider pinning a swing-tag printed with the museum logo to the items as this will give the appearance of a bespoke product without the need to commit to a large production run

#### **4. Quantity**

A common mistake is to over order but remember that unless the products sell out you could be left with unsaleable stock for years to come so before commissioning bespoke items you may wish to consider the following:

- Be realistic about quantities and don't be tempted to order too many even if the supplier offers them at a cheaper unit price
- Prepare a sales forecast based on historic sales data of similar products to determine how much stock is required. Calculate how many of each item you expect to sell each week and based on the visitor forecasts estimate what % of visitors will need to buy the item. Then ask is that realistic? Remember that if sales go better than expected a repeat order can be made and you don't have to commit to buying stock that will remain unsold for years!
- Is there ample suitable storage space for the stock? For example stocks of catalogues take up a lot of space and will need to be stored in a clean, dry environment or will become unsaleable
- Developments in printing techniques have brought down volumes and prices at least in the world of paper and textiles

- Products can deteriorate and appear dated over extended periods of time and packaging can become brittle - another reason not to over-order
- You may wish to consider collaborating with another museum or museums, perhaps in the same geographical area, or one with similar themes, to develop a bespoke product that would work well in both your sites

## 5. Suppliers

Suppliers of bespoke products are listed in Heritage Shop Catalogue [www.imsguides.co.uk](http://www.imsguides.co.uk)

and exhibit at the trade shows listed below:

Top Drawer [www.topdrawer.co.uk](http://www.topdrawer.co.uk)

Pulse [www.pulse-london.com](http://www.pulse-london.com)

Spring Fair [www.springfair.com](http://www.springfair.com)

Autumn Fair [www.autumnfair.com](http://www.autumnfair.com)

ACE – Association for Cultural Enterprises Trade Show  
<https://acenterprises.org.uk>

Museums and Heritage Show – [www.museumsandheritageshow.com](http://www.museumsandheritageshow.com)

An additional useful resource is the Small Museums Retail Purchasing Syndicate (SMURPS). This is a pilot project launched early September 2016 and is designed to assist the qualifying small museums with the research and procurement process.

In summary:

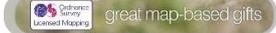
- 19 suppliers have agreed a range of enhanced trading terms, including discounts, reduced carriage charges and lower minimum order quantities
- Some suppliers have also agreed to supply special packages of products affording the opportunity for museums to trial a range of own branded products prior to committing to larger quantities

- For museums with similar themes or in the same geographical location there is the opportunity to develop products collectively and to spread the cost of order between the different sites

The 7 participating suppliers specialising in bespoke products are shown in the table below:

Supplier	Product Category	Standard Terms	SMURPS Syndicate Terms	Contact details
<p><b>CD Heritage</b></p> 	Museum Bespoke Products		<p>For syndicate museum members in the same geographical area CD Heritage can produce a single master image which can then be translated across a selected giftware product range and stock called off by the sites involved. Products available include China mugs, Tea Towels, melamine trays and coasters, Fridge Magnets, Key Rings etc. Their website has more details and pictures of what other Heritage sites have done. This route could deliver quite low MOQ's / cash flow / stock holding commitment for each site involved. The image/s could be historical / geographical etc.</p>	<p>Garry Dawson 07894 051986 <a href="mailto:sales@cdheritage.com">sales@cdheritage.com</a> <a href="http://www.cdheritage.com">www.cdheritage.com</a></p>
<p>Enormous Art <a href="http://www.enormousart.com">www.enormousart.com</a></p> 	Museum Bespoke Products	Carriage charges £15	Carriage charges reduced to £10 for syndicate members and	<p>Catrina Lister 0114 230 9800 <a href="mailto:catriona@enormousart.co.uk">catriona@enormousart.co.uk</a></p>

			orders >£150 are free carriage	
<p>Farrah's of Harrogate <a href="http://www.farrahs.com">www.farrahs.com</a></p> 	Gift food items	Minimum carriage paid order amount of £200 or for orders over the value of £100 there is a charge of £10 for carriage.	<p>Special starter pack £155.11 + Vat. Free delivery. Pro-forma required for first order. Including bespoke artwork for the museum a single image working to a standard templates.</p> <p>Starter pack includes:</p> <p>20314 170g CC Fudge Box x 20 20315 170g CC Fudge &amp; Toffee Box x 20 20472 200g CC Shortbread Drum x 12 20461 200g Choc Chip Biscuit Drum x 12 20650 100g Milk Chocolate Bar x 24 20610 100g CC Fudge Bar x 30</p> <p>Subsequent orders as per standard terms</p>	<p>James Clapham</p> <p>07771 878075</p> <p><a href="mailto:sales@farrahs.com">sales@farrahs.com</a></p>
<p>JH Design Point <a href="http://www.jhdesignpoint.net">www.jhdesignpoint.net</a></p> 	Museum Bespoke products	Mugs Cost Price £4 +VAT	<p>Mugs £3.65 + VAT Mixed designs can be supplied No minimum order -carriage will be charged at cost price For orders of 72 mugs carriage is free</p>	<p>Jean Hutton</p> <p>0141 339 4927</p> <p><a href="mailto:jmhutton@btinternet.com">jmhutton@btinternet.com</a></p>
<p>Judge Sampson <a href="http://www.judgesampson.com">www.judgesampson.com</a></p> 	Museum Bespoke Products		<p>Special offers to syndicate members</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Free artwork service</li> <li>2. Regular and Porcelain mugs (items 3 &amp; 4 page 19) MOQ 72 (normally 108)</li> </ol>	<p>Trevor Wolford</p> <p>01424 401275</p> <p>07740 256602</p> <p><a href="mailto:trevor@judgesampson.co.uk">trevor@judgesampson.co.uk</a></p>

			<p>3. Tin Plate and Acrylic Magnets (items 1&amp;2&amp;4&amp;5 page 4) MOQ 100 (normally 300)</p> <p>4. Global Expressions Range (all items on pages 46&amp;47) MOQ 100</p> <p>5. Postcards 10p each + VAT for 500. (Normally 16p)</p> <p>6. Carriage subject to negotiation – usually carriage paid order value is £125. Otherwise is £8</p>	
<p>Talented  <a href="http://www.madebytalented.com">www.madebytalented.com</a>  </p>	Museum Bespoke Products	<p>Standard terms  Minimum order 200 bags or 250 tea towels for an exclusive, hand drawn, bespoke design</p>	<p>'Talented' offer the opportunity for museums to collaborate on a shared design, and to split the minimum quantity between them across the range of product including tea towels. The 2 exceptions are Greeting Cards and Mugs. These can be included in a share but only as an add-on to another product as it would not be enough to cover the cost to Talented of origination of the artwork.</p>	<p>Louisa Noble  0114 272 1201  louisa@madebytalented.co.uk</p>
<p>Weekend 365  <a href="http://www.weekend365.net">www.weekend365.net</a>     great map-based gifts</p>	Museum Bespoke Products	<p>Standard quantities are 54 mugs</p> <p>Usually an additional charge for logos</p>	<p>Special Package available to Syndicate members for £261.30  27 x 11oz Ceramic Mugs in acetate gift boxes @ £3.85 +VAT each</p>	<p>Miranda Bell  01172 302474  miranda@weekend365.net</p>

		Carriage £30 for package quantity	25 x melamine Snack Trays 28cm x 13.5cm @ £3.35 +VAT each 36 x Greetings Cards – can be 15cm square or 21cm x 7.5cm depending on design @ £1.35 +VAT each The addition of logos to be included with the design at no extra cost Logo and contact information to go on the backs of the greetings cards at no extra cost Reduced carriage – all 3 products come from different suppliers – total carriage will be £25 +VAT – normally this would be £30 +VAT for this quantity.	
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## 6. Designer Makers

Developing bespoke ranges needn't be limited to working with wholesale companies specialising in this field and you may like to consider working on a 'limited edition' approach by collaborating with a designer maker. These items would appeal to visitors looking for unique, authentic items inspired by the museum collections for example jewellery, ceramics and textiles.

A visit to a regional or local craft fair or performing a web search is a good place to start to find local contacts to work with.

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