

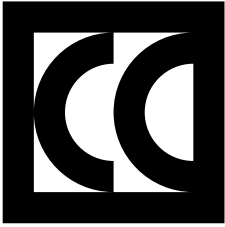
Crafts Council

The Power of Experiences

Bringing Craft Experiences
to your Business: Case Studies

November 2021





Abdollah Nafisi

Nafisi Studio

🌐 nafisi.design

📷 [instagram.com/
abdollah.nafisi/](https://www.instagram.com/abdollah.nafisi/)

Motivated by his architect mother and inventor father to incorporate creative thinking into every part of his life and work, Iranian-born, UK-based furniture maker Abdollah Nafisi's in-demand craft experiences provide insight into his spontaneous approach to furniture design.

The lifestyle economy

Driven by a desire to establish himself as a professional artist, when Abdollah immigrated to the UK in 2011 his exceptional work ethic and unconventional approach to design enabled him to build a reputable furniture business. When he realised that his studio process fascinated his customers, he started to explore ways of generating income by sharing his working methods.

'I heard from a friend of mine that Google sends their staff to restaurants, and they learn about cooking. So I thought to myself, why can't we invite them to learn about woodworking?'

Clever experience design

Designing experiences for Facebook, New Brewery Arts and customers who arrive at his workshops via social media, Abdollah believes his events are in demand because they encourage people to learn new skills while also having fun. Feedback from participants enables him to constantly refine his offering, with simplified workshops that focus on

making things using the specific skills that former participants found most enjoyable. Crowd-pleasing craft experiences such as Abdollah's signature circular-shaped lamp workshop enable those who sign up to gain insight into his spontaneous design approach, making a functional piece from scratch.



© Sarah-Mace Dennis



Getting known

For those who want to quickly build a successful craft experience following, Abdollah recommends promoting your skills and courses on social media. When it comes to drawing new crowds, different demographics use different platforms; Instagram and Facebook are frequented by adults with disposable incomes.

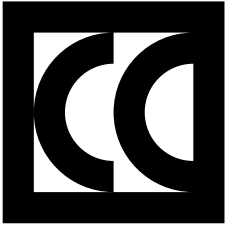
'Marketing our courses through Instagram is very cheap. I would think that we spent about £20 per course on the ad budget. In return, we had eight, fully-booked courses. So, that's not a bad deal, because each course is about £180–200 per head.'

Posting beautifully designed content about the circular-lamp workshop on social media enabled Abdollah to create an archive of material for people to refer back to when hype around the experience started to spread. News about the lamp escalated to colleges, who went to Instagram and Facebook to learn about the experience. A new creative partnership was formed when West Dean College of Arts and Conservation, UK, invited Abdollah to deliver the workshop to their students. Freed from the obligation of having to find participants and oversee promotion, now all he had to do was show up and start teaching.

The future of craft

Reflecting on his lifelong aspiration to become an artist, Abdollah admits that his vision is very different from what it used to be. By embracing new opportunities and moving across the shifting borders of a globally connected world, makers can develop new approaches to designing and delivering culturally enriching experiences.

The problem, Abdollah thinks, is that many of us underestimate what we know. What inspires him most is the personal and creative growth that comes from the interactions he has with those who attend his workshops. It is his love of being around, and learning from, others, that drives him to continually evolve the experiences he offers. By opening his studio doors to the public, Abdollah hopes that he will provide those who visit with new opportunities to activate their own creative learning and development.



Brookfield Properties

Brookfield Properties

[brookfieldpropertiesactivated.com](https://www.brookfieldpropertiesactivated.com)

[instagram.com/
activatedbrookfieldproperties/](https://www.instagram.com/activatedbrookfieldproperties/)

One of the world's leading real estate management companies, Brookfield Properties has a global reputation for using experiences to creatively activate their buildings in ways that support the wellbeing of their tenants.

The business of experiences

With a thirty-year history of supporting arts and crafts practitioners to breathe life into their extensive portfolio of commercial real estate, Brookfield Properties is a leading figure in the global experience economy. By designing environments that prioritise the wellbeing of their tenants, their sought-after office spaces culturally enrich the lives of the those who work in the buildings they manage.

'Craft "works" for our strategy, because it has a human connection. People like to read about the material, how it was made, and the artist's intention.'

**SAMANTHA WILLIAMS,
MARKETING MANAGER, UK**

Strategic experience design

The types of craft practices that Brookfield Properties seeks out are often sculptural in nature. Although colour, light, and levity are qualities needed for a work to hold presence in the expansive architectural spaces that the company manages, this doesn't mean the work can't be challenging. Brookfield Properties supported artist Matt Smith in curating a museum-quality exhibition in the foyer of 99 Bishopsgate, the company's iconic high-rise block in central London, UK. Freed from the conceptual and architectural limitations of the traditional white cube, Matt Smith's work re-appropriates objects from their original uses to rethink museum culture from a LGBTQIA+ perspective.

Brookfield Activated is the company's public-facing program of cultural activities. This initiative provides networking opportunities for tenants by inviting them to participate in exhibition openings, events, craft workshops and wellness activities. Providing opportunities for tenants to have new experiences and grow their creative knowledge demonstrates Brookfield Properties' commitment to enlivening the spaces in-and-around their buildings.

Building a profile

Brookfield Properties' UK Curator and Marketing Manager Samantha Williams regularly visits craft fairs and searches for new talent on- and offline. She is expert at discovering the most thought-provoking work from creative practitioners at all stages of their careers. Makers wanting to raise their profile might think outside the box, considering all of the places in which to draw in a community. This could be at an art fair, a museum, a gallery, or a reception in the city. It could also be entering your work into prizes: a great way to get your work out there and become recognised.

The *Brookfield Properties Crafts Council Collection Award* is just one example of their commitment to supporting craft and contributing to its legacy. This acquisition-based prize gifts the winner's work to the Crafts Council Collection. It also supports the winning maker in developing a new exhibition for 99Bishopsgate, London, UK.

When it comes to social media, Samantha encourages makers to be strategic in the design of their Instagram profiles; in 2020, this was the platform where many curators went to look for new talent.

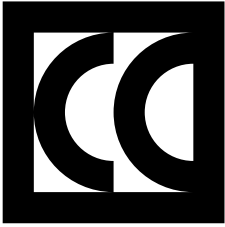
The future of craft

Arts and crafts experiences always have been, and always will be, central to Brookfield Properties' business model. Collaborations with artists and makers are important because they enliven public spaces. These creative interventions encourage people to pause and reflect on how the craft makes them think and feel.

Reflecting on the subtle cultural changes that have come about through the COVID-19 global lockdowns, Samantha feels that these shifts are particularly emblematic of craft. This is because a lot of people have spent more time at home dabbling in craft activities. This experiential connection to the activity of making has inspired a renewed interest in craft and its associated materials, techniques, and processes.



© Sarah-Mace Dennis



Deborette Clarke

Deborette Creative

🌐 deborette.com

📷 [instagram.com/
deborettecreative/](https://www.instagram.com/deborettecreative/)

A former teacher with an ‘appetite for designer bags,’ Deborette Clarke’s passion for creative learning inspired the design of a thriving craft experience business.

The business of experiences

Deborette’s appreciation for the versatility of leather motivated her to stop buying and start making leather goods. When she left her twenty-year career as a highschool teacher to set up a full-time virtual craft shop in 2017, she had a clear vision for integrating experiences into her business model. In the beginning

she offered short ‘pop-up’ events at festivals and bars, and delivered workshops in museum, gallery, and community settings. These short, self-contained events allowed her to give participants a taste for leather, while she equipped her studio with the tools needed for hosting more intensive activities.

Designing experiences

At her studio in the jewellery quarter in Birmingham, UK, Deborette’s wealth of experience caters to different skill levels and leather-making interests; her customers leave with a product that they are proud of and want to share with others.

Deborette relishes the feeling of excitement that comes when the public enters her workshop for the first time:

‘I think people are intrigued by actual working spaces. They like to come into people’s working environments, and sit at the same place that somebody has been working.’

Deborette’s teaching experience enables her to provide a range of learning styles. Being aware of what people can and can’t do, and suggesting different approaches, is all part of her commitment to ensuring that every customer leaves her studio satisfied.



© Deborette Clarke



Finding customers

At £160 for a full-day bag-making workshop, Deborette's offering is targeted at working professionals with disposable income. Platforms such as Eventbrite, a top Google AdWords site that lists a range of quality craft experiences, helped

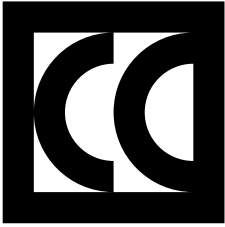
her to attract new customers while establishing her profile. As soon as she had a healthy following, a regular newsletter took the place of paid advertising, allowing subscribers to sign up for new workshops and spread the word.

Future goals

Deborette thrives on sharing her knowledge with others and showing them how to make things happen. This, combined with an overwhelming desire to learn as much as she can about leather, means that craft experiences will always be central to Deborette's business offering.

Emerging from the isolation that so many experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, Deborette believes that craft activities are more

important than ever. This is because they provide important opportunities for using our hands, our minds, and to connect with others. With this in mind, she is in the early stages of building an outdoor studio. While this has the potential to attract a different demographic, Deborette will continue to design new learning activities that offer customers her 'authentic' studio experience: set against the scenic backdrop of Birmingham's vibrant Jewellery Quarter.



Karen Thompson

Karen Thompson, Ceramicist

🌐 karent.co.uk

📷 [instagram.com/karent.co.uk/](https://www.instagram.com/karent.co.uk/)

Transfixed by the therapeutic potential of craft, Karen Thompson is a maker and ceramicist whose thriving business provides her with the financial stability needed to work on functional porcelain pieces and create bold political statements with clay.

The business of experiences

Beginning her career as a maker in 2011, Karen's business model has evolved to include craft experiences. This strand of her practice was developed during her residency at Crescent Arts in Scarborough, UK. This community organisation supports studio holders to develop and advertise workshops for local audiences. Karen's outstanding

people skills created a buzz around her offering, enabling her to establish successful relationships with regional galleries and museums. Invitations to host experiences with different councils and heritage organisations provided Karen with the space, audiences, and income needed to develop new learning formats and ideas.

Designing experiences

When she moved into her waterfront studio on the pier in Scarborough, UK, in 2016, Karen turned her hand to designing site-specific activities that provided tourists with a unique experience of the surrounding environment. With the goal of appealing to day visitors, Karen delivers short, hour-long workshops that invite participants to breathe in the area's scenic views as they experience new forms of creative learning.

'It's nice to come to a different location, especially being able to look at the scenes outside while you're drawing. It's actually really calming.'

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

Running hour-long experiences on a rotational basis enables Karen to offer numerous daily sessions during busy holiday periods. Because there isn't a lot of travelling to do, this set-up is particularly cost-efficient.



© Sarah-Mace Dennis

Finding customers

Karen's craft experiences are advertised locally and online through Airbnb. When people book accommodation, they have the opportunity to book an experience as well. The thriving tourism industry in Scarborough, UK, makes Airbnb the ideal platform to service Karen's

target market. Realising the value of cost- and time-effective marketing for business growth, Karen now intends to post flyers around the local area to spark the interest of tourists who might not have booked their holiday via Airbnb.

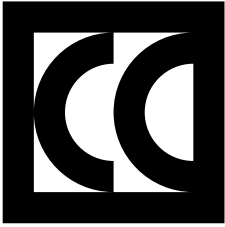
Future goals

Karen believes that craft experiences are becoming increasingly important, because of the rising costs of education. The lifelong creative learning experienced through craft is invaluable; creative activities encourage new conversations and ways of thinking.

From a financial perspective, craft experiences make a significant contribution to Karen's annual revenue. They give her freedom to focus on the more conceptual and political aspects of her practice, without having to worry about sales. Inspired by the creative energy generated in her studio in Scarborough, UK, Karen is currently renovating a transit van so that she can expand her offering to customers at festivals and different outdoor venues.



© Sarah-Mace Dennis



Turning Earth

Turning Earth

🌐 turningearth.org

📷 [instagram.com/turning_earth/](https://www.instagram.com/turning_earth/)

A community of makers united by the goal of providing accessible craft experiences, Turning Earth is an open-access pottery studio that supports ceramicists in developing their skills, collaborating, and finding new business and selling opportunities.

Inspired by experience models in the United States that provide makers from different backgrounds with new learning opportunities, Tallie Maughan founded Turning Earth in 2013 off the back of a small crowdfunding campaign.

'We included experiences in the business model because it was such a good opportunity to get people back into making things again, where there had been little opportunity for people to even start out.'

**LEWIS MAUGHAN, OPERATIONS
MANAGER, TURNING EARTH**

With studios in three London boroughs (Hoxton, Leyton, and Haringay), Turning Earth offers a step-by-step learning experience whereby people can start with any level of skill and become professional if they choose. Revenue is generated by a gym-style membership that provides subscribers with access to studio space, storage, and technical assistance, as well as glaze and firing support. This base income is supplemented by weekly and intensive workshops and classes.

A formula for experience design

For Turning Earth, the formula for a good experience is providing a service that is fun, accommodating, and accessible. Ensuring that participants create a product they can share with others is also key. This encourages people to talk about their experience, as well as motivating them to come again and expand their knowledge.

Not only does the therapeutic potential of ceramics make it addictive, but the experience is also circular because there is always more to learn. Pop-up

events at festivals and markets provide a 'taster' for Turning Earth's full studio offering. For many, these shorter activities spark the realisation that they could easily get hooked on what they are doing.

While the studio membership and classes give people different options in terms of their learning, what makes Turning Earth a truly unforgettable experience is the community environment where people come to socialise, learn, and share their skills.



Building a community

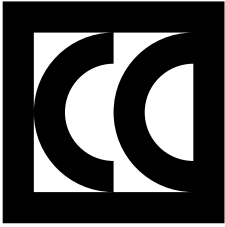
Turning Earth believe that building on the foundations of a strong brand is key to drawing in new customers. Their offering, which appeals to consumers eager to create something new with their hands, is now so popular that courses can sell out in as little as 30 seconds. Although Turning Earth advertise across all social media platforms, they still find that most people come by

word of mouth. They regularly host in-person studio sales and ceramics-inspired parties. Organised around music, food, and drink these open-access events, where members have the opportunity to showcase and sell their work to the public, have a kind of contagious energy that no doubt draws others to test out the studio's unique offering.

Experiencing the future of craft

Turning Earth is an innovative model for the future of craft experiences, because it provides a community space where people can gather, share, and learn new skills. As people's everyday activities become increasingly distributed inside virtual worlds, physical spaces where you can come and learn how to make things with your hands, will become increasingly important for mental health and wellbeing.

Working in the studio rather than online means being able to be present, listen to, and share ideas with other people. For Turning Earth this means drawing from its community to develop new experiences that respond to makers' interests and needs. With the recent launch of their third studio, there is no doubt that this collective of makers is growing strong.



Yodomo

Yodomo

🌐 yodomo.co

📷 [instagram.com/yodomo.co/](https://www.instagram.com/yodomo.co/)

With an affection for the space that craft held in her adolescent world, Sophie Rochester is a creative entrepreneur whose knowledge of business development, technology, and market trends led to the launch of Yodomo: a digital platform offering versatile craft experiences.

The business of experiences

When Sophie founded Yodomo in 2017, it was one of the first technology platforms to be designed with a craft experience proposition. Part marketplace, part agency, Yodomo nurtures and promotes craft practitioners, helping them to monetise their skills and share them with the public. At Yodomo, you can sign up to online courses, or buy kits directly from independent makers and crafts people.

'We noticed the correlation between crafts and wellbeing, and that lots of people were using crafts possibly as a way to reset from technology — even though it was technology that helped them find those courses.'

Yodomo also partners with brands, festivals, and corporates to deliver live workshops. You can apply to join their roster of makers, and, if you are accepted, they will promote you and your work to their networks.

Clever experience design

Yodomo offers the makers they work with expert guidance on defining and monetising their craft experience offering. When starting out, you should put yourself in the position of the learner. Once you have come up with an accessible project in terms of skill level and time frame, you can then break the process down into steps; thinking about the length of the experience, tools, health, safety, and mess are all crucial. Is there anything

that requires drying time? If you are doing a live event, what are the practicalities of keeping the area tidy and avoiding any damage?

Sophie recommends finding somebody with no craft experience and trialling your workshop with them. You can ask them to go through all of the steps in your craft kit, helping you to determine its accessibility and iron out any logistical issues.

Attracting customers and opportunities

While the recent transition to life online has generated a fresh interest in craft experiences, Sophie cautions that with new opportunities comes more competition. Yodomo addresses this issue by helping makers to stand out in what is becoming an increasingly crowded craft experience economy, both on- and offline. This includes hiring film crew to produce professional videos of craft experiences or following Yodomo's learning modules in order to do it themselves. Accessible to paying consumers through their platform, this content allows easy access to online learning, while ensuring that makers are fairly compensated.

When designing their own social media offering, Yodomo collaborates with well-known artists and brands. Developing experiences with, and for, Cass Art, The Royal Society of Sculptors, artist Jake Spicer, and publisher Hachette, provides exposure and access to new customers. Having multiple stakeholders promoting the same event and its associated content not only increases market reach, but also shows that you are working with trusted names in the industry.

Finding future goals

When it comes to craft experiences, Sophie thinks the future looks bright. We can see this in people's renewed interest in craft, and its assimilation into a wider network of experiences, including sustainability workshops, conscious consumerism, and wellness events.

For Yodomo, any increased interest in wellness activities is a positive development. As the world starts to open up, Sophie and her team continue to search for physical and virtual clients who may not otherwise be engaged in crafts, encouraging them to support makers, and contribute to a dynamic and ever-evolving craft experience economy.



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