

COCKPIT ARTS 3 YEARS

Lorna Syson

- *Ingenious Growth Loan Recipient 2016*

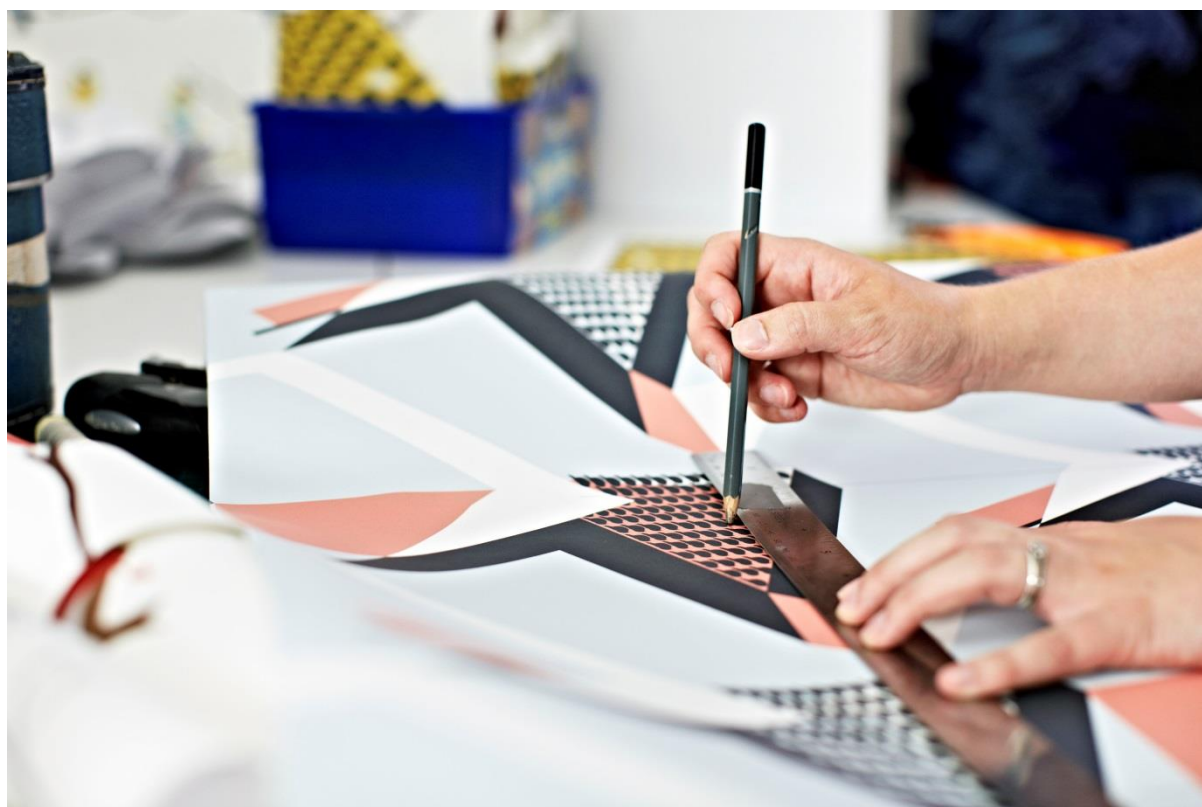


Lorna Syson is a great example of how to tap in to all the incubation support on offer at Cockpit Arts. In the four years since she first arrived in Deptford, she has actively engaged in the workshop programme and meets regularly with business development for one-to-one sessions. Lorna has also taken the opportunity to sell cross-site during Open Studios, giving her access to an audience in Holborn as well as Deptford. This has been particularly useful in her early stages of developing and testing product.

Lorna's loan proposal was to provide the funds required to enable her to take a 'step up' in her level of outsourcing, giving her access to high quality fabric by the metre. This scaling up in production was driven by three major factors; reducing standard costs of production, being able to offer fabric-by-the-metre as a standard product and taking up an opportunity to be stocked as a designer fabric label by John Lewis. Lorna says: "The loan allows me to invest in fabrics, which then enables me to offer more competitive prices and higher quality than I was before. This is only possible in bulk. I also wanted to sell this through John Lewis after they approached me at a trade show."

Working on the loan application together gave Lorna and David Crump, Head of Business Development, the opportunity to step back and appraise her business as a whole, as well as looking in detail at the specifics of the fabric-by-the-metre project and the opportunity with John Lewis. They met several times over a period of three months, each time reviewing the progress that Lorna had made with her business plan and identifying what needed to be tackled next. As Lorna states, “writing the plan was a particular challenge for me and so it was important that time was spent looking at *what* the plan said as well as *how* it said it.”

She elaborates: “I wanted support in the decisions I was making. It’s a lot of money and I needed to make sure that I was being sensible with it. I’m also severely dyslexic and although I know all ins and outs of my business, this is sometimes hard to get on paper in an order that other people can understand. I was nervous; worried that the plan I created which I have so much passion behind wasn’t going to be understood by the decision makers. David helped me all through the process and he helped me every step of the way”



The business plan needed to cover a number of key areas, such as:

Production planning

Moving to this scale of production means that Lorna needs to keep a close eye on her patterns of sales, linking this to her forecast for future demand so that she ensures that orders for fabric are placed giving enough lead time for production without the risk of running out of material either for her own use or for sales to John Lewis. As a consequence of this exercise, Lorna realised that she needed more physical space to deal with the amount of fabric that she might stock at any one time; thankfully she was able to expand the space within her existing studio, and so this element of scaling up was relatively straight forward.

Cash flow forecasting

Whilst the opportunity to grow revenue is obviously exciting, it brings its own challenges when it comes to managing cash flow. As part of the financial planning for this application, Lorna worked on some models to simulate the possible scenarios that might occur over the next 12 to 24 months. Part of the rationale for the loan was to ensure that she was able to order increased levels of stock without being under pressure to immediately grow revenues to match.

When it came to pitching to the Cockpit Arts Ingenious Growth Loan Panel, Lorna gave a very confident account of her business and this proposal. The members of the panel had lots of questions to ask about how this project would work in practice, and what the potential risks and benefits would be. In conclusion, they all agreed with making this investment to support Lorna's efforts to scale up her business. Lorna states, "It was much easier than I expected. I found once I got them into conversation I was able to answer their questions and engage them in what I was doing and why"

Cockpit Arts & Ingenious Growth Loans of up to £10,000 are available to studio holders needing an injection of cash to grow their business.

www.lornasyson.co.uk

Photos: Kerry Harrison