

News story: Tyneside craft supplier weaves its way to success in the US

The North Shields-based business, founded in 2013, will use the Quilt Market Houston trade show to unveil its new 'Tessepatch' range to the US market.

[Craft Yourself Silly](#) found early success through its use of a traditional North East craft method known as 'proggy rag rugging', where scraps of material are pushed through holes in a woven fabric.

Today, it manufactures DIY kits that allow crafters to use the traditional 'proggy' technique to make soft toy animals, fabric accessories and decorations, selling its products online and in stores like Hobbycraft, as well as in a major US craft retail chain.

In 2014, the firm won a £300,000 contract from JOANN, one of the largest chains of craft and hobby stores in the US, after receiving support from the Department for International Trade (DIT) to showcase its products at the Creativation trade show in Phoenix, Arizona.

The firm's products are now stocked in 865 JOANN stores across 49 US states. Last year, exporting accounted for almost a third of the company's total revenue.

Founder and Managing Director Hayley Smith said:

In the UK, the craft and hobby market is worth around £4 billion every year, while in the US, the value of the market is 10 times that size.

We've managed to tap into that demand with great success. But the process hasn't been without its hurdles. After securing our contract with JOANN, we found ourselves needing to fill shipping containers instead of pallet crates and had to very quickly get to grips with US customs processes, labelling requirements, and safety standards. We also needed to learn about variations in laws and regulations, which can differ from state to state.

DIT was on-hand to help us at every step of the way, offering expertise and guidance to make everything as smooth as possible, in addition to introductions to new suppliers.

My advice to anyone thinking about exporting for the first time is to get in touch with DIT at the earliest opportunity – the team knows what opportunities exist in different markets, and what support is available to help you get there. After that, give it your best shot. If we can do it, you can too.

Managing Director Hayley Smith and her patchwork products.

David Coppock, Head of Exports for the North East at the Department for International Trade, said:

Craft Yourself Silly has managed to turn a traditional North East art form into an international bestseller through ambition and drive.

We know that 2 of the main barriers preventing companies across the region from exporting are the perceived difficulties with legal and tax requirements and finding suitable buyers or trading partners. We can assist firms with both of these, and far more besides.

To help companies make the most of demand overseas, we have 19 International Trade Advisers based on the ground across the North East. These advisers are ready to provide specialist guidance to firms looking to export for the first time, or to increase their exporting activity. I would urge anyone interested to get in touch as the support is out there.

DIT's Exporting is GREAT campaign aims to help more businesses explore new markets overseas. The campaign is currently showcasing 30+ UK businesses – from a range of sectors and regions – to inspire and support firms up and down the country to export.

Firms looking for support should visit great.gov.uk which has information on live export opportunities and includes general information on exporting and events.