

BEBAROQUE

Printed and hand
embroidered hosiery



INTRODUCTION

Mhairi McNicol and partner Chloe Patience launched their fashion accessory label at London Fashion Week in 2007, featuring digitally printed and embroidered hosiery.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Mhairi and Chloe had independently designed tights as accessories for their Masters fashion shows while studying in Glasgow and Edinburgh respectively. Mhairi explains: “It was the tights rather than the clothing that grabbed attention at both shows. A stockist approached Chloe, and I gained a commission. We realised we had a niche product with a potential market, and that was the inspiration for setting up the company.”

Initially, Mhairi looked to start up independently, but found it difficult: “Launching a business on my own proved a struggle, so my coach suggested I form a partnership.” The collaboration has been fruitful. Less than two years on, bebaroque’s accessories were available from more than 40 stockists worldwide including Liberty’s, Urban Outfitters (in the UK and US), ASOS (the UK’s largest independent online fashion retailer), and a range of independent lingerie boutiques.

As well as supplying wholesalers, the company also sells direct to customers from its own website, allowing it to benefit from the full retail price.

bebaroque has already achieved acclaim in the fashion arena, including winning the 2008 Accessory Designer of the Year at the Scottish Fashion Awards (sponsored by Vogue.com).

PLANNING YOUR BUSINESS

NESTA’s Toolkit approach was helpful for Mhairi: “I learned a lot through the process. I found the tools and exercises really helpful as a means of looking at the business, and in growing it.”

Access to tools such as Blueprint Modelling and Marketing Planning was beneficial for planning the business and knowing what had to be done. Mhairi continues to use them in running the company: “I still use some of the tools I learned on a regular basis, although in a less formal way than as a set exercise, they’re ingrained in what I do and how I think about the business.”

FUTURE AMBITIONS

While the initial product range was confined to printed and embroidered tights, this has been extended to include scarves, leggings and body suits.

The Directors are focused on continuing to expand the business, particularly reaching new overseas markets including Russia and Australia. Mhairi comments that although the company has a distribution agent and partners for manufacturing, printing and embroidery, the next step is to get more staff on board: “We want to grow the business in a way that will allow us to put more of our time into design rather than the day-to-day administration of running the business.”

WORDS OF ADVICE

It helps to get a range of perspectives and business advice on setting up, particularly when you’re inexperienced, but ultimately you need to make your own decisions. Mhairi explains: “Soak up the advice on starting up, but remember that you know your business better than anyone, so it’s for you to decide what advice you act on. Don’t think that because you’re young and inexperienced you can’t make good decisions. In our experience good, experienced mentors who can offer meaningful advice in our niche area are hard to come by.”