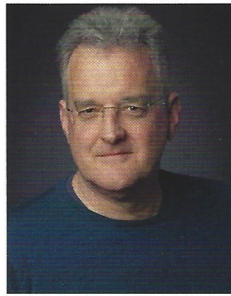


STEVE BARTON

Steve Barton is CEO of Just Hands TV, an online video subscription service that provides online workshops for knitting, quilting and textile arts.
justhands-on.tv



"Footfall has been quiet in my bricks-and-mortar store this year. How can I encourage customers and turn the shop into a resource for my local craft community?"

Craft shops in the US are experiencing growing success with 'make and take' sessions. These are open afternoons or evenings where anyone can try their hand at a new technique. The key here is to create a more informal environment where visitors can drift in and try a few stitches rather than committing to a three or six-hour class. Call it a gentle taster rather than a formal workshop.

It's also important to cater for a range of craft options. Creative people enjoy trying out fresh ideas and discovering new ways to express themselves. Rarely are they tied to one technique, even though they may be more accomplished in a single area.

For example, we've noticed that many of our subscribers who are dedicated quilters will also watch how-to videos on knitting or relatively niche textile art techniques. Interestingly, the make and take approach also appears to be pulling in that difficult-to-attract younger audience. Perhaps it's because of their time-poor schedules or because these crafters don't feel confident enough to take a full-length class. Whatever the reason, you'll get more response if you invite them to 'drop by the store for an inspirational browse or chat', as Lauren Guthrie, Mosley shop-owner and Great British Sewing Bee contestant puts it.

Of course, the next challenge is how to make this regular behaviour. According to some experts, you encourage this by stimulating a trial of new behaviour with an offer such as free coffee. Repeat this process, then remove the reward after the habit becomes ingrained.

I think the last step sounds a bit mean. I don't believe you need to drop the free coffee as much as you need to keep the evenings informal and inspirational. Provide a route to a more advanced workshop when your customer s find a craft they would like to pursue.

One final thing that cannot be overlooked is good quality tutors. The best teachers anticipate your difficulty before you know it, and they can walk you through a simple solution without it feeling awkward. There is real skill to this.

The good news is that most craft shop-owners and their staff have this quality. Still, don't be afraid to bring in top tutors for your make and take sessions. We've found that every time we feature a product in an online workshop there is a lift in sales of that item in bricks-and-mortar shops. We believe that using Britain's finest tutors for our workshops is a big reason for that success.

An initial visit to a session leads to a repeat visit and purchase, which in turn means making new friends, participating in more advanced classes, regular visits and a chance to trade tips with people in the shop. Before you know it, these informal sessions are the special ingredient that places your business at the centre of a thriving and vibrant local craft community.



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