

Case Study:

Product Development at the Warner Textile Archive



The Warner Textile Archive Collection provides an excellent resource for product development. With its origins in our retail shop, this has evolved over the years to include wholesale collections.

Increasing secondary spend:

- People are **inspired** by their trip to our gallery – they always identify a piece that they'd like in their own home. Product development enables us to make the most of this and increase secondary spend while enthusiasm is at its peak.
- Our visitors often comment that they enjoy seeing a **modern interpretation** of a design, or a reapplication of it. A design which was originally intended for furnishing fabric, they can have as a greeting card or a jigsaw. It's a much more instantaneous purchase with less commitment than covering their living room furniture.
- We hope that going forward our retail shop will become a '**destination**' in Braintree, helping to reduce our dependence on external funding. Warner Textile Archive branded items are consistently among our best sellers and we recognise the need to have unique items, unavailable elsewhere in Braintree. The benefit of product development to our retail KPIs is information we feed back to our trustees.

Proofing, sampling and colouring:

- In-house product development has provided us greater control over the Warner Textile Archive **brand** than some of our licensing activity. When creating new ranges we take the time to ensure it's a product we are proud of, and that our retail volunteers will be keen to sell. This may include slightly altering the colouring of a design in order to increase its accessibility, while its **integrity** remains.
- This was the case when using the design *Giraffes* (c.1939), where altering the green colour made it much more appealing to our customers.
- Colour provides us with a challenge in product development – it requires greater sampling and set up time and costs. Recently, we've addressed this by creating some small stationery items using a design's recognisable **motif** and recolouring it in black. The result has been clearly-branded and contemporary products, which were relatively **quick and cost effective** to stock.



Managing costs:

- Developing commercial product does take time, and also investment in terms of photography, graphic design and print origination costs. **Digital print runs** have reduced our initial stock outlay, and enabled us to review the response to a product, and respond to changes that need to be made, more quickly.
- In order to make the most of our spend and investment, we have increasingly created multiple products using one design. In cases where a Collection is not fully digitised, this has the benefit of meaning some photography and graphic design costs are allocated across a few lines.
- We have also noticed customers buying **combination gifts** – a jigsaw and card or tea towel and coaster can make great complementary items. With this in mind, as part of the development process, while sampling we make sure we have a good match for products already using a certain design. In trying to encourage greater secondary spend, it's important that the retail team feels confident suggesting these combinations.

Managing workload:

- We are a small team and have to balance retail success with other priorities. Of late, we have created product lines to tie in with the largest events on our calendar – our Textile Fair in May, and Christmas Fair in November. For each event, one design will feature heavily on our website, social media, flyers, posters etc.. By integrating this design with product development, the cost of photography and some graphic design time can be split across multiple projects – marketing, events and retail.
- The idea is that customers will instantly recognise the design from marketing, and be drawn to buying it! For Christmas 2014, we used the design *Birds & Blossom* (1927) and started with cards: we found a **stock-size** envelope to keep costs down; knew the size of the printing sheet so as to **reduce wastage**, and did some **market research** so as to find out how much customers would expect to pay for a pack of Christmas cards. The product we came up with was a pack of eight cards, each measuring 10cm x 10cm, and retailing for £4.
- Here, the public access and commercial departments have worked together and complemented one another, but **driven by the collection** we hold – for me this is exactly how it should be, when a museum begins to work commercially.



The culture-commerce mix:

- In practice, there is frequently some question about how museum and heritage sites can work commercially. For us, Warner & Sons was a hugely innovative company, consistently drawing inspiration from the past, and **pushing the boundaries** of what could be done in textile production and design. As such, the adaptation of some of the historic documents in our Collections means we are continuing to follow the ethics of the Company, providing it is done tastefully so that the integrity of the design remains.