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I make clothes which carry my own designs. How can I ensure they stand out?



### James Caan

*Dear James,*

I WOULD like to start a business to sell my own clothing, tote bags and other products which will all have designs with my own artwork on them. I would like advice on the best way to market and advertise myself and get noticed more than those who are doing and selling similar products.

*Rajon Ahmed*

YOU need to think about your target market. Do you want to make products for the mainstream, or create more intricate designs which appeal to a niche market?

Decide what your unique selling point is and this will help you develop your pitch when approaching

customers. If you start by selling to individuals, it will take you a long time to grow your business.

One option is to launch your own boutique – as I did – but obviously that is very costly and requires you to research the location carefully. You also need a lot of upfront investment to cover all the overheads.

As an alternative, I suggest you come up with a full range of designs and approach existing fashion retail outlets yourself.

The bigger players in the market, such as Selfridges and Debenhams will already have their preferred suppliers which makes for a tougher sell, so be more targeted for now.

When you've established what sort of customer would be attracted to your designs, find boutiques who cater to them. Then you need to do the old-fashioned thing of cold-calling them. This is where perseverance pays dividends. No one likes rejection but look at it as a

numbers game: if one in 10 shows an interest in your products, then for every 100, you have 10 suppliers who will stock your goods.

When they do show an interest, offer them say, eight samples from your range to place in their store.

You need to calculate how much your pieces cost to make and then aim to sell or trail to the retailers with a decent mark-up. If they don't bite, then negotiate a price they would be happy with. To keep your mark-up, you may need to re-think your fabric or reduce the amount of stitching.

Another way to reach buyers is to exhibit at a well known clothes show, for example the annual Clothes Show Live each December in Birmingham. The other one is Bread & Butter in Berlin in July – it's a huge event that attracts global buyers. Go with a range of 10-20 pieces and you're guaranteed passing customers.

Research lifestyle and fashion magazines, send your products into the publications that you think suit your range and ask if they will feature them. If you've got an interesting story to tell, that will increase your chances of getting some coverage.

And use social media as much as possible. It's the quickest and cheapest way to reach a mass audience. You can post images of your products, start blogging and build awareness of your brand online.

■ For the full article and news of James Caan's free app, go to [standard.co.uk](http://standard.co.uk). His new book, *Start Your Business in 7 Days*, is out now.