

'My wedding gift idea became a business'

Painted Clans founder Brendan McCarey makes family Coat of Arms and hand painted Heraldic products in a contemporary style. His business began when he designed a wedding present for a friend.

The start

I started my design company five years ago. At the time a good friend of mine was getting married. I wanted to create a wedding gift like a modern family coat of arms. He was moving to Australia, and I wanted to give him something that would remind him of home. I started searching but I couldn't find it, so I began to design it myself.

I started by setting up a Facebook page with the top ten modern Irish family coats of arms, and suddenly orders started coming in. I saw that there was potential to make quite a bit of money.

What is a coat of arms?

It is a heraldic depiction of your family history. It started in medieval times. They came to Ireland with the English. Most people in Ireland have a family coat of arms. I focus on the symbol within the coat of arms and strip away all the extravagance. I redesign it and create a series of stencils and finally paint the symbols in different layers.

How did you fund the business?

I did a Kickstarter campaign at the very beginning which was more of a marketing programme. The beauty of the business is that my initial outlay was just the frames. I came from a design background, so I had a lot of equipment and office space and was ready to go.

What are your growth plans?

The business has been running three years. I am still trying to focus on America for growth. There are millions of Irish people in America. If we could get one percent of America, it would be amazing.

How many people work in the business?

Currently just two people, my wife and myself.

What challenges do you face?

The most significant challenge for me is working on my own and not having people around to bounce ideas. To help, I linked up with a few friends who have startups, and we share and solve issues. When you are alone in business, managing yourself can be tricky.

What would you do differently if you were to do it all over again?

I would get a website specialist straight off the bat. I would partner up a lot quicker. I think I was trying to solve all problems myself and learn skills that I didn't have.

Who inspires you?

From a design perspective Dieter Rams. I studied product design in Derry, and I also studied it in Germany. He is a German designer. As far as business is concerned Danny Og Magennis who runs Whack Pack Furniture, a startup based in Monaghan.

How do you balance work and life?

With a lot of coffee and late nights. I used to work a lot of weekends, but now I just focus on weekdays. I try to switch off on the weekends.

Images courtesy of [Painted Clans](#).

Interview by Alice Orange.