

19th century printing press powers The Pear in Paper

A manually operated letterpress from the 1800s and recycled materials used by [The Pear in Paper](#) make its founder Lynn Costello Erskine's designs entirely eco-friendly. Think Business talks to her about her quest to bring back hand-crafted prints in a way that benefits the environment too.

What led you to set up Pear in Paper?

I always had a dream to have my own business. I really wanted to be my own boss and combine it with my love of art.

Even though I really enjoyed previous jobs, I needed that creative outlet and that need is what started me on this path.

What makes your company different?

We use letterpress and lino print in a move towards individually hand-crafted, tactile products printed in an old-fashioned way. From the start, my whole process has been entirely eco-friendly. Not just the card I was use, or the envelopes and ink I use but the process itself. The card is made from recycled cotton fibres; the envelopes from recycled paper and the ink is made from linseed oil.

The heart of my business is my letterpress which is entirely eco-friendly. It is 149 years old and uses battery rather than electricity. Every single greeting card is made on that press. It takes so long in comparison to using a computer and printer but the environmental element of my business is really important to me.

The letterpress is also so lovely to use. You can only go as fast as the press will go, so it slows you down. Each piece is made slowly and deliberately. The sound of the rollers inking the plate puts me in a peaceful trance.

What challenges did you meet and how did you overcome them?

The biggest challenge I had was confidence. When I started, I didn't tell anyone except my family about my business idea. I wanted to start quietly, to test the market. I knew what I wanted to do, I had a definite plan of where I wanted to take the business but I was still lacking in confidence. In 2015, I set up an Etsy shop. That was brilliant because I was uploading items and the next thing somebody was buying them. That really was the starting point and it grew from there.

Did the pandemic impact your business and how did you adapt?

When my shop closed in March 2019, my online sales took off. Orders came in immediately. My sales went up 120pc. My business grew and it has grown again since this time last year.

What supports did you receive to set up your business and how could support for entrepreneurs be improved?

The Local Enterprise Office was brilliant. They helped me financially with a grant to build my business. They gave me all kinds of support. They got me on a Start Your Own Business course and I got mentorship for two years, which was amazing. It really helped my confidence.

I applied to the Design & Crafts Council Ireland to do Showcase, Ireland's creative expo. It happens annually and attracts buyers from all over the world. There's an area within the show called Design Ireland, that only about 50 businesses can showcase in. I applied to get into that area and was chosen to showcase my products there. It meant buyers knew I had been well vetted by the Design & Craft Council. I got a lot of orders and leads from that.

What was the most important thing you learnt and what would you pass on to other businesses?

Have confidence and believe in yourself. If you have the seed of a business idea, you can do it. Remain confident and positive. There will be challenges along the way but don't let them stop you.

Get your website done really well. If you are going to have an online presence, don't take any short cuts. Use lots of photographs to help sell your product.

What are your plans for the future?

It was my dream to get into the Donegal Craft Village. I have my own unit there. I currently have two presses and we're going to introduce another restored press that's on its way, as well as more prints and greeting cards. I would love to build a studio at home so that I can work from home as well as in the Craft Village. I have a new employee in the form of my daughter, she works in the shop. I have another daughter and a 10-year-old son who can't wait till he's old enough to work in the business. They all have an interest in being able to use the press.

Interview by Olivia McGill

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