

devonshire scent of success

We chat to Lesley Phillips, Director of The Soap Kitchen, about the business and soap making

How did the business start?

We started The Soap Kitchen more than 15 years ago with an interest in finding out how to make soap from basic ingredients. After research in the library, sourcing materials from a variety of suppliers and soap-making experiments, I started this niche business with my husband Richard. Working from home in North Devon with the help of a website, selling soap at local markets and craft fairs, the business grew. As well as the finished product, which was made in our kitchen, we offered friendly advice and information, as well as all the necessary ingredients for customers to have a go themselves.

As the business expanded, we bought a shop in Great Torrington, and have now moved our web business and workshops into large bespoke premises in Bideford in Devon, where we have a lovely creative suite where all our products are made.

Many niche crafts including soap making are making a comeback. Why do you think this is?

With the onset of the recession, homecrafts have seen a resurgence with make do and mend and up-cycling increasing in popularity.



Like a lot of traditional crafts, soap making is not a new idea, in the past, surplus fats and potash were used to make soap at home. The Soap Kitchen supplies quality ingredients to update this craft for current trends and has a growing base of both hobbyists and small businesses who like to make soap for their own use, as special gifts or to sell themselves. Advertising in craft magazines and providing both projects and content for these publications, it's clear that home-made products have that added value of a personal touch.

What can the company offer craft retailers?

The Soap Kitchen offers bespoke packages for craft retailers from easy-to-use kits to base supplies, colours and moulds. We also sell fragrances and essential oils, as well as candle making supplies and the finished products for resale. There's the back up of a friendly team at the end of the phone to guide new retailers to a tailor made introduction depending on their business needs. This is an upward trend with many high street retailers offering the finished item with candles and toiletries to complement their own product ranges.



Can you tell us about the manufacturing process?

Making soap is much easier than many people might think so it's ideal as a hobby or craft interest.

There are two main methods to make soap. The easiest way to get started is to use a Melt and pour soap base, which is as simple as it sounds. There are many choices of soap base, which includes natural or organic choices and bases with lovely additions like aloe vera or shea butter. It's simply a matter of melting the base, maybe in a microwave or just on a hob top, adding your chosen colour, and fragrance and pouring into a mould. There are a huge selection of fragrances available to use in melt and pour soap plus an array of colours and pigments which create some really stunning effects, from simple liquid dyes to more specialised products such as micas and glitters.

The Soap Kitchen's specialty is natural soap made in the cold process method. This is also far easier than you might think. Natural Soap can be made from virtually any oil, like olive oil and coconut oil, which are readily available. These can be easily turned into very high quality natural soaps with just a little know-how and the kind of equipment found in anyone's kitchen. Again, you can easily learn how to use a wide choice of dyes and pigments to add colour to the soap, and fragrance is most easily added by the addition of essential oils.



Both of these methods can be used to make just small numbers of soaps using very simple kitchen equipment, making them ideal as a home hobby.

What sort of products should a retailer new to this craft stock?

As well as starter kits, a retailer should offer a range of simple basic ingredients such as soap bases, a selection of moulds, and the easy-to-use colouring system Zenicolour 5. We offer bespoke packages with no minimum order value. This gives customers an introduction to soap making, as well the extra supplies to get more creative with their new hobby.

The Soap Kitchen has a new website. Tell us more about it?

A website is probably one of the most important tools a company has when retailing and wholesaling these days. For us, it's the perfect medium to interact with customers

and to provide guides and recipes. With the use of tablet computers, there's been a huge surge of people replacing printed pages with web pages. Also with the advance of the smart phone, online shopping is no longer restricted to a PC or laptop.

Our new website is designed to meet the needs of the discerning online shopper. It has a responsive design that means it adapts to different screen sizes, making it easy to shop or to simply look up a recipe or information on any web-connected device. It has been professionally designed to make navigating really easy, so it's very simple to find what you're looking for, whether it's any of our free recipes, product guides, technical information or simply to find the product you're looking for and making a quick and easy purchase. It also offers an easy on-line booking for our regular workshops and courses held at our premises in Bideford.

Do you have any news that's hot off the press to share with us?

As we've already mentioned, The Soap Kitchen supplies Zenicolor 5 exclusively in the UK. It's a new and innovative product which gives exact colour matching and has an easy-to-use app to give perfect results for melt and pour soap.

A recent trend has been a surge in men's grooming products, so we're introducing a growing range of simple-to-use bases to create a selection of men's grooming lines such as beard oils, moustache maxes and shaving creams that you just add fragrance and colour to.

As well as supplying a wide range of ingredients and supplies, The Soap Kitchen has a highly experienced technical department and design team, so we really are a starting point for any business interested in this growing market.



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