

## Bespoke Online

'Last year was proof of concept', says Fred Kimel, founder and manager of the Handcrafted online client-meets-maker type brokerage which is certainly making a mark. The site now represents over 250 woodworkers, and the plan, as originally envisioned, is to extend the platform to those who work in metal, stone, leather and more.

Recently received funding will help Fred to further develop the business by providing him with a survival wage and payment for his small team. The latter currently includes a full-time developer and most recently marketing support.

'Any start-up needs time to refine the business model', Fred says, having survived the financial drought of the very early days. Receiving investment from the Sydney Seed Fund, QUT Creative Enterprise Australia (CEA) and a number of 'angel' investors, Handcrafted has raised \$275,000.

To achieve a critical mass of makers on the site to attract the briefs, maker's fees were initially waived, however a recently introduced fee for Premium Profile listing signals the commencement of subscription fees.

Handcrafted has now facilitated hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of projects. 'Not all (briefs) come to fruition but there is a 30% conversion rate', says Fred. 'Now that we've got many more makers with different styles, geographies and price ranges, it means that when a brief comes in I can match it to a few makers.'

Ten years at Macquarie Bank as a senior product manager with responsibility for online business banking show when Fred Kimel talks. 'Etsy is an online marketplace that has demonstrated the value of handmade goods, \$1.9 billion US dollars was transacted last year,' said Fred, 'and that was 50% on the US\$1.35 billion year before – and they have now listed on a US exchange at a valuation of over \$2 billion'. All of which demonstrates there is market interest in connecting directly with a maker and purchasing something handmade. Whereas Etsy's average transaction is for \$25 for typically textile and crafty items, it's not as well targeted to higher value and furniture sales.

'Bespoke furniture sustainably made by local makers' is how the site advertises itself. Looking through the maker profiles on the site, the commitment to sustainably sourced, often reclaimed materials is frequently stated. For makers, running a viable business is the other side of the sustainability coin, and that means keeping the amount of time spent detailing down to a level that both they and their clients can afford.

'The younger generation of makers is just a bit more pragmatic about what people can afford but still giving clients an alternative to terrible mass-produced goods that aren't made to last,' said Fred. Where structures may have been standardised and simplified, boxes such as 'being made locally, original design, solid materials, not going to be thrown away', are still being ticked.

[www.handcrafted.com](http://www.handcrafted.com) 



Handcrafted founder and manager Fred Kimel.