

Decorating gets eco: Introducing YesColours, creators of Europe's first recyclable paint pouch

Did you know 14,000 tonnes of paint tins go to landfill every year? John Stubbs, founder and managing director at YesColours, and Emma Bestley, its cofounder and creative director, want to help change that.

Launching YesColours

JS: It began through a conversation I had with a family member about the leftover paint tins building up in the garage. We were discussing how difficult tins are to dispose of in an environmentally friendly way – currently, over 55M litres of paint and 14,000 tonnes of tins go to landfill every year and only 2% ever actually get recycled. It's astonishing.

We were inspired to create a paint brand that changes the way we decorate for the better, is benefit driven and puts purpose before profit. And also one that did things differently, unlocked people's creativity and reignited everyone's connection to colour. We didn't want to be overly reliant on colour trends or the status quo in the paint sector.

We now have a unique and fully recyclable paint pouch that we hope will make it really easy for people to recycle their paint waste, and a selection of colours

inspired by the world around us – from different cultures, travel, film, music and even food.

EB: John and I have been friends for over 20 years – we were both unemployed during the first UK Covid-19 lockdown and that’s when he came to me with the concept of YesColours. At first, I was more of a colour sounding board, but as the months went on, it became increasingly apparent that I was just as invested in the business as he was – that’s how our official partnership began as co-founders.

I’m also one of the lucky ones (so I think) to have Grapheme Colour Synesthesia, where I see particular letters and numbers in specific colours. Naturally, I am obsessed with colour and so couldn’t have dreamt of a better job!

The business

JS: We’ve created Europe’s first recyclable paint pouch. Being hugely passionate about sustainability, I took to reinventing the customer journey, tackling the paint waste issue at the start, rather than the end, and offering paint to our customers in waste saving, fully recyclable packaging. We’ve also made sure that our paints are free of harmful chemicals with 0% added VOCs, 0% microplastics, vegan and cruelty free without compromising on quality, vibrancy or colour.

Our aim is to empower customers that care about the environment to help protect it, rather than putting more tins straight to landfill. We’ve kept sustainability at the heart of how we operate and will continue to do so, from our packaging to our supply chains, to our use of raw materials and supporting UK manufacturers. YesColours is Made in Britain accredited.

A huge part of creating a business is to also act in ways that can have a positive impact by working with local communities. We are working with a number of charitable organisations on community based projects to help young people feel good.

The positive impact that colour can have on both mental and physical recovery is not pseudoscience – it’s real and it’s proven.

I can't wait to see our finished installation at Sheffield's Children's Hospital working with none other than Morag Myerscough - it's going to make such an incredible difference to the ward.

EB: It's been really rewarding growing the YesColours customer base organically over the last two years. We've done it naturally - much like our brand ethos - and used the network that both John and I have accumulated over the years to gift and support likeminded influencers, artists and designers across interiors, fashion and design.

We've also just wrapped up our first brand video, which we launched on our website and across our social channels. Seeing your brand in the 'big lights' feels so good and has definitely accelerated our desire to continue adding to our palette and explore bigger brand partnerships.

We actually secured a fantastic opportunity with Westfield London to be their exclusive paint partner for an experiential space being designed by Oliver Heath. It's launching on 19th May, so do come down!

Evolving the reach

JS: The idea for YesColours grew out of our love for colour and sustainable solutions during the first Covid lockdown in 2020. We incorporated YesColours a few days before my birthday in October 2020. At the time, we were working from our kitchens and have since then moved to a hybrid model working from home and London coworking spaces.

In terms of the business strategy, this has evolved from a singular vision of how to tackle an environmental problem, to broader considerations around products and initiatives that we feel will have a benefit to our communities. Our considerations are now not only just DTC, but larger commercial projects and opportunities as well as brand partnerships.

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Funding

EB: We have very modest beginnings. John took out a startup loan and used some personal savings, and then approached a small number of investors from various backgrounds that could support the growth of the business at an early stage. All of our investors have relevant experience to add value to the team and drive us forward.

We have since closed our first pre-seed round, and are now openly running a seed round to fuel our growth plans for 2022 and beyond. It's extremely exciting. We have almost the perfect constellation of talent, advisors and investors that have joined us on the journey to date. We couldn't be happier, or more humbled, by the love, dedication and trust that people have bestowed on us.

Tackling challenges

JS: Supply chain management has most definitely been our biggest challenge. Starting a business during unprecedented times has been a huge challenge, as it has for many others out there. However, without lockdown, we certainly wouldn't be where we are. It's enabled us to take the time required to get our brand, our values and our product exactly how we envisaged has achieved great results when it comes to all the projects and customers that are now singing our praises. The recognition we've achieved in such a short space of time just goes to show that even in a global crisis, entrepreneurs can emerge from a struggling economy.

EB: To be totally honest, the challenge for me has been juggling family life alongside cofounding YesColours. It's easy to totally immerse yourself in the work but that's not so easy when you have kids. During lockdown, the struggle was real; homeschooling, tantrums, innocent energetic interruptions on video calls and unlimited snack provisions.

What you do realise though, is when you've gone into business with the right person. After 20 years of friendship, having that open communication every day is key. There's more joyous days than the difficult, but you know you've got something solid when you come through for one another on the difficult days. Humour is key and we've got that in bucketloads.

Addressing an unmet need

EB: We're changing the narrative of how a paint brand is talking about colour. We're less trend focused, and more about the personal connection to colour. For too long, we have been looking at other brands offering the same old colours, greiges, whites, greys and the entire sector feels like it needs to be shaken up and reconnect customers to colours that are more culturally relevant and relatable.

That's why our palette is a collection of colours that

are inspired by the world around us, whether that is different cultures, travel destinations, nature, movies, music and even food.

We wanted a colour palette that spoke to everyone, for a younger generation who are clearly ready for more colour experimentation and expressing themselves creatively.

JS: On the sustainability side, our initial goal was to offer an alternative packaging that was more readily and *easily recyclable*. The other issue we are tackling is over-ordering. Many other brands only sell paint in 2.5 litre tins as their smallest size, and it's not economical to sell them any smaller. What we've done is sell our paints in 1 litre pouches to help avoid the over-ordering issue in the first place. This then leads to less waste being created at the point of purchase.

Advice for founders?

EB: Don't ever think you know it all, always keep hold of that drive and passion which sparked the idea, and built the brand but look for truly wonderful people who will help grow the business to the next level. Don't necessarily hire the ultimate best of the best - hire people you can trust and learn from. Initially, always try to work with the best people you already know.

This has helped us on the start of our journey tenfold then the next step; expect to hire new talent who see the business with fresh eyes, perhaps ready to challenge you. I love Alex Churchill, founder of Gamesmith's analogy of recruiting; like when you hire a band, everyone's dancing to music they're already in sync with.

JS: Don't listen to that little voice inside your head telling you not to do something. Step out of your comfort zone, believe in your idea and then get to work finding the right people to make it happen.

Your team is everything - bring people together who not only share your vision, but also have the skills to achieve the mission. And be a nice human... That part really, really matters.

John Stubbs is founder and managing director and Emma Bestley is cofounder and creative director at [*YesColours*](#).

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