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From tees to totes, more and more designers today have their own merchandise. But how do you actually get your spin-offs started?

It's a tempting vision: using your existing design skills to make a bit of extra cash by branching out into your own line of unique merchandise. What could be easier than getting a few T-shirts printed up and putting them on your website to sell? The answer, according to Stereohype co-founder Tomi Vollauchek, is nothing, so long as you're prepared to become "your own PR machinery, project manager, sales rep, investor, client, accountant, intern, courier, and so on... Oh, and last but not least, an editor, designer, illustrator and artist."

Nevertheless, it seems that everyone is at it these days, and many of them will have been inspired by the success of ventures such as Stereohype. Since launching in 2004, the London-based online store founded by Vollauchek and Agathe Jacquillat has splashed both the duo's own and a host of guest artists' designs across exclusive ranges of T-shirts and badges, as well as stocking prints, books and many other items. In 2009, the pair also authored *Made & Sold*, a book showcasing more than 500 self-initiated products created by designers – all whilst still running their visual communication studio, FL@33.

Yet it's deceptively simple to get started, even with a dizzying range of potential products on offer: T-shirts and cotton tote bags may be the most obvious blank canvases on which to >

Words: Abi Elias
T-shirt illustration: Fran Marchesi, <http://franmarchesi.com>



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> display your creativity, but then there's other clothing items, badges, sew-on patches, pocket mirrors, mugs, magnets, stationery sets – if you can picture it, then chances are that there's someone out there waiting to help you produce it.

For T-shirts, the first step is to source the shirts themselves. Buying the cheapest possible blank tees might seem like an attractive option, but many designers prefer their work to appear on higher-quality, sweatshop-free garments from brands such as American Apparel. One such label is No Guts No Glory, an Exeter-based collective run by Nathan Blaker and Hayley Marchant. Designed by a hand-picked selection of artists, its tees are printed onto organic cotton shirts from Anvil, a US company with an environmentally and ethically responsible ethos. "The super-soft organic T-shirts and jumpers that we use are a little more expensive to source than conventional cotton garments, but the quality is far superior," Marchant explains.

No Guts No Glory's designs are hand-screenprinted by Get A Grip, an independent studio based in Birmingham's Custard Factory that specialises in using organic inks. "We love analogue printing techniques, and a lot of our favourite artwork lends itself very well to screenprinting," Blaker says. "It's also friendlier to the environment, and the finish and longevity of the



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01 No Guts No Glory supports local artists in the Exeter region. The label holds no truck with knife-wielding lizards

02 The collective's numerous members act as models when required, as well as artists and sellers

03 The **No Guts No Glory** website invites visitors to pop in and say hello. You just have to get yourself to Exeter in the UK



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printed garments are noticeably better than with other printing methods. Hand printing also ensures that every single garment is checked for quality."

Seems straightforward? Agathe Jacquillat offers a note of caution: "The main headache in producing T-shirts is the issue of sizes," she says. "There doesn't seem to be a rule in what our customers prefer. When we initially sold out quickly in medium and large sizes and then ordered accordingly the next time around, suddenly everybody wanted small and extra-large." In her view, this unpredictability is another reason why you should make sure that all your products are desirable. "Individual tastes are so varied – it's mind-boggling really. It doesn't even have anything to do with the customers' location and culture; everything sells eventually. It's all about creating a brand and making sure it's all of highest quality."

The simplicity, low costs and DIY potential of badges make them another attractive spin-off item. A professional hand-operated badge-making machine and starter kit from a company such as Enterprise will set you back about £150 now, but if you anticipate producing any significant quantities, you may want to consider ordering them from a manufacturer – your arm muscles will certainly thank you for it. Birmingham illustrator

and comics artist Lizz Lunney has a thriving sideline in badges: she recommends requesting samples from a range of online suppliers so that you can judge the quality. "Generally once I've found a good supplier I will only use them for any particular product; it's good to be a loyal customer because they are then prepared to rush orders or help with things when required," she says. Using a supplier doesn't commit you to massive quantities, either: "I started by ordering less than 50 of each and over time it's easy to see which designs are the best sellers. I usually get badges in batches of 1,000 now."

When it comes to actually selling your items, a simple website with clear photos of the products can often be all that you need. No Guts No Glory is soon to launch a new site to reflect its growth, but Blaker admits that the label's initial one, built by a friend, was pretty basic. "At the time it totally suited our needs – we only had two types of products to display, and a blog page was helpful in giving us a voice." He adds, "We take care of everything on the website, from photographing ourselves wearing the T-shirts, uploading them to the online shop and tracking the stock levels. Packing up orders can take a fair amount of time, but it's much easier if it's all done at once, so we set aside time each day to get them ready." >