

Local creatives get set for US export market

The Craft and Design Institute (CDI) partnered with Aid To Artisans (ATA) to bring their e-Market Readiness Programme (eMRP) to South African creative businesses. This initiative has been made possible thanks to the support of the United States of America's Diplomatic Mission to South Africa through the US Consulate General in Cape Town.



Hand made and hand-painted ceramics by Lookout Sibanda

In October 2021, over 80 Western and Eastern Cape businesses benefitted through a week of dynamic learning, information sharing, inspiration and networking. The next phase of the programme is now rolling out through one-on-one coaching and intensive support to ten local small businesses.

The strategic partnership between CDI and ATA is focused on knowledge exchange and US market access, and prepares South African entrepreneurs in the creative sector to successfully enter the rapidly evolving US market.

The creative entrepreneurs directly benefit from enhanced knowledge on trends, changes, and requirements of the US market; engaging directly with US industry experts and retail buyers; building their confidence to grow their businesses despite the impact of Covid-19.

The seven-month programme includes the online US eMarket Readiness Programme of webinars which took place in October; and a five-month Business Intensive process for the 10 selected businesses. The Business Intensive component includes small group coaching, one-on-one coaching and product development consultations with US industry experts. This

will enable these businesses to fine-tune their product offering and action plans for US market entry. In addition, access to recorded eMRP presentations will be available to additional creative entrepreneurs who could not participate in the eMRP.

Topics covered in the programme include: Global Opportunities & Trends for Handmade, Shifts in Export Distribution Channels, Post Covid-19 Trends in Color & Design, Product Development & Design for the Handmade Market, Costing & Pricing Strategies for the US Market and Building Buyer Relationships (US buyers) Online.



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Supporting local creative entrepreneurs

"We are delighted to work again with the ATA, having previously done so in 2007, to support local creative entrepreneurs, and we are very grateful to the US Consulate team who have made this possible. This programme will enable a range of opportunities for producers to enter the global market, helping to take South Africa's amazing creative products to new key regions such as the US and helping these entrepreneurs to grow and develop," says Erica Elk, Group CEO of the CDI.

Elk adds that the partnership with ATA adds immensely to the CDI's export development programme, called Next, which has to date focussed on the European market and participants have had great success entering this market.

"Creative businesses in the Next programme are hungry for knowledge around the US market and how best to access it; through the exceptional eMRP programme offered by ATA, local creative entrepreneurs will be empowered to take their next steps. Importantly, as the global pandemic keeps people around the world at home, and trade shows are postponed, it is increasingly important for small businesses get the support such as this to develop a strong online presence."

Maud Obe, director of Aid to Artisans, says "ATA is thrilled to partner again with CDI with the support of the US Consulate to help talented South African artisan businesses expand their presence in the US Market. ATA's Market Readiness Program has helped hundreds of global craft businesses grow over the past 25 years. We are so impressed by the creativity, talent and enthusiasm we saw in the South African businesses during the eMRP. We look forward to seeing these businesses expand their presence in the US Market."

"We are very excited about the partnership we have started with the Craft and Design Institute," says Jehan Jones-Radgowski, Acting Public Affairs Officer at the US Consulate. "The Expanding to Export Market Access Programme will prepare South-African-based entrepreneurs in the creative sector to enter the US handmade retail market. We are always looking for ways to strengthen ties and build relationships between the United States and South Africa, especially when those ties involve our shared support of the entrepreneurial spirit and the aesthetic appeal of fair and inclusive sharing of culturally-inspired crafts. Congratulations to all the South African entrepreneurs going through the Export Market Access Programme, and thank you to Craft and Design Institute and Aid to Artisans for being partners in this worthy programme."

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