

INTERIOR DESIGN ²⁰¹⁸ YEARBOOK



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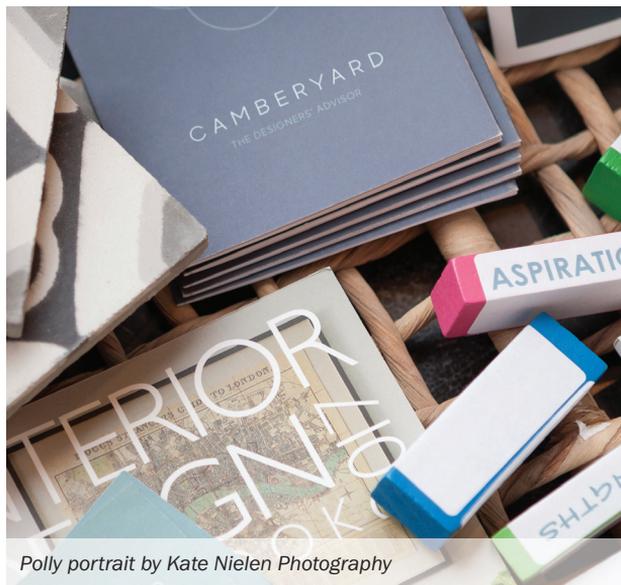


Professional Development

By Polly Williams
 Founder, Camberyard

Polly Williams is the founder of multi-award winning advisory firm Camberyard, working directly with clients to streamline their interior design business and help them maximise opportunities. Camberyard is an award-winning advisory firm, specialising in bespoke marketing, business and social media solutions and mentoring for interior designers, galleries, photographers, garden designers, furniture and lighting companies, fabric and flooring providers and bathroom and kitchen specialists in the interiors sector. Polly works with her clients to develop their business strategy, increase revenue and gain media exposure. With over 12 years' experience advising a leading interior design studio in London, Polly knows how to launch a brand and make it a success. Here, she shares her expert advice on how to use your talent and USP to make your business shine in the ever-expanding interior design market.

Interior designers are infinitely creative and talented. But when it comes to the practicalities of running a profitable business, other skills are needed to be successful. For those who have launched their own interior design studio and are looking to take their business to the next level, I always ask, 'So you're a brilliant designer, but do you have a professional pathway in place?'. As a professional designer, you know your craft well. You are also likely to be very familiar with the interiors industry. But if you run your own studio, you also appreciate that managing a business is a very different endeavour. It can be difficult to know how to put all the pieces in place to successfully launch, grow



Polly portrait by Kate Nielsen Photography



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and streamline your business. I believe most businesses fail for two reasons: lack of demand and lack of cash flow. This is where professional development is the key to growth. The most successful designers are 50 per cent business-minded and 50 per cent design-led, it needs to be an equal partnership. Whether you are just starting out or are well established with a big client list and prestigious projects – what are the essential ingredients to a successful professional development action plan? How will you take your business to the next level? I especially love working with designers five to seven years into running their own interior design studio. They are often employing freelance and full-time staff and

are working on decent projects with good fees, but they want to understand how to take that next step and grow their business. So, I ask them, do you know what you don't know? It may sound like an unusual question with an obvious answer, but I ask my designers to stop, breathe and think about the following questions; should I be following a professional pathway? Am I aware of market trends and current client expectations? What is going on in the industry that I can contribute to? What brands, suppliers, and up-and-coming tradespeople can I promote? Do I know about current industry and government regulations? Do I have a clear financial pipeline and past/forward financial planning? Does my company

structure reflect the key foundations of my design studio?

Should I be following a professional pathway?

Many designers, despite (or perhaps because of) their success, overlook the importance of a professional pathway as part of their business development plan. Are you registered with an organisation such as the British Institute of Interior Design (BIID)? The BIID have developed a Professional Pathway that will, in time, give you access to becoming a registered interior designer. Bodies such as BIID provide designers with industry-accreditation, educational CPD sessions, and networking events to their legal helpline, all vital elements for professional growth.

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Am I aware of market trends and current client expectations?

If you want to be at the forefront of your chosen industry, you must always know where the market is and, importantly, where your clients are. All elements of your business should be on trend with your company ethos. Realign if not. Look at your action plans and produce a visual mood board with your aspirations, inspirations and motivations for your company, this includes lifestyle. As your business grows, you can use the board as a signpost.

What is going on in the industry that I can contribute to?

One of my core principles is that collaboration is better than competition. I take great care in the Camberyard Collective to match my designers with brands and designers from whom they can benefit and learn. A new designer, for example, may have social media and web design skills they can share with a more

established designer. My established designers can be a fountain of knowledge to my aspiring designers, answering key questions like: what do you wish you had known when you started your business (answer: employ an accountant from the start to help you with aspects such as VAT returns), and how do you open trade accounts when you need two references (answer: pick up-and-coming brands who will be keen to have you on board and helping promote their products).

What brands and suppliers can I promote?

As Designers' Advisor, I recommend that my clients five to seven years in, reconnect with their best-loved brands to see what they are working on and how they might help spread the word. Brands are often producing editorial and organising events that designers who champion them could be part of – if only they asked! Always think: what seeds can I plant, water and watch grow over time. For

instance, I recently had a client who wanted to break into Country Estates. By associating herself with the local trade (estate agents, estate managers and surveyors), she has now landed her dream project working on a recently-acquired residential estate.

Do I know about current industry and government regulations?

I urge you as a studio owner to be a responsible interior and garden designer. Keep apprised of current industry and government legislation. One of the key questions you should ask yourself is: What about CDM regulations? It is always the elements you ignore that will be your undoing. Take time to review: contracts - it might be that you started out several years ago and your contracts no longer reflect the kind of work that you are doing; payment terms - in line with industry standards; insurance and the right right insurance-levels in place for your projects; industry regulations such as CDM



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regulations or the latest tax rules that could affect how you run your business and finally, project management versus project coordination - do you understand legally what work you can and cannot be involved in?

Do I have a clear financial pipeline and past/forward financial planning?

How can you be a responsible business owner without fully understanding your financial situation? Are you charging what is necessary to cover overheads and enable you to plan for the future? As Designers' Advisor, I am in a unique and privileged position to see what my designers are earning. It never fails to surprise me that some clients are not actually making money once they look at fees versus slippage of time and client unpredictability. I am often told

when I ask them to look at their team: 'They are so busy - I couldn't possibly ask them to keep a timesheet or give me a running schedule of the projects they are working on', but I urge them to remember that busy does not always equal time efficiency. You need to look at your finances in detail if you are planning to recalibrate your office structure.

Does my company structure reflect the key foundations of my design studio?

No matter how far you are in running your own business, ask yourself 'why you're doing it, what's driving you forward and what you want to achieve. Clarifying what you have to offer, your particular skills, your strengths as well as weaknesses, is another key element. You need to be clear about your skills, motivations and aspirations to

have a strong strategic plan for your professional development.

Ask yourself

Do you know what you want your brand to be? What makes it unique? Have you investigated your competitors? Do you have a strategy? If not, do you have time set aside to strategise? Have you considered what happens next? To help stay on track and keep motivated, I would recommend finding a mentor. Not only do I find mentoring incredibly rewarding (on both sides) I think it's a hugely important part of being a successful business person. A good mentor can provide you with valuable support and contacts in the interiors network, no matter how established your business.

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