

JAMES ROKOS, JIM ROKOS DESIGN

Name of business: Jim Rokos Design

Founder: Jim Rokos

Years in business: Since September 2011

Speciality: *“Playful, Sculptural Objects that Behave in Unexpected Ways”*

Location: London

Reach: International

Key to success: Relationships and outsourcing

Biggest challenge for businesses: Route to market and finding right manufacturers

Greatest asset: Network and creativity

TELL A STORY, SURPRISE, EXCEED EXPECTATIONS

It's a rainy Thursday. Tube strike was on and off this week, so just to be safe we decided to talk via Skype. Jim is in his studio and I am in my home office. We are both surrounded by elements of our craft: samples, packaging, prototypes. It's just that in Jim's case these are samples of glass colours, packaging for his decanters and vases and prototypes of new designs.

He's a creative director, owner and designer in his brand – developing new concepts of utilitarian art that playfully challenge the imagination of a user. They behave in an unexpected way.

The story so far

“When I was a kid I'd sort of look at things you buy in shops and I'd always sort of thought it would be quite easy just to come up with an idea and get it produced and make a living that way. Then I forgot all about it, life took its own path. But I seem to have come back to it much, much later on. And it is tremendously much more difficult that I'd imagined as a kid.” - says Jim Rokos.

Still, it's worth it. He's doing it today.

At school, James favoured arts, 3d was his thing. After school he worked in the film industry as a model maker. However, working from drawings, he found that it did not offer the opportunity to imagine his own ideas. He went on to work as an extra, a photographers assistant and became a support teacher. Still on the creative side of things, but in various configurations. Then he got an MA in Product Design, which gave him an opportunity to brush up on the technical side of the process and developed his love for conceptualising ideas. This focus on theatrical and imaginative products made him 'too risky to employ', as design companies look more favourably on applicants with portfolios filled with designs that are similar to their own output. I am suspecting it turned out for the best as Jim does not strike me as a character that would be content having to create more of the same thing for too long.

So, he began his own brand.

Think about yourself as a brand

When I ask Jim about the brand he starts reminiscing about visual elements of his identity. He says he needed a logo, he needed to look like a brand, not just a lone designer, to become more credible in the buyers' eyes.

He was lucky to have asked the right graphic designer for help. He needed a logo and approached a friend – what she did was brilliant – they mapped Jim's work, identifying what's luxury, everyday, conceptual, practical...

Then he quoted this golden sentence:

“You really need to focus. If you are doing all those different things it's confusing to people, they won't know how to place you.”

That's what it is about. He chose a group of products, identified their traits and visualised the brand. Look at the logo: sleek, crisp, a little surprising. Not shocking, the name is clearly readable, but it makes an impression that it hides a little more than meets the eye.

This is true for the products as well as the customer experience.

Tell a story

ROKOS' items are visually stunning. Each unit is perfectly executed, there are no compromises. Again, this makes developing a relation-

ship with the manufacturers crucial and a bit tricky, as ROKOS produces small orders that nonetheless have to be of exceptional quality.

Jim strongly believes in building close relationships with suppliers and manufacturers, accrediting them with part of the success of the brand and definitely with the sleekness of the product. He appreciates their skill and experience. Jim designs the items, but they are creating them together and it's a bond full of respect.

Then there are additional touches, like the logo on the decanters that is engraved by hand. These are examples of utilitarian art, they do serve a purpose; decanters and vases are performing their duties exceptionally well. Each also tells a story. Decanters are susceptible to the influence of their content and vases bow down when the flower gets thirsty. It's very romantic.

Stay ROKOS

We talked about how small business can compete with big suppliers, especially in the artisan world – they are more flexible and can access people with a desirable skillset to help with promotion. Having an online shop reduces overheads, however showcasing products in the real world is beneficial, it can be arranged through certain clients and partnerships, for example ROKOS items are often used by high end fashion boutiques.

ROKOS is an up-and-coming brand and a developing business. He's already present in a few boutique shops on a high street and is considering larger orders as well. I've been given a little sneak-peek into what's next and these are quite exciting times filled with new designs, new product lines and distribution channels. He has an agent that helps with distribution and is developing a team to increase his reach, but plans to keep the business a lifestyle brand.

Whatever his decision will be I know Jim is planning one thing for certain – to stay ROKOS.

WHY JIM ROKOS IS MY BRAND HERO

His products are quite exclusive and he is very approachable and easy to talk to. Having had this conversation with him, as I see it, in the core values, they are quite aligned:

- Creativity
- Elegance
- Surprise

These elements are in both. They also make the client's experience a little more beautiful by being around.

MY LESSONS FROM THIS CONVERSATION

1. We all can do many things but not all activities have to be performed by us – if you are busy managing the accounts, you are not designing your brand's next strategic move
2. Build relationships with your business partners and suppliers, this bond will make it easier to find better solutions and overcome crises
3. Exceed expectations, create a brand experience that leaves your clients on a high

If you like ROKOS, you may be interested to discover more about Paul Smith.

ELEMENTS OF A STRONG BRAND:

- CREATIVITY
- EXPERIENCE
- ENGAGEMENT

MOTTO

Jim says he does not have one as such, but I picked up on a few things during our conversation that I believe have their place in this paragraph: don't get distracted, find your inspiration, find the suppliers, build relationships and use your tools "to improve people's lives". Including your own.

To discover more about ROKOS:

- Visit their website rokos.co.uk
- Follow them on Instagram [instagram.com/rokosdesign](https://www.instagram.com/rokosdesign)
- ...and Twitter @ROKOSdesign
- Find them on Facebook [facebook.com/RokosDesign](https://www.facebook.com/RokosDesign)

P.S. I've found out that ROKOS decanters are made with science glass, which is both excellent and extraordinary – relentless commitment to quality.