

7-MINUTE **SCALING** **SECRETS**

EPISODE 19

**RUNNING AN ART BUSINESS
AS A CREATIVE AND ENTREPRENEUR**



ALVIN POH
SUPERSCALING.COM



GUEST SPEAKER
B. JANE COWIE
FOUNDER AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF
ART GLASS SOLUTIONS PTE LTD.

Alvin Poh 0:08

Hey, everyone. Welcome to another exciting episode of 7-Minute Scaling Secrets, where we interview entrepreneurs and learn a secret on how they scaled up their businesses. Today, we have a special guest, B. Jane Cowie, who is the founder and director of Art Glass Solutions. Jane, can you tell us more about what Art Glass Solutions does? This episode was brought to you by Super Scaling. Join the Super Scaling Ignite program today and learn how you can systemise and super scale your business so that your revenues can grow to at least \$100,000 a month, with a productive team from all over the world, raving fans as clients and happy founders who have true freedom. Visit superscaling.com/ignite today and now back to the episode.

B. Jane Cowie 0:54

Yeah, we're a company based in Singapore. And we started in 2008. Some time ago, our mission really is to enrich the environment, the lived environment that we create around us. So that means designing, making and installing artworks. And for me, it's really important that the artwork is responsive to the space, and really accentuates the space as well.

Alvin Poh 1:24

This is a great journey, because you've actually started off as an artist, and manage to transition into making art into a sustainable business. How does that happen? How can somebody who is an artist do that successfully?

B. Jane Cowie 1:45

There are lots of ways that you can do that, actually. And everyone has to find their own way of doing it. I'm from Australia. And when I was living and working in Australia, I was making products. I'm a glassblower by training. And so I would make glass products and design them so that they would be saleable in a specific market, which was the craft market. So in Australia, like a long time ago, there was a lot of craft shops. And there are also a lot of makers.

The craft movement was really beginning in the 70s 80s in Australia, well, internationally actually and especially for glass. Glass really came into the fore in the 80s 90s. So I was making products that were decorative, bright and cheery and sold in crafts to small craft shops and craft galleries around Australia. But when I came to live and work in Singapore, that was in the early 2000s, I realized that things are different in Singapore.

The houses are smaller, and so people don't buy as many objects, decorative objects to have into their home, they really have more functional objects. It was interesting because when I was in Australia, I was making objects sort of like this big, you know, sort of tabletop sort of size, utilitarian size. I also have worked in Japan for a year. And when I was there, I started to design and make very small items because the Japanese like really small things. So then when I went back to Australia, and I had to scale up again.

So it really indicated to me that experience that it really depends where you are is what type of objects people need. And so coming to Singapore, I realized people didn't really need objects. But I found a market making larger scale installations for bigger corporations and hotels. And I

sort of pieced together that I had been on that track, you know, in my childhood, making big installations, my bedroom and so on. And I really wanted to install a creative artwork that would create a space, that would accentuate a space. So I sort of fell into that almost by chance through being here. But since then, that's my passion that I've really enjoyed to pursue, to introduce into a public space and artwork that is beautiful, decorative, links to the space itself, and also talks a little bit about the company that's commissioning their work as well. So I think artwork plays a really important role to not just decorate but inform and engage people within the space.

Alvin Poh 4:28

That's awesome. That's one of the core tenets of business that whatever solution, product, service that we are doing has to fill a need. And the need is really determined by the market and you can't just go in a market with a service or product that you think is great and then expect the market to kind of adapt and you know shift in order to accommodate and accept that. I bet if you had gone the same way with the mindset of Australia or Japan or Singapore and try moving around with the exact same mindset, that it should be what the market wants, you'll find great friction and great resistance to the products and artwork that you'll be doing. It's the same case for business, any business.

B. Jane Cowie 5:18

Yeah, it's really interesting. Like, I probably couldn't do what I do now, if I was still in Australia, because when I go back to Australia, I see that the attention to large scale artworks really isn't there and it's more of a design aesthetic. So there's no real handmade creativity in the large scale art installations. So, you know, I feel quite lucky to have been here to sort of come here and found a job, but then gone on to start my own business, and really sort of, you know, blossomed into a market that I was quite unexpected, actually.

So I think whenever you have a talent or a skill that's creative, you need to sort of go and find out what's out there, what other people are doing, you know, how they're doing it. But then you need to find what other people are doing, then you need to find a space, a gap in that market, that people aren't fulfilling. And when you get in there and fill that gap in the market, that's when you make a niche for yourself, and you can actually specialize in that particular area.

Alvin Poh 6:24

Absolutely. I mean, that's market research, and developing a unique selling proposition is like all essential parts of a business. How do you even start an art business here in Singapore? As somebody who is a, you know, foreign to Singapore at that point of time, you probably wouldn't have the connections or the local knowledge? How do you even like, start finding customers for this business that you created?

B. Jane Cowie 6:55

Yeah, well, you haven't really created a business until it starts operating. So yeah, it's sort of interesting. That's a really interesting question, actually. How did I start? I think I just started with great optimism and sort of struggled on for a few years. And I think the first three years of that business, were actually really telling and learning. And I would write a lot of reports at the time.

So each year, I would analyze the people I was talking to, and what we spoke about. And so the first year, I was really dealing with interior designers, but not getting very far. The second year, contractors were finding me, but then they would just take my ideas and do them anyway. So not getting very far. And I think the third year, I started to touch base with interior designers and architects. And so if they wanted something unique or individual for a particular project, you know, they became the clients that started to work. Also getting yourself out there and doing exhibitions, at the time at Singapore was like a trade show for artists. And so we showed in that exhibition for three years, and most of the customers I have today, I found, you know, connections during those first three years.

So it's really about promoting yourself, but the world has changed in 10 years, I tell you, it's changed incredibly. So you know that everyone's talking about social media, I think it's important to be out there on LinkedIn, and Instagram, places like that, and really start to use those markets to get yourself known to start with. So yeah, so I think marketing right up front is really important. You don't have a business until you start making money really. And so it's finding that niche, the customer that really needs your product, so that, you know, they can do well in their own life and their own business. Finding that market, but then spreading the word so that people can find you if they need your services.

Alvin Poh 9:04

Here's something that people tend to think about marketing, and I want to hear your opinion about it. So some people think that marketing is like a bad word to them. They don't like marketing, because it feels like they're selling themselves. And it's something that they are uncomfortable with doing. What do you think of that? Especially as an artist?

B. Jane Cowie 9:28

Yeah, I think everyone's marketing these days. Like, you know, I hang out on those sorts of platforms a bit, but I'm just like, oh, well, everyone stopped advertising to me sort of thing. But I think it's about I've always been good at putting up a sign. I'm not so good when people come and knock on my door and you know, but I'm very good at putting up the sign. And I was like that in Australia, too, when I was really just starting out, you know, in my early 20s, or whatever. So I would put an advertisement in a magazine. So that's the same as putting you know, an advertisements on Instagram or wherever, so I think it's important that people know where you are and the service that you're offering. And then in the beginning, you don't know who your customers are. So you've sort of got to spread the net widely. So that people, you know, pay interest, and then the people that are really interested will come closer and you know, finally commissioned you to do something.

So it depends on what type of products you're selling, I tend to sell an expensive big item. So I only need a few customers. But if you're selling a small, cheap, inexpensive object, and of course, you need to find many customers, because I think they want sort of thing. So yeah, so then you have to go and analyze what your product is. But as a creator, who's making you know, who's passionate about what they do. If you want to go more on an exhibition track, so you don't want to sell a product that sells but you want to make exhibition work, then that's a different way

of marketing your product as well, again, you need to be I think, on social media, but then you need to find galleries, and you need to make sure that they're good galleries, that have the customers that will buy from them. So that's being an exhibition artist is very different, I think, to being you know, a commission based or a product based artist. And when you're an exhibition artist, you know, you still need to follow certain guidelines of saleability in a way. But you can be a little bit more focused on your own practice and on your own passions when you're developing your artwork, so but yeah, I'm interested to get back into gallery exhibitions, but I actually won't be selling anything in those exhibitions. Because I tend to work more with ephemeral materials, because the artwork is about the process.

So again, when you're an artist, you want to communicate something with the thing that you're doing, whether it's performance art, or visual arts, or audio arts, so you need an audience that's going to listen or see and appreciate in some way and give something back to you in some way. So if it's a sale, or if it's, you know, a thumbs up, you know, it's still that sort of communication that you have as a practitioner, when you want to express an idea. So yeah, so it's really interesting, being an artist and trying to survive, and figuring out how to survive. Especially in Singapore, because I think there's not a lot of galleries here. But, you know, the world is really global now. So you can select a gallery in Korea, or, you know, Australia and try and establish a relationship with the gallery so that they sell your work, but not necessarily in the country you live.

Alvin Poh 13:10

And, you know, saying like anywhere that clients can come from, do you have a process to choose clients then? Or is it anyone that you'd be able to work with?

B. Jane Cowie 13:27

Ah, I don't really choose my customers. I put some work in Australia actually, and in an exhibition there, where I had to pay to make the artwork. So that was purely speculative. But it was really great because I could make an artwork that I wanted to make, instead of an artwork that, uh, you know, a client was wanting to get something made like this sort of thing. And to see if there was interest there in my work. And I found that there was, but the appreciation and you know, who would buy it and where they put it was sort of a different. It wasn't sort of a totally matching. And then I recently put some work in the exhibition in Belgium to see what's gonna happen there as well. And I mean, even me putting some work in there means that I get to see the exhibition, and I look at the work and so I get to see what the market is really.

So yeah, when you're figuring out your market, you've got to try a few things that you know, don't make any money to try and just learn more about what's there. I mean, when I was younger, I was traveling a lot. I traveled the world and worked in different studios and countries. And so I got to see how people were working firsthand. If you have the opportunity to travel to different countries and get a part time job or just work free in a studio or something. You can learn so much from that experience to figure out what it is you want to do, but also where you can actually do that.

Alvin Poh 15:05

How would you describe the difference in the various countries that you're having exhibitions in and having clients in? And what is it that they are looking for that's different from each other?

B. Jane Cowie 15:17

There's just too much to dive into. But they're different culturally. But also the spaces that they have to feel different. The histories, you know, the different countries, like, it's been really interesting for me to look at the artwork and the exhibition in Belgium, it's a garden outdoor exhibition, and even the style of the work, you know. I feel Singapore is quite a contemporary country. I think it's more contemporary, sometimes in some of the Western countries. Because there's always change and growth in the architecture is always refreshing. So it's really interesting how modern this country feels. When I go back to Australia, I'm just like, they don't have Wi-Fi here. So it's really interesting to just see those countries and see the different cultures and even in Belgium too, it's very interesting to see the artworks and just think about the style and the technique, and so on.

Alvin Poh 16:27

Wow. Cool. So, with every episode of this podcast, there are two questions that I asked every podcast guests, and I'll ask them of you as well. The two questions are, number one, what is the most important habit to be a successful entrepreneur?

B. Jane Cowie 16:46

I think it's determination. You have to be a fighter. I think, especially within the art industry, you have to keep going and keep doing, keep searching, keep being reflective, to really sort of make it because, it's tough really, to be honest, it's really tough. So to be an entrepreneur, and artist is even tougher, because they say that artists are the most highly trained and the most lowly paid profession. So we do train for years, and we aren't being paid very much. So you really have to want to do it with a passion to be in the arts. And yeah, again, and again, I'll sit down and just go, I really want to make this work, how do I make this work? So you've got to figure out your own style and your own path basically.

Alvin Poh 17:50

Cool. To be determined. I think that's something that's essential in any field, especially if you want to be an entrepreneur. Cool. And the second question, what advice would you give to another business owner?

B. Jane Cowie 18:05

Another business owner or another artist?

Alvin Poh 18:07

We could have a bit more specific to maybe a creative and business owner, somebody that's looking into the art business?

B. Jane Cowie 18:22

Yeah, I think it's figuring out what you do best. And then really focusing on that. Of course, if you're starting a business, if you want to employ other people, then it's about having a vision then for the entity that you're going to create. So, yeah, I think it's having a stable end goal that's going to work with the marketing work that you've done, the marketing research. Figure out where you want to end up in the future. And then you gotta take the steps to actually to get there. So you've got to have passion, but you've also got to be methodical at the same time and do a bit of planning.

Alvin Poh 19:04

Oh, man. That's literally what most businesses require to have a vision. Because if the business owner, no matter what field you're in, whether you're creative, or a tech person, you need to make sure that vision is first of all clear to you before you can build a team and tell the team, you know, where this vision, where this path, what the plan is. And that is critical. I think that's one of the more essential things that a business leader or business owner needs to do in order to really have a business that can be successful. Even more so in the creative space. Yeah.

B. Jane Cowie 19:45

And I think it's really tough too when you're an artist, because really, it is two different sides of the brain. I will say, I will sit down and write a business plan but then I need to be a maker and there are different parts of the brain. So you really need to figure out how to divide your time, like just focus on the art making or then just focus on the business. So it's sort of divisive. So it's quite challenging, I think, when you're an artist or a creative. But yeah, if you really passionate, and you really have that goal in mind, then you know, you will split your time and your brain so that you can do both tasks basically.

Alvin Poh 20:25

Some time for one quick question, because I really want to ask you about this process that you go through this splitting of tasks, it's really tough. Is there a process that you go through or some routine that you take to help you be in the right state for the right kind of tasks that you're working on?

B. Jane Cowie 20:46

Yeah, I don't think I'm really successful at doing that. But at the moment, I have different spaces where I work in. So one space is where I'm really creative and doing my own work, the other spaces where I'm doing the educational classes, so it's got a different energy, and then another space is more quiet, the desk is here, you know, it's more private. And so that's when I do the thinking and you know, the paperwork, and so on. So yeah, I think different spaces actually assists you to just walk through a place and then you're in a different headspace. So then you can take on a different task.

Alvin Poh 21:21

I love that. People think that space or your environment doesn't matter. But it absolutely does, it helps shape thoughts, it helps put you in the right kind of mindset. It's amazing and this is the

reason why companies will go on company retreats, take it outside of the office, go to a completely different environment, because the environment is so crucial to putting your mind and your thoughts in the appropriate situation and appropriate like mindset. Awesome. Jane, how can the audience best reach out to you and Art Glass Solutions?

B. Jane Cowie 22:03

Yeah, well, I've got a website. It hasn't been changed for a few years, I think now, but my email address is on there and my phone number as well. It's pretty interesting. Now you can communicate via Instagram and LinkedIn, so many places that pretty much a phone call or WhatsApp works and email works to Art Glass Solutions. So yeah, more traditional ways of contacting me the best way to get in touch.

Alvin Poh 22:28

Awesome. Is this artglasssolutions.com?

B. Jane Cowie 22:31

That's the one.

Alvin Poh 22:32

Awesome and I'll link that into the show notes below. Thank you everybody. This has been another awesome episode of 7-Minute Scaling Secrets, where we interviewed B. Jane Cowie of Art Glass Solutions. If you guys liked this episode, please remember to like, comment and share this episode with your friends and I look forward to speaking to you guys on the next episode.