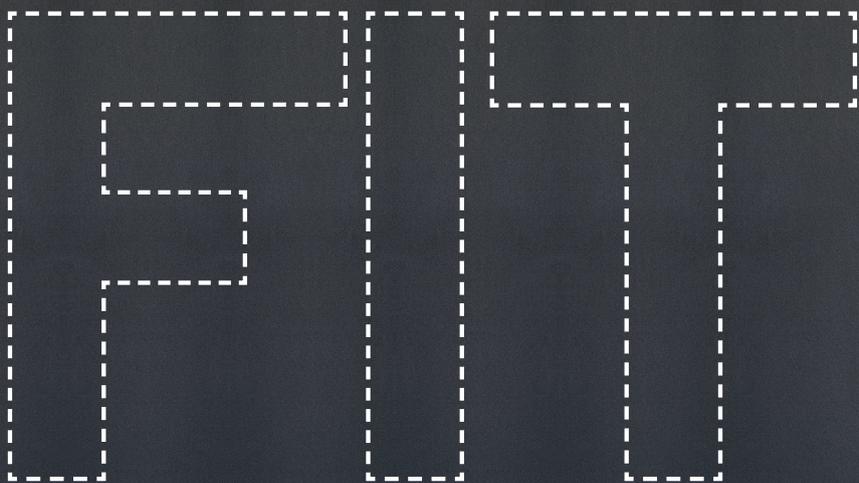


A PERFECT



From pink suit linings to a Robin Hood wedding outfit and super-slick website, Cad & the Dandy are shaking up the age-old craft of tailoring. FYM talks to one of the pioneering founders



What happens when two recently redundant bankers - one publicly educated in the country, the other the product of a London comprehensive school - with a closet love of textiles meet?

"In 2008 I was made redundant from my city job as a trader," says James Sleater, the public-school educated partner in the duo which in 2008 co-founded Cad & the Dandy, the UK's fastest growing tailoring house with a very modern edge. Admittedly James wasn't exactly an ordinary banker, if there is such a thing. "In my family we had our clothes made, I studied art history and we love textiles, so starting a traditional tailoring company seemed a natural option."

But in the middle of a recession? Was he completely mad? Well if he was, so was his partner, Ian Meiers, also a banker made redundant the same year. Coincidentally Ian was also considering launching his own tailoring



Getting a client's measurements right is crucial

outfit. The two men, just 24 at the time, were introduced by a mutual friend and despite their different backgrounds hit it off. Soon they were in business.

Contemporary and crazy

It is often said that if you can start a business and succeed in a deep, dark recession, then you're probably onto something. For Cad & the Dandy that seems to be the case. Of course as bankers they had been well paid, which meant they had the capital to self-fund their start-up. Even so it was a risky decision. "We spent over a year researching the industry and developing a detailed business plan," explains James. This involved getting to know the trade inside out; that meant measuring the customer, cutting a pattern and then hand-stitching the final product. Yes he can sew!

By the end of this period they had found their unique selling proposition or USP: they would make bespoke quality suits - be they traditional, contemporary or just plain crazy - accessible and affordable for all. To succeed they would certainly need to dispel some myths that tailors are 'big scary men' and that bespoke tailoring is only for the very rich and posh.

"If somebody wants a pink lining we'll do it," says James. "If somebody wants to look a bit like Robin Hood on their wedding day [an actual customer request and order], then we'll do our best."

With turnover of over £1.3 million in 2010, and customers that include the writer David Walliams and former middle and super-middle weight World Champion boxer Chris Eubank, the strategy paid off.

While the aim is 'accessible suits for all', having customers with friends in high places helps! After willingly accommodating Eubank's outrageous design requests, Cad & the Dandy were invited to co-design a pair of comedy trousers, aka 'cousers', for X-factor judge Simon Cowell. The gag made headlines across the UK and got the firm on nine different shows, resulting in huge publicity.

“ If someone wants a pink lining, we'll do it ”

Tailoring Trivia

- Savile Row was built between **1731** and **1735** and is a street in Mayfair, central London, well-known for bespoke tailoring shops
- **Bespoke** Made to a customer's particular requirements
- The likes of **Winston Churchill** and **Muhammed Ali** have frequented Savile Row
- The most expensive suit in the world cost **£600,000**, took **600** hours to make and has over **480** diamonds on it
- **Cutter** A person (usually male) who measures, fits and then makes the pattern
- **Finisher** A person (usually female) who sews buttons on, stitches the edges of the garment, and so on
- **Doctor** The term given to the alterations tailor
- Most people who make the suits on Savile Row today are not British!



Embracing modernity

The importance of getting the brand seen and heard is something that the two understand well. But before you build the brand, you have to have a viable business idea. James puts their success down to a simple formula - having an excellent product and providing an outstanding service. And of course it takes hard work and commitment - something neither are afraid of. "I'm a complete workaholic. The last thing I do at night is turn my laptop off and it's the first thing I turn on in the morning," admits James.

What has helped enormously, however, in the process of achieving brand visibility is being digitally switched on. Many tailors today are very old fashioned; some still require you to go into the store to book an appointment. James knows of one who still uses a typewriter for correspondence.

Incredibly many do not have a website, let alone a Facebook or Twitter account. Not so for Cad & the Dandy which is using its web spaces to create a memorable experience for customers. The aim being to transform the way we look at tailoring completely. It has a slick, modern and user-friendly website, as well as a blog - and, of course, they use Twitter and Facebook to engage with customers to better understand their needs. All this helps to make the brand more visible. After all, where do most people go today when

they want to find a product or service? "To Google, of course," says James, which by his own admission is the "the most important thing [for businesses] in the world". By having a presence across all social media platforms helps push Cad & the Dandy to the top of the list when people are searching for tailors in the UK.

Technology is something the firm

takes very seriously. "We've spent a LOT of money on IT [information technology]," he says. Understanding the importance of fully integrating all technology systems across the business is something the team learnt from the banking sector. This goes to show how all work experience - no matter how irrelevant it might seem - can prove useful in any new venture you try. ■

WORDS BY NAEEM RANDEE AND PAMELA WHITBY

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

James may be a public-school boy and former banker but he is anything but a stuffed shirt. For the FYM interview he comes snappily dressed in ochre cords, scuffed shoes and a tailored navy blazer. He is down-to-earth and relaxed.

Still, it has to be said that he comes from a relatively privileged background. So is Ian the 'cad' - the irreverent, naughty bloke from the comprehensive school - and he the 'dandy', the well-dressed posh boy? "Everybody asks us where the name comes from," laughs James. "It's bit of fun and a bit of cheeky tongue-in-cheek."

Of course, that is part of the brand they are trying to create and it is certainly quite unlike other tailors

which tend to be named after the founders. Sleater & Meiers would not have had quite the same ring for a firm that wants to create a brand that is transforming tailoring in a modern, a bit edgy and fun way.

So where do Cad & the Dandy go from here? With two shops in London, another in New York and one soon to open in Munich, it seems this tailoring outfit is not standing still! Like all true entrepreneurs they have their eye on a new business too. "We're in the process of buying a very well-known traditional shoe company," says James. No doubt the duo will be dreaming up technological ways to take another traditional trade into a very modern era.