

Student-Run Retail Store to Hold Product Pitch Sessions

Rylie Knudtson began her polymer clay jewelry business on Instagram, getting around three likes per post. After selling her products at Innovate 1858, she said the amount of people who started to recognize her brand was crazy.

The sophomore majoring in entrepreneurship created Rylie Kate's Clay Designs during her first year at Iowa State University. She said that one day her roommate showed her an email about Innovate 1858, a student-operated retail store at Iowa State. Knudtson had never heard of the store, but thought that working with them could be another way to get her name out there.

She pitched her products to the store and was accepted as a student-vendor. She said the store has continued to place orders with her and that they are incredible about marketing her business.

"It's crazy how many little, tiny things they do that all add up," she said.

Innovate 1858 is a store in the Student Innovation Center that is run completely by students. Their products are also designed or handmade by students. The store finds new products by hosting pitch sessions, which are opportunities for students to share their products and small businesses with a team from the store. If a student is selected as a student-vendor, Innovate 1858 will work with them to sell their products in-store and online. Innovate 1858 announced that they are holding more pitch sessions throughout the spring 2022 semester.

Audrey McMillan, a junior, is an e-commerce manager and marketing assistant at the store. She said that Innovate 1858 looks for a wide variety of products. While the store sells a lot of handmade jewelry, she said they have also accepted sculptures, electronics and a fish tank filter.

She said that after hearing the pitches, the buying team considers what it would take to turn an idea or product into a feasible business. They consider components such as packaging, pricing and trademarks.

Once a student-vendor is selected, McMillan said that the store works with them to get their product ready to sell.

Skylar Bundridge, a senior and student-vendor, said that preparing her first order of stickers taught her how to work with a store. She said that she was used to setting her own prices and quantities for her printing business, Sky Ivy Designs. Working with Innovate 1858 gave her experience in working with a bulk order and wholesale pricing.

Innovate 1858 continues to work with students after their products are in the store. Alaina Porter, a sophomore and procurement and inventory assistant, said the store collaborates with

student-vendors to market their businesses through avenues like social media and announcements.

“That’s probably one of my favorite parts about working here,” she said, “it’s getting to see all the creativity of the students around me and being able to support the store that supports other students.”

Knudtson said that a lot of her business’ growth stemmed from the store’s support. Since she began working with Innovate 1858 about a year ago, she has noticed significant improvements in the amount of people who have joined her social media pages and recognized her logo. She said that right now, she is as busy as she could get.

Knudtson said that for any students who are nervous about applying to pitch, they should just do it.

“They are truly for the students,” she said about Innovate 1858.

Upcoming pitch sessions are March 25, April 13 and April 29.

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