

Behind the Idea Pioneering people and ideas in the creative industries

Creating a future one BloQ at a time

Al Parra, co-founder of Building BloQs, explains the creative business concept offering Londoners a space to work

Tell us about your vision for BloQ

Sharing's our big idea. How we got about it is by offering industrial machines and processing in a shared, open access workshop with an affordable pay-as-you-go membership. This means freelance makers, small businesses and designers can get their hands on what they need to establish and build their businesses with more flexibility and less cost and risk.



Share option:
Al Parra

And what has been the secret in making sure it all goes right?

There's no big secret: it's the right people and a bunch of effort. A talented team has grown up around the co-founders and a really dedicated crew of members has joined. Together they've contributed a huge amount to developing the organisation you see today. Also we use a non-private profit model. If you remove the personal profit element and replace it with social capital, people naturally see the benefit and join the mission.

Why should people care about this idea in particular?

People care if they love their city, if they want a better future for their kids, if they want our country's creative reputation to thrive. It's harder and harder for youngsters and start-ups to get off the ground with crazy London rents. For those already in the industry, housing pressure is mopping up their industrial workspace. If we don't act fast, everybody will have to work in the service sector and we'll lose our famously creative multiverse of talent and skills. That would be tragic.

What makes this idea so different and special?

The special bit is the model that makes it possible. We've got more than 150 members working here, many of them now support themselves and their families through their businesses at Building BloQs. Freedom from overheads means you can get creative and get innovating.

Where did the idea come from?

We needed a new workshop when availability was shrinking and rents were ballooning. Loads of our fellow makers were in the same boat. We needed a solution to what we saw as a systemic problem. So we decided to build the best workshop we could imagine and share it with as many people as needed.



Bloq party: Creatives can share skills



Spaced out: Members pay an annual fee, then are free to use the workshop space and tools on a pay-as-you-go basis

What are your hopes for this idea?

The idea of putting a resource, like a workshop, in a community is nothing new. The innovative bit comes in creating the system that shares it fairly, effectively and affordably. Once you've got that cracked, you can go on applying the principle to whichever resource the community needs next.

It must be very rewarding...

Empowering people to actually have influence in how they live their lives is thrilling. People want to participate in their city. Give them the chance

and they will. What we're doing with our workshop is contributing a small but vociferous voice to the much larger conversation about what kind of London we want to live in.

What happens when you can't solve a problem or come up with an idea?

If we can't solve a problem, we go to the man or woman at the top and have a reasonable chat. It's amazing what having a chat can do. And running out of ideas? Well, I have to say that's not been a problem we've experienced.

Finally, what's your next big idea?

We're growing up! We've just been awarded funding from the London Regeneration Fund, so we're set to grow from the largest open workshop in London, to the largest in Europe, which is breathtaking. This means loads of people will benefit and we're actually creating London's very own 'Northern Powerhouse' of making.

Building Bloqs opens its new Textile Studio on March 25. For further details, see buildingbloqs.com

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