

Guide To Marketing Art & Crafts Online

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For Robbie and Angela

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Introduction: My Story

In College, I took a lot of pottery classes. I loved pottery but never expected to do anything with it. I was an animation major and I took the classes more because of the lack of homework than anything. When I graduated, I was really burned out on the animating and I ended up working for Portland Pottery for a couple of years. I got pretty good at throwing pots, and sold my work occasionally when they would have shows. This was back in the early 2000's. The Internet was alive and well, but it was before social media and Etsy. Back then, I couldn't fathom making any real money as a potter. Certainly I could make money teaching kids classes and cleaning the studio, but making money at selling pots just couldn't be done without spending all my time at craft fairs on the weekends.



I left Portland Pottery in 2006 to start my own web development company. I had always liked to mess around with code, and had created a few websites for fun. Back then, I didn't exactly know what I was doing. The world wide web was still young and it didn't take me long to get acclimated. Over the years my business grew, and I started offering online marketing services like search engine optimization.

Occasionally, I found a great deal on pottery equipment, and started acquiring everything I needed to build a home studio. I didn't get to use the equipment right away. I ended up having three kids in five years so life was just too busy. In 2014, a coworker of my husband and his wife (Robbie) gave me a free standard-size kiln they had in their basement. A few months later a friend (Angela) offered to take all three of my kids for the day, and I decided it was a good time to start throwing pots again as I was dying to try out the new kiln. That day, Zwellyn Pottery was born!

I posted the new pots I had made that day on Facebook and right away realized just how much more opportunity there was than I'd experienced 8 years prior. I received over 100 Likes on my post, people were excited and interested in buying. It dawned on me that I could use my online skills to promote my pottery, making it possible for me to make enough money to justify doing it.

Web development is still my day job, but I get to make pots every week. I fire my kiln at least once a month, and I generally make anywhere from \$500 to \$2000 a month doing something I love. It will be a while before I'd ever try to make pottery a full-time job, BUT I'm setting myself up for success if, or when, I choose to go that route.

Section 1: Getting Started



The Secret to Selling Handmade Online

In a Nutshell, the Secret is Simply to be Yourself!

In all aspects of your life - loving, valuing, and being true to yourself is the secret to being successful, and selling handmade items online is no exception.

I like to think that when I make a piece of artwork, I'm creating a tiny piece of my soul that I'm able to package up and give to someone else. Most items that people buy are mass-produced and lack the magic and uniqueness that's present when an item is produced by hand with the blood, sweat and tears of the artist.

When you sell a piece to someone who knows you, that magic is more apparent and more easily transferred. The secret to selling online is to make that magic apparent to strangers who may be a long distance away.

It's a daunting task that's all about finding your voice online.

The tools you will use to amplify your voice online include: the images you take of your work, your website, social media, handmade selling platforms like Etsy or Amazon Handmade, email marketing, and your correspondence with your customers. The important thing to remember is that these are all simply tools. How an artist is able to get their authentic voice across varies with the personality of each individual.

I realize this is a bit spiritual, and it may be a hard thing to wrap your head around. Many people struggle with putting themselves out there as the face of the business, but in the handmade sector, business is personal! No one makes your product exactly like you do, and that's part of the value and why the customer is willing to pay more for it.

Be Consistent

While succeeding at amplifying your voice is personal, there is one rule: *Be Consistent!*

Others will not be able to invest in the value of your work if you are only giving them a glimpse once in a while. You need to engage often enough to become a fixture in their lives.

Wherever you choose to put your online efforts, make sure to show up on a regular schedule.

Your artwork is not going to appeal to everyone and that's OK. The power of the Internet is that you are able to get in front of people who DO value your creativity even though they could be halfway across the world.

If at First You Don't Succeed

The bottom line is that finding your voice is a simple concept, but can be difficult in practice. The people who succeed at it ultimately are the ones that don't get frustrated and give up! While we're at it, let's examine what "success" actually means. This, again, is going to be individual to

the artist, but I want to put it out there because I often see people focus on perceived “failure” to the point that it prevents them from capitalizing on the progress they’ve actually made. Just because a marketing campaign, or sale, or whatever doesn’t turn out exactly as you pictured, doesn’t mean it’s a failure. Real growth comes slowly, one Instagram follower or mailing list sign-up at a time. Over the years, if you are consistent, it can add up to a large audience, and that audience can allow you to spend more time creating things you love.

Building Demand

The unique challenge of making a profit on your craft revolves around the time it takes to complete each piece. The key to making this work isn’t to simply produce more, that’s the antithesis of handmade. It’s to build demand for your current output, increasing the value so ultimately you can charge more for each piece you produce.

That’s not to say that you never want to increase production, or create a line of products that are similar. Certainly that can help increase sales, it’s just important to realize that aimlessly flooding the market with your artwork isn’t going to increase demand.

The Things That Produce Demand Are:

- Make your work easy to find for the people who will love it.
- Make it easy to reach out to the people who love your work by allowing them to follow you on social media and subscribe to your email list.
- Have great customer service so the people who have purchased from you will want to do so again.
- Occasionally have incentives or sales to get people excited to purchase from you.
- Scarcity increases demand so don’t push yourself to over produce.
- Make work that fills your soul with joy and is uniquely you.

Building Demand: Your End Game

- You produce some new work.
- Before you release the work on your website, Etsy, or wherever else you sell, you send an email blast to the thousands of fans signed up to your mailing list letting them know the exciting day you’re new work will be released. Additionally, you post this information on social media.
- On the day your work gets released, it sells out in a few hours.

Retail is Changing

Back before the internet was what it has become today, achieving what I outlined above was extremely difficult, but retail has changed a lot in the last 20 years. Big box stores like Toys R Us are going out of business, and more people are shopping online. This is very good for artists who want to make a living on their craft. The internet has allowed us artists to cut out the middle man and sell directly to the consumer without having to do an in-person sale. How do we further along this process? Simple, we support each other. When it’s time to buy gift, go out of your way to buy a handmade gift! It will not only mean more and inspire the beneficiary of the gift, it will

also get you in the habit of buying locally.

Setting Yourself Apart

An important part of building demand is answering the question: “Why should someone buy from you instead of others that sell similar products?” Ideally, you don’t want the purchaser to make this decision based on price. You want them to make this decision because they WANT your product more. This is basically what “branding” is all about. In this book, I will show you the tools you’ll use to succeed online, but true success will come from setting yourself apart from your competition.

Notes: