

# Some Helpful Tips

## Marketing Tips

Marketing is a lot more than selling. If you expect someone to buy your work you must provide a reason they should.

## Pricing Tips

It's important to know how to price your work accurately to be sure when you sell it you're making money from it and not just trading dollars. Even more important is to price it at a level people are willing to buy it.

## Business Tips

There are many different kinds of businesses but there are some basic guides that apply to all businesses.

## Advertising & Promotions Tips

If you want someone to buy your work you must let them know you're selling it.

## Attitude Tips – motivation – innovation - persistence

In most things attitude is the most important consideration. Why you do something matters as much as how you do it.

## Teaching Tips

Teaching is a skill that can be acquired the same as any other skill. Because you can do something doesn't mean you can teach it. Many skilled and talented artisans are terrible teachers.

## Quips & Quote

Some fun comments relative to making and selling handmade work.

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## 1. Price on bottom

A tip for selling at retail markets. When selling your work at retail markets you should put prices on the bottom. Most artisans place prices on top or somewhere easy to see. Sophisticated sellers place them on the bottom for a VERY specific reason. It provides extremely valuable information. We humans are a tactile species. If we like something we touch it. If a prospective buyer sees something they like they touch it so if they like the look of one of your offerings they pick it up to check the price. If they like it they pick it up. If they don't like it they don't touch it. This is where it's important. If something doesn't get picked up you know it's not liked. Stop making it. If they pick it up and don't buy it they just told you they like it but reject the price. Either look to adjust the price or stop making it and focus on what does sell.

## 2. Take a Stroll Stopper

A common mistake artisans make at markets is not taking big expensive piece because they assume they are too expensive for that venue. For every show, regardless of how big or how small, you should have at least one star piece to show off what you're capable of. I call them "stroll stoppers" because I noticed when visitors were strolling through the show and spotted that star piece it stopped their stroll and diverted them over to look at it. It was pretty common for someone to admire a big expensive piece, comment how much they liked it and lament being unable to afford it – but a fair few bought a less expensive piece before returning to their stroll. Stroll stoppers increase sales. The more people that stop to look at your display the more people will buy something. Everything you do to draw people over increases your sales. Display your best work.

## 3. Don't Forget the Guys

Art shows attract more women but men buy more impulsively. That isn't sexist. It's a generalization, and like all generalizations there are exceptions, but a generalization that is statistically valid. Women are more likely to pause to justify a purchase while for most men the only justification is they like it. Most women like to shop. They enjoy the experience. Again, a generalization but statistically valid. Most men hate to shop – they consider it a chore to be dealt with as expediently as possible. Tools and sports stuff are usual exceptions. When a woman sees something she likes, she is more likely to take time to think about and justify the purchase. If a man sees something he likes he's more likely to just buy it. When a possible buyer pauses to "think about it" it's rare for them to come back. Many artisans mistakenly focus on making what women like because they are the majority of their customers - but forgetting that men are also possible customers and are often the ones buying more expensive pieces. When I started offering male oriented items at retail shows I immediately learned men make less purchases but more often bought more expensive pieces. Also, many women commented how great it was they found something appropriate as a gift for a guy. Just because most of your customers are women don't be a fool and forget the guys.

## 4. Provide Shipping

We have all lost sales to tourists or visitors because the prospective buyer is concerned about getting it safely home. Instead of losing those sales you can learn how to pack and ship for them as a service. When you hear someone voice concern about getting it home you can ensure the sale (sales pros call it closing) by offering to ship it for them. They've just told you they like it. Now is the time to step in, remind them they have good taste and offer to help them own it. Learn how to pack and how to quote shipping costs. I figured out the total cost for packing and shipping to anywhere in Canada or the USA could be covered by 20% to 25% of the retail price. To quote for anywhere else I'd just make my best SWAG (Scientific Wild Assed Guess). I closed a lot of high ticket sales I know I would not have happened without that shipping offer.

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I even expanded that offer to provide drop shipping for shops I sold wholesale to. They made the sale and had me make one and ship it to their customer. When their customer voiced concern about getting it home the shop could step in and offer to do it for them. Many of them have told me that offer closed a lot of sales for them. If offering to ship it for an extra 20% didn't close the sale they would sometimes step in and graciously provide shipping free. Remember, the shop is reselling it for 2 times the wholesale price so is still making 30% on the sale and doing nothing more than telling me what and where to ship – and not parting with the piece they had on display

## 5. Price Perfect

Costing is Science – Pricing is Art.

Costing is simple math.  $\text{Material} + \text{Labour} + \text{Overhead} = \text{Cost}$

$\text{Cost} + \text{Profit} = \text{Price}$ .

It's relatively easy to determine your cost but NOT so easy to decide on a price. How much can you sell it for? How high can you set the price before the price is so high nobody buys? How low can you set the price before it's so low you're either working cheap or even free? How do you choose the right price? Some suggestions:

- Ignore what anyone else sell for. Your work should be uniquely yours so your prices should be uniquely yours. Base your prices on your costs plus what you want for your time. What it costs someone else or what someone else wants for their time is irrelevant. You calculate what your costs are and you decide what your time is worth.
- Start low. Start at the lowest price you can tolerate. If something sells, make more and raise the price. Repeat the process. If you start with a high price you don't know if something isn't selling because people don't like it or because they think the price is too high. Start low. Nobody ever started a business with high prices with the idea they could reduce them if stuff didn't sell.
- If you're a beginner and just starting to experiment with selling your work there's no reason to not sell at prices that just cover materials cost. You might be working free but you are also getting your education subsidized. Some countries pay you to go to school. This isn't one of them.

## 6. What to Make?

If you want people to buy your work you must provide a reason to buy from you instead of from someone else. What makes your work special? Don't try to compete on price or on quality. You can never match the prices for imports or those from hobbyists willing to sell for just their material cost – nor can you compete on workmanship quality against hobbyists willing to expand many hours of time just for the fun of making it. If you want a competitive advantage, be original. Make something others don't make. Especially avoid the common mistake of assuming if there is a large market for something you should make it. When there is a large market for something there is almost always a large supply. Jewelry is the best example of that. There is always an excess supply of jewelry. An equally common mistake is making things that are easiest to make. The more difficult something is to make the less supply there is of it. The most effective way to compete is by making something different – something other sellers don't offer. Be unique. Be original.

## 7. Perceived value

There is no real value. There is only perceived value – what someone thinks it's worth. A prospective buyer doesn't care how long it took you to make something, doesn't care how much the materials cost you and doesn't care how much experience was needed to learn how to make

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it. They don't care if you're a hobbyist or a professional artist. They care ONLY about what they think it's worth. If you want someone to buy your work you must convince them it is worth your asking price. Why should they buy from you and not from someone else? What is special about yours?

## **8. Selling Wholesale.**

Selling wholesale is when you sell for a set price to a shop or gallery who will resell it at a higher profit. The most significant advantage is it's a firm sale. You aren't taking your work to a market or putting it on consignment hoping it will sell. The usual wholesale discount is 50% off retail. It's widely referred to as the "keystone" price. Many artisans complain they think it's unfair the shop gets half the selling price while you did all the work and pay for all the materials but that complaint ignores the contribution the wholesale buyers makes in providing the venue, displaying and selling your work and freeing you to focus on what you do best – make stuff. Selling at markets or online where you get the full retail price or selling on consignment for a commission less than 50% can be seductive but it has been my consistent experience selling wholesale is so very much more efficient it produces a significantly higher net income than selling retail or on consignment

## **9. Converting Consignment to Wholesale**

A definite wholesale sale is always better for you than a potential consignment sale but shop owners prefer consignment because it removes the risk of buying something that doesn't sell – especially if they have never sold your work before. An effective way to remove that fear is for you to offer the first order "on trial". Offer to put together a mix of your work on a 30 day trial. At the end of 30 days they either pay for the entire order and continue into the future as a wholesale customer or they pay for what they sold and return the rest.

## **10. Price Universality**

If you sell your work wholesale to shops or galleries and also sell it retail it's important both you and your wholesale customers have the same retail price. Your wholesale customer expects to sell at twice the price they paid you. When you sell retail you should sell at that price. You might be tempted to sell at a little lower price but if you do that you provide unfair (and unreasonable) competition to your wholesale customer. Setting prices can be complicated. A simple formula that has worked well for me for many years is to carefully calculate cost (labour + materials + overhead) and multiple it times 3 to establish the retail price – then offer 50% off for wholesale purchase.

## **11. Wholesale Price Qualification.**

The original idea of a wholesale price was a lower price for buying the whole case or the whole roll. Over the years that changed with suppliers offering discounts for "qualified" buyers – for example if bought to be resold. Everyone wants to buy at lower wholesale prices so determining who legitimately "qualifies" has become extraordinarily complicated for the seller. Many suppliers are now returning to the original practice of basing prices on quantity. One price for 1, a discount for 10 and a bigger discount for 50. If you sell wholesale it's reasonable to require a minimum first purchase. One of my businesses makes tools for glass art and pottery. Our minimum first order is \$1,000 for wholesale price. That's relatively low. One of the companies I buy pottery clay from for resale has a minimum first purchase of \$15,000. We also refuse to sell wholesale to anyone that doesn't have a physical shop and is not just an online seller. If you plan to sell wholesale you SHOULD set, and strictly enforce, a minimum first order size to qualify.

## **12. Offer Return Option**

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Every gift shop and gallery owner fears buying something that won't sell and is usually the main reason they prefer consignment. It's a legitimate fear but it's a fear you can remove by offering them an open credit return option on anything at any time. If they think something they bought from you won't sell in their shop let them return it for a credit to buy something else. When I started doing that it encouraged many of my wholesale customers to experiment with some more expensive items. We were both happy to see those more expensive items sell for them. I've had shops that were at first hesitant to buy things over \$100 evolve to selling \$1000 pieces.

## 13. Grant Exclusivity

It's tempting to sell to anyone willing to buy but placing your work in too many outlets can be harmful to your business. When you decide what to make you must ask, "Why would they buy my work and not someone else's?" Shop owners will ask, "Why would I carry work that is readily available in many other places?". You want your work to be distinctive. They want what they offer for sale to be distinctive and will often ask for exclusive rights to what you make. Give it to them. Give each of your wholesale customers territorial exclusivity. Sell to one outlet, and ONLY one outlet in each community. If you sell at retail markets, advertise what shops carry your work. If you have a website, list the retail outlets that sell your work. Always remember...this is a partnership. You make stuff and they sell it for you. If many other places sell your work the shop owner will treat your work as just another product offered for sale. If they have territorial exclusivity they will put extra effort into how they display and promote your work. It's a big world. No reason to concentrate sales in a small area.

## 14. Wholesale Shows

If you want to expand wholesale sales you might consider exhibiting at a wholesale show. These are not to be confused with retail markets where you sell your work. At a wholesale show you take display samples of everything you offer and take orders for later delivery. Wholesale shows are closed to the public. To be admitted a prospective buyer must apply and confirm they qualify as a wholesale buyer – usually by providing a business licence. If you would like to visit a wholesale show but don't qualify as a wholesale buyer, you can contact the show management and tell them you are an artisan considering exhibiting. Most will give you a "visitor" pass that allows you to see the show and talk to the vendors but you wear a badge that tells the vendors they are prohibited from selling anything to you. For artisans concerned that wholesale price is almost always 50% of retail, they will be horrified to see wholesale prices on jewelry are often 25% of retail. YES – jewelry sells retail for 4 times wholesale price.

## 15. Choose Your Wholesale Partners

Selling your work at a retail market is a good way to make contacts for wholesale sales and exhibiting at wholesale shows is equally good but the VERY BEST way to connect with a quality wholesale account is to personally select them with a direct sales call. Don't make the mistake of contacting a shop or gallery that already has work similar to yours and don't make the mistake of choosing one only because it's a high class venue. Choose one you honestly believe your work would be a good fit in to add to what is being offered. Pick an outlet you think would benefit by having your work added to what is already there. If you make the choice it's a lot more likely you can build a long term partnership with mutual benefit. To sell my work one of the smartest things I ever did was my son and I taking a road trip from Canada to Mexico. Went from BC down the Washington, Oregon and California coast to San Diego. In every coast town we'd do a quick drive through and select a prospect. I'd walk in with a box of samples and price list, put a few samples on the counter and deliver my pitch. *"If you can spare 2 minutes I have a product line I think would make a great addition to what you're already offering for sale"*. I had a few, "We're already fully stocked", "Our manager isn't here" and "We only buy at the wholesale gift shows" but

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I was always treated with respect and often thanked for coming in. In more than a dozen shops I got an order on the spot and a dozen more contacted me later. What I got most was expressed surprise to be called on by the real artisan instead of a sales agent. Go visit some prospective buyers. You might not be willing to do a 1400 mile road trip like I did but I'm sure if you make the effort to visit some shops near you it will be worth your while. Why not make it a vacation? Remember those 4 wonderful words. Tax Deductible Business Trip.

## 16. Sales Agents

A sales agent is someone that acts as your representative to sell your product for a commission to wholesale buyers. The usual commission is 10% but some ask as much as 20%. This is much like a gallery taking a sales commission on goods you placed with them on consignment. They not only get the commission on the first order they sell to that account but get it on every order that customer places with you in the future. They open the account but don't necessary service it. Too often sales agents pay little attention to how your product fits in a retail outlet but care only about making a quick commission sale. They also often do little to actively promote your product but just add it to the variety they already offer. A sales representative working on commission can do a lot to boost sales for you but you should be VERY careful who you choose work with and be EXTRA careful what promises and commitments you make to them. A good agent can make your business bloom but a poor one can destroy it. An example of where an agent can be harmful to your business is where they take a big order from a retailer that uses it as a discount promotion. The shop looks like a hero with a big discount sale but all your other wholesale accounts will stop buying from you. Be careful. There are sharks in the water.

## 17. Finders Fee

It's common in business to pay a commission or finders fee for providing a contact or reference that turns into a sale. If one of your wholesale customers sends a commission customer to you it's reasonable, and sometime contractually agreed, to pay them a commission. It can be whatever you agreed on or what you think appropriate - but 10% is relatively standard and is often part of a consignment/agent agreement with galleries. Even if you hadn't agreed to a finders fee it's a good practice, both personal and professional, to do something concrete to show thanks. A small thank you gift is always appropriate and makes a significant contribution to building strong alliances. You're supposed to be creative. Be creative in how you say thanks.

## 18. Juried Markets

Not all retail markets are the same. In an Open market anyone that pays the booth rent gets in. In a Juried market prospective sellers submit either photos or samples of their work to be judged whether or not they can participate. Each jury system is a little different. With some it's whatever the market management personally approves. Some have relatively loose requirement while others are strict. The good ones judge carefully and professionally using a scoring system similar to diving or figure skating giving points for creativity, originality, workmanship, etc. The best are those using a "blind" jury where the jurors are shown examples of the work without anything identifying the maker. This ensures it is the work being judged and not the maker's name and reputation. When you're selecting where to rent space to sell your work you can assume the markets hardest to get in will attract the highest quality customers.

## 19. Select Your Market

Whether you're selling at a retail market or selling wholesale to a shop or gallery it's always best to take some time to select who you sell to and where you sell. When selling wholesale choose outlets that you think are most likely to have customers that will buy your work. The same with choosing a retail market to sell at. One of the most common mistakes artisans make is favouring

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low rent markets. Whether you rent space in a craft market or a retail outlet shop, when the rent is low it's almost always because sales are low. Higher rent locations are more likely to generate higher volume sales. It doesn't take any more of your time to set up and sell in a high rent market than a low rent one. Don't reject a prospective market because the rent is high and don't select one because the rent is low. You get what you pay for. When I was doing markets as a craft fairy gypsy I learned to favour the ones with the highest rent.

## **20. Use Retail Markets to Find Wholesale Customers**

Displaying and selling your work at a retail market can be an excellent way to connect with prospective wholesale buyers. But...be careful...too often it's asking you to give them work on consignment. At juried shows it's more likely to come from buyers willing to make a direct purchase. Wholesale buyers know that juried shows are more likely to display quality work and more likely to have artisans ready to sell wholesale. Gift shop and gallery owners are always looking for fresh talent and make a point of visiting retail markets to look for new sources. That applies especially in market locations likely to attract buyers motivated in part by the prospect of a "Tax Deductible Business Trip".

## **21. Demos and Videos**

When you exhibit work for sale at a show the more people that stop to visit your display the more people will buy something so anything that encourages more visitors encourages more sales. Doing a live demo or running a video is a terrific way to attract prospective buyers. Live demos are usually only practical if you have someone helping you but you can put out a TV monitor or laptop running videos to attract attention. When I tried running videos demonstrating how the work is done they worked as well as a "show stopper" to draw people to my display.

## **22. One of a kind**

Making only one of a kind items is great if you sell into high end galleries where they want something that is never repeated or copied but it's a deal breaker if you sell into gift shops. They want to know if they take a risk and buy your work to see if it sells, they will be able to get more of what sold. They know it sells so they want more. If everything you make is "one of a kind", every purchase they make from you is a fresh risk. Imagine a glass artist or potter wanting to reorder some glass or glaze and being told they couldn't get any more of that colour because all the glass and glazes are "one of a kind" and not repeated. What businesses most want is reliability, dependability and repeatability. What they want least is risk.

## **23. Too Many Choices**

Too much variety can be more harmful than helpful and can be worse than too little. Offering too many choices in too many colours and too many sizes can create "decision paralysis" where the buyer has so many choices they can't decide so choose none. Keep the variety reasonable and manageable. The most popular and most effective quantity is three. Three different colours in three different sizes. Not only will controlling the variety offered help encourage buyers to make a choice it also helps reduce your cost to make what you sell. If you want to offer more variety it's better to make some completely different designs – each in three different colours and three different sizes.

## **24. Professional Display**

There are two distinctively different ways to display work. There is the "Thrift Shop" display where everything is scattered about intermixed the way we might decorate our living room. Candles mixed with pottery mixed with glass mixed with leatherwork mixed with jewelry. For a business

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that is the mark of an amateur. Alternatively, there is the “Drug Store” display where everything is categorized in groups. All the candles in one group, all the pottery in another group and all the glass in yet another group. This is how professionals display work. When you put together your display at a retail market you will sell more if you have an organized display sorted by style or category. Apply the same preference for professionalism when selecting a shop to sell wholesale to. You will sell a lot more if they apply a neatly organized display like in a drug store and not everything just scattered about like a thrift shop.

## 25. Hobby Business Hazard

When you sell to a shop or gallery the objective is to create a partnership/alliance where you each share the same objective – to sell what you make. You make it and they sell it. A working partnership. That only works if you share that objective. Many gift shops and galleries are more of a hobby business being run for fun rather than as an income creating enterprise. That ESPECIALLY applies with gallery and gift shop owners unwilling to buy outright but only accepting work on consignment. Unless you are just making stuff as a hobby and don't care if it doesn't sell you would be smart to avoid dealing with hobby businesses and choose instead those that rely on selling the work on display to survive.

## 26. Big Customer Risk

A lot of small customers is better than a few big ones. Having just a few large customers can be easier to manage but that ease comes with a risk. What happens if you lose one of those big customers? How harmful would that be? How easily could you recover? Smart business owners prefer to minimize risk. It's foolish to be so reliant on any customer that losing their business would seriously harm you. Also, having more small customers provides a steady income dribble with a little money coming in ever few days rather than waiting for infrequent large payments. Each of us can decide what percentage we're comfortable with and how much risk we're willing to take. Many years ago I learned to do my best to NEVER have any one customer providing more than 25% of my revenue.

## 27. Discount Dilemma

Agreeing to discount your selling price to make a sale can be more harmful than helpful. You might be tempted to accept a lower offer but doing that is as likely to make the buyer unsatisfied as pleased they got a discount. Too often instead of being thrilled they got a price cut they think if you were willing to trim the price a little bit, if they have pushed harder you might have trimmed it even more. You established willingness to cut your prices. If they become a return customer they will expect to never pay your original price – and will tell their friends you are willing to cut your prices.. Everyone wants to think they got the best possible price. If you respond to a discount request by telling them, *“I didn't just guess at a price but took some time to calculate the best and lowest price possible. That's the price I'm offering it for”*. If you were willing to bend a little it's reasonable to assume you will bend a lot. Discounting is a slippery slope you should never step onto. Hold firm on your prices. A better way to encourage a sale is to offer something extra as a gift.

## 28. Sunk Costs

“Sunk cost” is a term economists use to refer to a cost that has already been incurred. Once you have spent the time and materials to make something the costs to make it are sunk. Gone. Spent. The only way to recover ANY of those costs is to sell it - so anything it sells for is a profit. Once the costs are sunk if you sell it for only \$1 you make a \$1 profit. Large retailers fully understand the importance of sunk costs. If they have bought something and it still hasn't sold after 90 days it is treated as a tenant not paying rent. It is to be evicted. Put it on sale, donate it or trash it –

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but remove it to make space for something more likely to sell. If you have made something on speculation of sale it is foolish to hold onto it with the assumption you have to get your money back. What you do have to do is get rid of it. The cost is sunk. Move on. Sell it for anything you can get, donate it or dispose of it and make something else. Each of us decides how long to wait before disposing of a sunk cost item but however long you are willing to wait you must accept the reality of sunk costs. Holding onto something hoping it will sell is like saving something “just in case” you might someday need it. The smart decision is to routinely purge to clear space.

## **29. 80-20 Rule**

The customer is NOT always right. Sometimes the customer is unreasonable and sometimes the customer is a lying thief trying to rip you off. Start by giving everyone the doubt. Treat everyone fair but expect them to do the same to you. Most of your customers are great – but not all. It varies with everyone but the 80/20 rule is a reliable generalization for all businesses. 20% of your customers will provide 80% of your problems. A different 20% will provide 80% of your income. Only fools allow themselves to be taken advantage of. Pay attention to which 20% are causing you problems. Either stop dealing with them or rigidly police their behaviour. Set firm rules and enforce them. Focus on the 20% that are not causing problems and making a steady contribution to your business. They are special. Treat them special. They are the ones to build a long term relationship with. I lost it when we moved into a new shop but for years I had a sign on the wall that said,

***“Prices Subject to Change According to Customer’s Attitude”***. It wasn’t entirely a joke.

## **30. Play Fair - my favourite 4 letter word.**

Be fair but be firm. Be fair to your customers and also demand your customers be fair to you. Do business by the “Golden Rule”. Treat your customers the way you expect to be treated as a customer. Do the same with your suppliers. Treat them the same way you want your customers to treat you. Be fair, but be firm. Don’t do business with customers or suppliers that you feel are not playing fair. If you play fair you will build solid long term alliances with your customers and your suppliers. If you allow customers or suppliers to take advantage you encourage them to continue and equally encourage others to copy. Be fair but be firm. Make fair rules and firmly enforce them.

## **31. Good agreements make good friends**

It’s too easy for a business relationship (or even a friendship) to be ruined by a simple misunderstanding or misconception. The best possible protection is a clearly worded agreement that assures any assumptions or presumptions are understood. The best relationships are those where every participant clearly understands what is expected and what is denied. Draft an agreement and enforce it. It doesn’t have to be a formalized contract involving teams of lawyers but SHOULD be something in writing in plain language that details what is agreed to. That ESPECIALLY applies to the Terms & Conditions of Sales and to any Partnership or Consignment Sales Agreement. Do not rely on verbal agreements. Avoid misunderstandings. Put it in writing.

## **32. Decision Paralysis**

It’s often hard to make a decision. Whether it’s a client that can’t decide what colour they want or you trying to decide what to make or what price to set. Sometimes it’s so hard it creates decision paralysis where no decision gets made. A technique that can help is to instead of making a positive choice, make a negative choice. Instead of asking “What is most preferred?” ask “What is least preferred?” I’ve often had difficulty with a client unable to decide what design they liked best when asked, “Which do you like least?” had an instant answer. By going through the options

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and one at a time removing the least liked could easily settle on a preference. Do the same with yourself. Make a list of all the options – then one at a time delete the least liked.

### **33. Seat Swap Decision Making**

An effective way to make effective decisions is to swap seats. If you're wondering what to make or what price to set or how to word an agreement, reverse the positions. Put yourself in your customers seat and ask what would you like if you were the customer. What price would be fair? What conditions would be reasonable? Do the same with your suppliers. If you have employees, do the same with them. Treat them the way you would like to be treated as an employee. I have always treated employees like family and both customers and suppliers as partners in a shared enterprise.

### **34. Artistic Isn't Enough**

It must be balanced with engineering and economics. You can make something that is beautiful but without adequate engineering it might collapse and no matter how lovely it is if it's too expensive to make nobody will buy it. Your marketing strategy should be to create a balance of artistic, engineering and economics working together with each making an equal contribution.

### **35. Product – Price – Place**

You might have a great product but you're offering it for sale at the wrong price or selling it in the wrong place. You shouldn't expect gallery calibre sculptures to sell at a flea market nor expect fridge magnets to sell at a prestigious gallery. I've seen examples of an item not selling for \$50 at a street market but easily selling for \$200 at a gallery or gift shop. Cowboy theme designs are less likely to sell at an ocean resort than marine and maritime designs and seascapes or sailboats won't be popular at a venue attached to a rodeo or farm fair. It isn't enough to produce a great product. An important part of your marketing strategy is to offer it for sale at an appropriate price and displayed in an appropriate place. If you want your work to sell, make product, price and place a team working together and not individually.

### **36. Piggyback Ordering**

If you want your supplier to give you better prices it's usual to just ask them for a discount. A better way is to work with them to help reduce their costs so they can pass the savings along to you as a better price. Maintaining inventory is a big expense. Instead of buying from their current inventory, help them bypass their inventory costs entirely by "piggyback ordering". Give them your order to add to (piggyback on) their order to their supplier. I do this routinely both with both my suppliers and my customers.

### **37. Drop Shipping**

Drop shipping is when you ship on behalf of your customer. They sell the item then have you ship it on their behalf to whoever they sold it to. This allows your customer to sell something they didn't have to handle and didn't have to process as inventory. I routinely drop ship both for things I sell to wholesale customers and for stuff I buy from suppliers Drop shipping is a team effort where you both work together for mutual benefit. It works well but can be, and often is, abused by sellers that have no physical shop but just a website. Take care who you agree to drop ship for. Internet sellers are notorious for abusing drop shipping and can harm your business more than help it. It's a partnership. Choose your partners carefully.

### **38. Selling Jewelry – Plus & Minus**

On the PLUS side, there is a steady market for jewelry. It's easy to transport and consumes only small amounts of materials to make. On the MINUS side there is always an oversupply – usually

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a lot more supply than demand. There are too many artisans making jewelry for the number of customers buying it. Unless you make something especially unique or have engineered a way to make it at extremely competitive prices it is rarely profitable. Some artisans make only jewelry but many artisans like to make jewelry as an extra addition to their other offerings. Because of this competition most juried shows, and pretty much all wholesale shows, specifically prohibit such mixing. They insist if you make things other than jewelry you may NOT sell jewelry and if you want to sell jewelry you may not sell anything else. In classes I'm often asked, "What should I make? What sells?" My favourite answer to that is, "Not jewelry".

## **39. Go for Gold**

Most artisans that make jewelry for sale choose to use silver findings instead of gold – usually because silver is cheaper and has more potential customers. That is often a mistake. The market for silver is much larger than for gold but there is lots of silver jewelry offered for sale. The supply more than meets the demand. The market for gold is smaller but often the demand for it exceeds supply. Customers that prefer gold will rarely accept silver and are accustomed to seeing lots of silver offered for sale but much less gold – so when they see jewelry with gold findings they are more ready to make a quick decision to buy. It is ALWAYS a smart marketing strategy to avoid a market that is oversupplied and instead go into a market with more demand than supply.

## **40. Must Art be Useful?**

When you make something for sale you might often ask if it has a function other than to be admired? Does the buyer need it to be useful to justify buying it? Should you make mugs and bowls and plates and things that are useful or should you make things that have no use other than being pleasing to look at? Yes, there are many customers that do need to justify a purchase because it is useful, but there are many more that if they want something useful like a mug or bowl are more likely to visit Walmart or a Dollar Store. A while back I did a demo/talk for a group of gallery owners on glass workmanship. After the demo I thought it would be interesting to ask gallery owners their views on "When does craft become art?" They all agreed the more useful something is the less likely it is to be perceived as art. One of the gallery owners make a comment that I took to heart and passed on to other artisans. "I don't think people buy art to use as a fruit bowl". This comes back to market demand. The market is saturated with artisans making useful things like mugs and bowls and plates but not so filled with offerings of work that have no function other than decorative. When craft elevates to become art might be difficult to define but I've seen many examples of art turned into craft because the maker thought it needed to be "useful".

## **41. Amusing Sells**

In my many years of doing retail shows I learned to identify two things that clearly signalled a willingness to buy. If someone smiles when they look at a piece or if they say, "Isn't that cute" they are sending a clear signal they like it. When someone says, "Isn't that cute" you need only to step up and suggest they have excellent taste and should own it. People WILL buy things that amuse them and especially will buy things as gifts if they think it will amuse the recipient.

## **42. Art Critique**

You WILL be criticized. Some will be good and some will be bad. Some complimentary and some insulting. Ignore all of it. If you're trying to sell your work the ONLY criticism that has ANY relevance is that coming from someone willing to buy it. What anybody else thinks or says should be ignored. Let the marketplace decide if its good or bad. That also applies to price. Whether someone else thinks your price is too high or too low is irrelevant. You decide what it should be and let the market decide if it agrees. ESPECIALLY ignore criticism from self-designated experts. *"A critic is someone that owns a road map but doesn't know how to drive the car".*

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## 43. Getting Started Selling

I'm often asked, "When is my work good enough to sell? Simple answer. When someone is willing to buy it. Don't be afraid to offer it for sale. You're likely to find you like doing it. It can be difficult to get started so most artisans start small and work up incrementally.

- Personal – sell to friends and family
- Flea Markets – they're low rent so low risk but get only low prices.
- Craft Shows – a little higher rent but much higher sales volume.
- Internet Sales – either your own website or something like Etsy.
- Sales Agents – will take care of all your sales for a percentage commission.
- Art Galleries – you give them your work to sell for a percentage of the selling price.
- Wholesale - a shop or gallery buys from you and resells at a higher price.

Where you choose to position yourself is entirely personal. If you want to keep all the selling price to yourself retail shows or internet selling might be your best choice. If you want to sell high price items art galleries might be a better option. If you don't want to be involved in the sales you might hire a sales agent to do it for you. If you want to generate a reliable steady income selling wholesale is usually the best.

## 44. Inventory Advantage

Artisans that prefer to sell retail and not wholesale because they get a higher price usually fail to consider the inventory cost saving advantage to selling wholesale. When you sell at a retail market you want to maximize your sales but can't predict what will sell so you make lots of stuff to take – always much more than you really expect to sell. You are packing around a lot of inventory with the risk some of it might not sell. You have the expense of handling all that inventory plus the risk of much of it becoming a "sunk cost" with goods that don't sell. When you sell wholesale you make only what has been ordered for purchase. The only inventory is work being made to fill orders.

## 45. Prospecting

Never underestimate the importance of prospecting. Whether you're prospecting for gold or prospecting for customers the objective is to find something valuable. If you want to sell your work new customers are extremely valuable. I have no idea how to prospect for gold but can suggest some ways to prospect for customers

- Retail markets – be sure to have business cards with your website address
- Product cards attached to all your work.
- Bio handouts wherever you display your work for sale.
- Wholesale markets – exceptional to connect to wholesale buyers.
- Personal sales call. Often underestimated but always worthwhile.
- Directed mail. Mail directed to specific prospects.
- Community Bulletin Boards – especially valuable if you teach.
- Press releases – a nicely packaged press release can create great free advertising.

## 46. Consignment Sales

Consignment sale is when you give your work to a shop or gallery to display and sell for you. They take a percentage of the selling price as a commission and pay you after the work has sold. Most common commission is 30 to 40% but it could be less or more depending on what the seller demands. As with most things, there are advantages and disadvantages to consigning your work. For artisans that want to expand their market, or don't want to do retail shows, this can be a good

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option. However, when the shop owner doesn't have to pay for your work they have much less incentive to sell it and often just wanting to fill space. Too many consignment shops are poorly managed and too often just a hobby business. Also, they are notorious for going out of business leaving suppliers unpaid for work that sold and decline responsibility for anything damaged or stolen while in their possession. If you do decide to place your work on consignment be CERTAIN to have a signed contract clearly outlining responsibilities.

## **47. Shelf Rental**

Appearing everywhere are places that offer to rent small display space for artisans. The usual arrangement is the artisan pays a fixed rent for display space and the venue takes a small percentage for handling any sales. It is a way to sell your work but almost always these venues are concerned only with renting space, indifferent to the mix of what is offered for sale and put little effort, if any, into connecting with customers. You might have your work on display alongside some complete crap. Also, like consignment sales, venues often refuse responsibility for anything damaged or stolen while in their possession.

## **48. Co-operatives & Guilds**

When properly managed co-operatives and guilds work exceptionally well to help members improve and market their work - but ONLY if they are properly managed. Too often too many members participate only for what they can get from the group with little effort to contribute to help others. Often the primary focus of a group is to get some form of grant for financial support. This "what's in it for me?" attitude discourages many of those with the most to offer from joining the group. Be careful who you decide to share with.

## **49. Art Galleries**

A good gallery will put serious effort into representing you to prospective buyers and will be a working partner in marketing your work. It will almost introduce your work to customers willing to pay higher prices than at gift shops or public markets. However, just like consignment shops, many private art galleries are too often run as a hobby business or a side to other enterprises and not particularly concerned about making a profit. Just as a good gallery will put serious effort into which artists they choose to work with, you should put serious effort into choosing which gallery to partner with.

## **50. Artist's Portfolio**

If you want a gallery to represent or you apply for a grant of some kind you are expected to provide an Artist's Portfolio that should include the following:

- List of accomplishments – awards, exhibitions, degrees, etc
- Examples of your best work
- Resume – history of your experience
- Artist's Statement – what motivates you.

It should be organized, carefully categorized and look as professional as you can make it. This is your introduction to a prospective lifetime partner. Put some effort into making a good first impression. Even if you aren't looking for gallery representation or applying for a grant, this is something you should have on your website.