



The Relativity of Marketing

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Marketing Venues

CRAFT SHOWS

When someone asks me what I do, and I say I am a jeweler, the first thing they do is look at my ears. The second thing they do is ask me where I sell my work. The third constant is that they are astonished when I tell them I don't do craft shows anymore. This is a perfect example of clearly defining your business marketing strategy to suit your own needs. About ten years ago, I lost my taste for craft shows, so I sold my display, and never looked back. I think some people actually decide to be a craftsperson, just so they can do craft shows. I am not one of those people. Shows are however a great way to get your name out there, IF that is, you do them consistently for several years. If you do them haphazardly, they will be almost worthless as a marketing tool. I did the best-known craft shows in Rochester for 18 years, through thunderstorms, 100-degree weekends, disappointing sales, collapsed displays, and the flu. I gained name recognition, I won a number of awards to add to my resume, and I got a good start on a mailing list.

HOME PARTIES

My city house became something of a curiosity on the way to the local farmers' market. Because the Public Market is an acceptable destination in that neighborhood, I piggybacked on its name recognition and location. "I live near the Public Market; you could stop and pick up your earrings on your way." When I saw their reaction to my home, I took advantage of my house as a marketing tool. I started having jewelry home parties. People love to see where and how artists live. My house is completely outfitted in stuff I have found on the curb or purchased at estate sales. After attending one of my home parties, a woman went to an interior decorator, and told her she wanted a house just like mine.

GALLERIES

It's been a slow time for lots of galleries, and many no longer buy wholesale like they used to. If you decide to put work in a gallery, check your motivation. Are you doing it for the prestige of having your work associated with that gallery? Are you hoping to boost sales? Are you simply passing the burden of sales to them? These days I won't send my work to a consignment gallery without doing some research first. Call a few of their artists and ask about their reliability, payment schedule, presentation skills, and track record. Aside from the public face (which you can judge yourself by visiting), find out about their recordkeeping skills. You can waste a lot of time going back and forth on payment and inventory issues.

WEBSITE

As I was making the transition from wholesale to home shows, I realized a need to also update and modify my catalog. When a new customer asks for a catalog, it is not good policy to point out that the pair of earrings she just bought on sale cost less than a printed catalog, even though that might be the case. The Internet changes that equation. In 1998, I decided to create a website that would be an on-line catalog, with no real concern at that point of creating a storefront. A catalog request from a customer at a home party or a gallery across the country could be quickly, efficiently, and cheaply supplied. Also, an electronic catalog would always be up to date; no more nasty white-outs over the old prices! "You can go right now to my website and print one..."

I realized through doing my home parties, that people enjoy the personal touch, and the feeling that they were buying more than just a piece of jewelry. They went home with a story to tell. I wanted my website to feel like that too—transparent, funny, candid and quirky.





Branding

Carrying a theme is incredibly important. You need to have a style that instantly says this work is YOURS. And then your marketing needs to reflect your work. Even in a foreign language, we instantly know the Coca Cola logo. How many Nike ads never even say Nike? The swoosh is all we need. But think about how many times they had to thrust that image in front of us before we knew it better than we know our own phone number.

When I decided it was time to start thinking about a website, I first targeted my business cards, brochures, stationery, labels, rubber stamps, gift tags and packaging. I needed to present a totally united front. My graphics had to mesh. The color of my business cards had to match my background color of my website. The icons had to connect. I was branding when I didn't even know the term.

Pricing

Where you sell and why you sell will have a lot to do with the prices you ultimately come up with. If you are not trying to make a living with your craft, and you are selling your jewelry off your desk at work, you can pretty much ask what you want. But if you plan on supporting yourself, and you decide on a number of public venues, say a web site, a few galleries, and a few craft shows, your prices will have to be consistent across the board. If they aren't, you won't be taken seriously, and your inconsistency will hurt your attempt at looking professional. For example, if you sell a bracelet on your web site for \$200, you will have to sell it for \$200 at the gallery, and at the craft show. Your price structure needs to insure that you're still making money on that gallery sale, even though you only received \$100.

If you are running a business you have to remember to calculate for the time you are working and not in the studio. This includes marketing time, paperwork, taxes, networking, phone calls, emails, the weekend you sit at that craft show, you get the idea. So if you are planning on a 40-hour week, you are only going to be in the studio for 20 of those hours. Let's say that in twenty hours you can make ten pairs of earrings. And let's say that you need to gross \$1000 a week in order to pay for health insurance, cat food, new shoes, the broken window, avocados, and sharpening your bench shears. As much as you like the earrings, you can admit to yourself that they are not going to sell for \$100. What do you do?

One path is to explore as many short cuts in your production as possible. Do research, experiment, keep accurate work logs. Ask other jewelers and other none jewelers. Other craftspeople have great insight. I learned one of my best tricks from a woodworker.

The second path is education. You should never pass up the opportunity to teach a customer about what they are buying. Do you know anyone who isn't interested in a compelling factoid? Don't just save your facts and educational spiel for someone who can't make up their mind about a purchase. I never let a customer arrive to pick up an order or drop off a repair, without bringing them into the studio, "Oh look! You just have to see what I am working on... did you know this fossil is 350 million years old?" Let them take away some of your excitement about your work, and I guarantee they will bring it up the first ten times a person complements them on their new ring.

