

Ten tips to selling more art through your website

By Eliana Berlfein

If you want to be taken seriously as a professional artist, you have to have a website! However, if your website isn't increasing your sales, you're wasting your money. Here are ten tips on how to use your website to sell more art.

Tip #1: Your website must look professional

If your daughter or your nephew or a kid down the street has offered to make you a website for free, the cost may be too high. People judge artwork by the context they see it in. That may not sound fair, but it's true. If someone sees a painting in an upscale gallery, that person will have a lot more confidence in the painting's value than if it's hung on a gas station gift shop wall.

Keep these points in mind to create a professional website:

- **Appearance:** As an artist, you have an aesthetic taste. Your site should reflect it. You don't need fancy animation, but you must have a clean, well-organized interface. Since your art is the most important thing, there shouldn't be a lot of other busy stuff distracting visitors from the art.
- **Text:** Make it personal and engaging. At the very least, make sure it is grammatically correct. Keep your fonts consistent, no more than 1 or 2 different fonts on a page.
- **Site navigation:** Your site must be easy to use. If customers can't find what they want within the first minute, they'll leave. A good designer knows how people think, and will layout your website so it's easy to get around.
- **Photographs of your work:** Your photographs should enhance your work. It's hard enough to sell artwork online, but impossible if visitors can't even tell what the artwork looks like. If you can't take professional-looking photographs yourself, hire someone to do it for you.

Tip #2: Put your website address on everything.

Put your website address on your business cards. If you have stationary or brochures, include your website address there. Every time you meet someone, give them your card. Even if you already know them, give them your card and tell them to visit your website. Ask them to give your card to someone else. Word of mouth is a great form of advertising.

Every time you sell something, enclose a card that includes your website address. In fact, include two cards, so the customer can keep one and give the other to a friend.

If possible, use a label to put your website address directly on your artwork. People lose cards but they won't lose your artwork.

Add it to the bottom of every email. Most email programs come with a feature called a signature. You can enter your name and website address in your signature, and it will automatically show up on every email.

Go to shows and hand out flyers with your website address. Send out postcards with a picture of your art and include your website address. If people like the postcard they'll probably take a look at your website.

Call or visit galleries. With a website you don't have to send or lug around your portfolio, just direct them to your website.

Tip #3: The people you know are your best resource, so get to know more.

If you don't have a mailing list yet, start one now. Include all of your friends and family. Your mailing list should include everyone's email address as well as physical address. Ask your friends and family to help you get the word out about your website. They'd rather buy art from you than from a stranger. And even if they don't want to buy your art, they'd probably love to help you by passing the word along. Your out-of-town friends and family may have never even seen your artwork, or not since it was hanging on your

mother's refrigerator. Your website gives them an opportunity to not only see your work but to show it to their friends as well.

If you haven't already, start gathering names at every show – and from every customer, past and present. Although it's possible someone will find your site on a search engine, people that know you or have seen your art in person are more likely to visit your website and buy your art.

There may be lots of people who have seen your work at a show and lusted over it, but the timing wasn't right or you'd just sold the piece they wanted. For whatever reason, they haven't bought anything from you – yet. There are also those people who already own one of your works of art and would consider buying another, but since your show only comes to town once a year, they haven't had the chance.

A website is ideal for these people. They have the opportunity to see a large selection of your work – probably more than you could show in a gallery or show. They can contemplate each piece, show the work to their spouse, match colors to their home, take measurements, sleep on it and then review the piece again. Many people are not impulsive buyers and feel too overwhelmed at a show to make an expensive purchase. But in the privacy of their own home, there's a much better chance they'll decide to buy. If they've been pining over your work, and they know you have a website, then when they receive their tax refund, or it's their best friend's birthday, they know where to find you.

Include a guest book on your website.

A guest book on a website is just like a guest book at a show, only automated. People who are visiting your website can sign your guest book and get automatically added to your mailing list. You can use the guest book to send out emails to everyone on your mailing list.

Add your current mailing list to your guest book, and use it as a central place to keep the list. Your guest book should allow you to store emails, edit or delete emails, and send out notices to everyone in it.

Once you have your mailing list, make sure you use it. Send out notices when you've added new art to your site or when you're going to have a show. Let people know that you've just received an award or that you're in a new gallery. I recommend sending out a notice anywhere from once a month to once every 4 months. If you send it more often than that people might start to ignore you. The email does not need to be lengthy. Tell them the good news and then tell them to go see your website for details.

Tip #4: Give something away for free

Once someone is at your site and they like your work, they may still need some encouragement to sign your guest book. Offer them a free gift for signing your guest book. Here are a few gift ideas:

- Have your web designer make a screensaver made from your art. If pictures of your art are rotating on someone's office computer, that's great exposure for you.
- If your art or craft includes a unique technique, offer a free tutorial on how it's done. For example, how to print an image from your computer onto fabric.
- Provide a selection of e-cards (electronic cards) using your images. Let people add their own text and send a card to someone. Make sure the card has your website address so that the receiver can visit your site.

Giving something away can serve you in more ways than one. You encouraged someone to sign your guest book and you made someone happy with a free gift. But most important is that your gift may be advertising your work to people you would not otherwise have reached.

Tip #5: Update your site often

If people have signed your mailing list, chances are they want to see new work as you produce it. If they have been to your site several times and nothing has changed, they'll probably stop visiting. That means you must keep it up to date. It would be good to add new images every month or so.

Most website designers charge by the hour to update your site. One of my clients told me that her website designer was making more money off of her site than she was. Imagine you've just finished a new series and you have clients drooling to see it. You call your web designer, and she says she's really busy right now; she can't get to your stuff for a few weeks. Besides that, it's going to cost several hundred dollars. Wait a minute, that's not going to work for you.

But what can you do? Most artists don't have the technical skills (or interest) to learn programming required to update websites themselves.

There is a solution. Some web designers offer easy-to-use tools that allow you to update your website yourself. When you're looking for a web designer, find one that provides such tools. Better yet, find one that will give you an option; you can update it yourself or they will do it for you.

How much control do you want? Some sites will just let you add images while others will let you customize many aspects of your site. These options may include:

- Add images
- Add and edit text
- Add website pages
- Name pages whatever you want
- Customize the look of the gallery (the page that displays the thumbnails). For example, change the size of the thumbnails.
- Separate your gallery into categories and name each category. For example a painter may have landscapes, faces and abstract paintings while a jeweler may have necklaces, rings and earrings. Make a separate category for each.

If a web designer offers you tools to let you update your site yourself, check out the tools before you buy. They must be very easy-to-use. Make sure you see a demo or try out an online demo. It should also include a tutorial and/or excellent customer service. If

you're not a technical person you need a product that's been designed with someone like you in mind.

Tip #6: Include an events or calendar page.

Your website should include a page that lists all of your shows and galleries for at least several months in advance. What if someone found your website, really likes your work, and wants to see it in person? Maybe you've got a show coming up in a town where they have been planning to take a vacation. The events calendar lets them know where to find you.

In Tip #5 I said that your website should be easy to update. Ideally it should include a special template for events. All you should have to do is type in the place and time – the template formats it for you. The template will make your events page clear, consistent and easy to follow.

Tip # 7: Include a page about you.

If someone is going to make an expensive purchase from your website, give that person the confidence needed to buy. The buyer can't meet you in person, so provide information about you and your art. Include a page that's personal and engaging. What inspires you? Why do you make art? What meaning does it have in your life?

Factual information about you will also boost buyer confidence. Where have you studied art? What galleries are you in? Do you have any well-known collectors?

Tip #8: Make it easy to buy.

Your website doesn't necessarily need to include a shopping cart, but it should make it easy to buy something. For expensive items people may be hesitant to make a purchase without first talking to the artist. That's where an Inquiry Cart is nice. It's similar to a shopping cart – when someone is interested in a piece they add it to an Inquiry Cart. But, rather than purchasing the item online, a notice is sent to the artist about the inquiry. The artist then contacts the customer. The artist knows exactly which

pieces the customer is considering, and can talk the buyer through the final purchasing decision.

Tip #9: Search Engines.

Everyone wants to be on page one of the top search engines. Some people can do it, but not everyone can. I did a search on Google for “Contemporary Painting” and it brought up over 4 million matches.

Your site may show up on Google, but if it’s on page 100, no one is going to find it. Therefore you want it to have a higher ranking. A higher ranking means that your site will show up closer to the top of the list, hopefully within the first three pages. Most searchers don’t go beyond the third page.

Keywords are the key to search engine position. Keywords are the words that people might enter into the search engine if they wanted to find you. You should use your keywords as much as possible all throughout the text on your site. Keywords placed in certain locations on your site have more weight than those in other locations. Getting a high ranking (showing up in the first three pages of search engines) is a science in itself. Any tools or tips your website designer can provide you is a plus.

One of your keywords should be your name. If someone is looking for you by name, there’s a very good chance you’ll show up on page one of the search engines (unless your name is John Smith or something equally common).

There are people who specialize in getting your website a high ranking. If you’re willing to pay for it, there’s a better chance your site will show up.

The fewer people there are using the same keywords, the better your chance of a high ranking in the search engines. So, if you have a unique product or use a unique material, and people enter those keywords in the search engine, you’re more likely to get a higher ranking.

Although showing up on page one of Google would be great, don’t count on people finding you by search engines alone. Do everything else mentioned in this article.

Tip #10: Get other websites to link to your site.

Search engines will favor your website if you are listed on other websites – especially other popular websites. List your website on as many other related sites as you can. There are a number of artist directories. Some are free and some cost a minimal fee. Ask your artist friends which ones are worth paying for. If you belong to any organizations with websites, get listed there. Besides helping you raise your ranking in the search engines, it will provide more avenues for people to find you.

Think about the unique features of your artwork. If you paint flowers, link to botanical sights. If you paint tango dancers, link to tango sites. Email the Webmaster of the site you're interested in linking to and ask if you can do a link exchange. That means you link to their site if they link to yours. This can be a very powerful way to draw people to your site and to increase your ranking in the search engines.

Summary

You have to spend money to make money, but spend it wisely. Find a web designer who is going to build a site that works for you. Your site should include the following features:

- A professional design
- A guest book
- The ability to update your site yourself
- A shopping cart or inquiry cart

Once you have a site with the right tools, it's easy to follow these tips to increase your sales.

Author Bio

Eliana Berlfein, founder of Sidewalk Café Design, is an artist and a web designer. Sidewalk Café Design has just released a new product called *Mocha for Artists*. With *Mocha* you can easily have a custom-looking website that includes all of the tools you need to start selling more art. Visit Eliana's websites at www.mochaforartists.com and www.sidewalkcafesdesign.com .