

TOP TOOLS

FOR MAKERS

7 favorite business tools of Academy of Handmade members

The Academy of Handmade is a community of makers and businesses that support makers. We have many talented members who have picked up tips and tricks along the way in their business journey. We've surveyed a few to find out which tools are their favorite. Enjoy! ([get to know more of our members here!](#))

1.



Name: [Pam Morales](#)

What Business Tool or Trick Is Your Favorite? My favourite and most invaluable tool is the Vend Register App for iPad.

Description of Tool: Vend is a robust POS and inventory tracking software that's easy to customize and quick to setup.

Where to Get It: www.vendhq.com

Cost: They have 4 different pricing plans to suit a variety of needs with the smallest plan being FREE.

Why It Works: There are several iPad POS systems out there but after testing a number of them, Vend worked best for my situation. I have a consignment-based retail model and Vend makes keeping track of stock and variants by supplier very easy.

How to Use It: Because Vend is cloud based, I can use it on any iPad that has the app installed making it really handy for multiple shop locations. If one shop makes a sale, the inventory is updated automatically to all other shops.

2.



Name: Hovey Lee

What Business Tool or Trick Is Your Favorite? Mailchimp

Description of Tool: tool for sending out email marketing campaigns

Where to Get It: mailchimp.com

Cost: free if you have under 2,000 subscribers

Why It Works: It works and it's easy to use just like other similar tools in the market. It lets you send newsletters to your subscribers, track open/click rates, embed signup forms and social media. It's free!

How to Use It: Create email newsletter from scratch or use their templates, real easy.

3.



Name: [Zazu Faure](#)

What business tool/trick is your favorite? Generating custom hangtags, business cards and other printed matter myself using the myriad of online printers (GOTPRINT is a personal favorite).

Tool? Adobe Illustrator Graphic Layout Software

Where to get it? www.adobe.com/illustrator

Cost? varies (I'm still using a version from bundle with Photoshop that I bought 5 years ago for about \$200).

Why it works? How to use it? It's a great program for making professional clean graphic designs. The possibilities are pretty vast. I've stuck with a clean basic design incorporating my logo that I can quickly adapt and update to make very customized hang tags. It gives me the flexibility to economically customize tags for different product lines. I format all tags to standard business card dimensions, but triple up the layout so each card printed is 3 different types of products. With a paper cutter and a hole punch, I get very professional tags at a fraction of conventional printing costs. The investment a good graphic program more than pays for itself. It is so worth the upfront costs.

4.



Name: [Hydrangea Hippo](#)

What Business Tool or Trick Is Your Favorite? Buffer

Description of Tool: Buffer is a social media scheduling tool that works on desktop and mobile and also offers content suggestions daily.

Where to Get It: Free - just download the app (mobile) or go to [buffer.com](#)

Cost: Starts free but paid plans are available - I use the \$50 a month plan

Why It Works: The scheduler is super straightforward. You can shuffle and rearrange posts by dragging and dropping them. You can schedule posts at specific times or drop them into a queue that sends posts at times you predetermine. The bookmarklet scheduler on the desktop works great - you click it and can share any page to any of your connected social networks at any time.

How to Use It: There are three ways to use buffer-- use it on [buffer.com](#) to schedule content to any or all of your social networks, use the mobile device to schedule content from your phone, or use the bookmarklet to schedule directly from any webpage. Additionally, you can use buffer from within Facebook and twitter to schedule FB shares or retweets! It saves me tons of time and I don't have blocks of posts in a row anymore. If I see a story I think my followers will like, I can just drop it into my buffer to share.

5.



Name: [Dave Conrey](#)

What Business Tool or Trick Is Your Favorite? Evernote

Description of Tool: Evernote is my favorite piece of software. Being able to keep my notes, thoughts, random ideas, photos, or whatever I need to keep track of in one place, is invaluable. And because it's both an enterprise software, and cloud based, I can work without wifi if needed, or can update remotely. This is great for those times when I need to write, but don't have access to any Internet connection, but the backup gets made as soon as I'm back online.

Where to Get It: www.evernote.com

Cost: Free to use, but has a premium service that is \$5 a month to start.

Why It Works: Keeps all my notes and digital ephemera organized in a way that's just not possible with other programs. It also has powerful search functionality that allows me to find what I'm looking for. The premium also comes with OCR capability that will turn scanned documents into text so you can search them by the content on the page. I use that function for receipts mostly.

How to Use It: There is no one way to use it, but the best advice I can give is to use it constantly. Get into the habit of tracking your items, and it will become second nature. Then you'll always know where to look for things when you need them.

6.



Name: [Kristen Pumphrey](#)

What Business Tool or Trick Is Your Favorite? Quickbooks Online

Description of Tool: The online version of the classic accounting software

Where to Get It: www.quickbooks.com

Cost: Varies - \$13 - \$30 a month

Why It Works: With the online version of Quickbooks, it's super easy to send invoices to our customers that are easily payable on their end using credit card - no need to keep cards on file!

How to Use It: Quickbooks has a great intuitive interface and easily allows you to track your invoices and do accounting. If you don't want to spring for the monthly subscription fee for the online service, I can also recommend Quickbooks for desktop. There's also free trials you can use to see if it's right for you!

7.



Name: [Sharon Fain](#)

What Business Tool or Trick Is Your Favorite? I keep track of my Instagram stats using Iconosquare (formerly Statigram).

Description of Tool: It's a way to view your Instagram photos and feed, but way better than Instagram's online viewer which doesn't let you search or do very much.

Where to Get It: iconosquare.com

Cost: Totally free! (though I know you will soon have to pay for certain features)

Why It Works: I feel like a phone is terrible for doing a lot of typing and my fingers start to hurt. Iconosquare lets me do those things using a "big girl" keyboard.

How to Use It: It lets me like and comment on photos using my laptop instead of my phone. It also has a fairly robust stats feature so I can see where I am at for the week and for the month. I can also see who has followed and unfollowed me. It also lets me search hashtags where I will go in and like all the photos of people who I think are "my people."