

Customer Service and Sales

Before the Show ... or Tour

A successful event begins with preparation!

Two days before the event gather everything you need so that you will not be stressed for the event. Get a good night's sleep and breakfast every day that you do an event: doing an event is like taking a final exam – you need to be rested and ready to go!

Bring plenty of food, snacks and beverages with you so you won't get stuck in your space and be starving or dying of thirst.

Appearance

Plan your clothes and have them clean and ready for the show. It is easier to be outgoing with customers when you feel presentable. You are an artist so wear what you want to wear, but be mindful of your work and how people will perceive you as the maker. If you make items to wear you should definitely be wearing one of your own creations (be prepared, customers may offer to purchase what you have on!). Bring more than one pair of comfortable shoes so you can change during the day if your feet hurt.

Attitude

Artists and craftspeople spend years developing their work and perfecting their techniques and we think that our work should sell itself, but that's just not true. There is nothing wrong with being a sales person and "selling your work" ... Hollywood's stereotype of the aloof artist is a fantasy! Your attitude and demeanor with the public can make or break your show. You need to show up with a positive attitude and no matter what happens shake it off and put on your smile again.

Set-up

More is not always better. A tidy organized display is better than one that looks like a flea market.

Don't be afraid to leave some back stock out of your display – it can make it more interactive when someone is discussing a certain piece and why they like it – you may have something similar that you can pull out and show to them. Also you can use these pieces for your busy work: re-writing tags, organizing them, or swapping them for the pieces you have out (more on this later).

Make sure you have everything priced. A sure way to not sell something is to not have it priced and then you run the risk of hearing the really tired joke, "Oh is this one free?" Also, people are less likely to try to haggle with you if the price is clearly marked.

Make sure you have a guest book so patrons can join your mailing list. A guest book is one of the most important tools that an artist has. Be sure to mention that you never share your mailing list. Also, tell people that you only email or mail a certain number of times a year. Some people are determined not to get any more email or snail mail so allow them a choice.

SALES

Greeting

Greet everyone quickly with your introduction.

Example: "Hello, my name is _____, and this is my handmade sterling jewelry. If you have any questions please feel free to ask me." Practice your greeting before hand so it will become second nature. Figure out what works best for you, make it meaningful but not too long and drawn out.

Relax

Once you have greeted people give them some time and space to look around. If you continue to try and talk to people soon after they enter your space they may feel like you are pushy and will protest, "I'm just looking!" and they may even leave.

To combat this, make sure you have some busy work you can do so that customers feel like they can browse without pressure. A nervous artist with nothing to do can make for a very tense situation. The worst thing you can do is stand there, arms folded, watching your customers like a hawk. Show goers will quickly move along to get away from energy that makes them feel uncomfortable.

Some good busy work includes; cleaning, taking notes, pricing work, or rearranging. Don't be afraid to straighten your paintings over and over again ... the customers won't notice that it's the 300th time you've adjusted them that day!

Under no circumstance should you do anything too engrossing; tasks like recreational reading, surfing the web, or talking on the phone send the signal that you are busy. Of course you want to appear somewhat busy, but not so busy that customers are afraid to interrupt you. If you need to take a call step outside of your booth or space so people will not feel unwelcome.

Engage

Wait long enough and the customer will ask you a question. Now is the time to start talking to them! Be generous with information and try to avoid one-word answers. Do not be afraid to self promote, you should be proud of your work and believe in it whole-heartedly; if you don't who else will?

An example conversation might go something like this:

The customer asks, "are these acrylics?"

Now you could answer “yes.” But a better answer might be,

“Wow, that’s very observant of you! I prefer to use acrylics because I find that that the texture and color range I achieve suits my style better than any other medium.”

See how much more information you just gave?

At this point you shouldn’t be afraid to give your customer your full attention. If you ignore people they will think you are rude and not worth their time.

On the studio tour this is so important, you will become close friends with all your studio mates and when things get slow you might get into a great conversation and it can be so hard to stop talking when the customers come in, but that is why you are there in the first place. Keep things light so you can easily switch gears when a visitor arrives.

This doesn’t mean you should clam up when customers are around, but be sure to put the customers first. This includes when they are looking at your studio mates work ... a gushing comment from another artist can often make the sale, so be sure to learn all you can about your studio mates work.

Treat customers with respect and sincerity

A genuine, sincere interaction will make more of an impression than a perfect set-up or a big flashy postcard – There are famous artists whose work I have always found amazing and yet when I visited their booths they did not speak to me or engage me in any way – guess how I feel about their work now!

Bargaining

Bargaining is not a negative reflection of you nor of your work ... it is far more likely that a customer that asks for a discount is the kind of person that always asks for a discount. When this happens (and it will), explain calmly why your work is worth the price. Describe the unique features of your work, the tremendous care you take to produce it, but above all, do not get upset. Try to stay positive ... this can be a difficult time to control your emotions, but it is vital that you do!

If they insist, you can try turning the conversation to your personal touch and the “value added” aspect of the sale. Make your customer know that they are special as you describe the gift box or the bubble wrap you will use to protect their purchase, your free repair policy, or your hassle free returns. Show them any literature that would accompany their piece: your care cards or certificate of authenticity.

Above all, remember that any time you sell something for less than the stated price you are encouraging this behavior and they expect even more concessions with the next artist they encounter. You must honor yourself and your fellow craftsmen by standing firm. If it helps, remind yourself (silently) that customers willing to pay full

price are out there, and if you sell the piece for less now you will not only miss out on a better sale later ... but you are dishonoring the customers that paid full price without complaint.

This does not mean you can't hold sales or do special deals ... but it has to be on your terms. Posting a sign that says "Show Special: Mugs \$20 Each, or Three for \$50" is a lot different than rewarding a pushy person who pesters you with "if I buy these mugs can I have a third one for half price?"

Inform and Educate

The more people know about you and your technique, the more success you will have. People are not just buying art, they are buying an experience, your story, a piece of you. Do not be afraid to tell them about yourself as an artist and share what inspires you to make your art.

Do not get disheartened when positive interactions with patrons do not immediately turn into sales. Some people need to see an artist's work several times before they are ready to make a purchase but that does not mean that you failed to make an impression. If a person likes your work and enjoyed talking to you they will be sure to stop by whenever they see you at an event and eventually they will make a purchase.

The biggest benefit of yearly events like the studio tour is that they provide a standing date with the art lovers in your community. The people who visit your studio this year will return next year and the year after. They will be excited to be the first to see your new work and may even become collectors!

Be sure to have an easy way that visitors can contact you after the event: a website and business cards. They may not buy a piece now, but they may want to call weeks or even months later to see if a special piece is still available. If you do commission work, let people know what you can and can't do!

Planting Seeds

Keep in mind that there are a thousand positive things that can happen as a result of an event... and only one of them is a sale!

Remember that getting out there and showing your work is the best way to build your business. You are laying a firm groundwork, and you will reap the benefits in the future provided you stay positive and keep growing.

Why DO Shows?

- You are getting your work out there and getting feedback
- You are making connections with clientele, other artists AND learning about other opportunities!
- It's an ideal form of market research
- Sales
- Future sales
- Teaching opportunities
- Commissions
- It's fun!
- Listen to the people who like your work – you can learn a lot!

Do's and Don'ts

- Do not sit down – If you look tired or bored no one will buy your work.
- Keep busy – Don't just stand there.
- Avoid using phone or computer and leave your book at home.
- Never say anything negative in your space, this includes complaining that you are not making any money!
- Avoid private conversations ... keep things light and focused on your art.
- Don't take down your work until the last possible minute ... often people will arrive at the very end, and they are often the people with the most incentive to buy.
- And most importantly, never ever take anything personally ... you can decide to dwell on a rude or cruel comment and let it ruin your attitude or you can let it go and get back to building your business.

Further Study

If you are interested in more sales tips you can get Bruce Baker's 3 CD set at

<http://bbakerinc.com/>

Many artists swear by his techniques and his upbeat attitude and his can do spirit is infectious!

Another good resource is Alyson Stanfield. She has a variety of books and classes covering all aspects of the artist life, especially marketing and sales. Her website is:

<http://www.artbizcoach.com/>

She also has a free podcast. Although it is no longer being updated, there is a tremendous amount of information in the archives, just do a search for "Art Marketing Action" and start listening!