



Ecommerce for Artists

An integrated, modular curriculum developed collaboratively by CraftNet member schools and artists as an introductory guide to establishing an entrepreneurial Web presence. Created with the generous support of the Appalachian Regional Commission.

INTRODUCTION

Description

Ecommerce for Artists introduces artists to the fundamentals of developing an online business in art while providing information needed to build a presence on the Web. It is designed as a tool to help teachers working with artists in developing their business skills and for artists who want to learn more about using the Web as one of the resources available to sell their art.

Developed by a working group of CraftNet artists and educators (with project support from the Appalachian Regional Commission), this guide is structured around 100 questions that community-based artists likely would ask as they pursue the overarching goal of establishing a vibrant presence for their art-based business on the Web. It also provides a way for these artists to create some of the materials they will need for their initial foray into ecommerce, even as they are just beginning to learn about this important resource.

Artists generally approach business in a different way from other entrepreneurs. In most instances, they already have created their product and now are looking for ways to market and sell it. This approach differs markedly from how business is most often taught in the classroom—wherein a foundation of feasibility is researched first, a business plan written, funding obtained, and finally the product created. But those classic strategies rarely work well for artists, who typically show scant interest in business methods unless presented in a context that resonates in harmony with their own art-making strategies and eclectic lifestyle.

In fact, to some artists, ecommerce may appear at first to be an enticing shortcut for selling their work without ever having to leave their studios where they make their art. However, while ecommerce is a valuable tool for building their businesses, artists and their teachers both need to keep in mind the complexity of entrepreneurship. Ecommerce is only one of a number of tools required to launch and sustain a successful business. Developing a presence on the Web does not remove the need for artists to be part of a larger community and provide education of how we all interact with our local area or world.

Goals

Understanding the need for artists to have the skills to tap into the powerful resource of the Web, our collaborative team of educators and artists has designed this guide to accomplish the following objectives:

- Provide teachers with modules for use in teaching artists in the classroom, in informal workshops, and online. In the form of questions and answers, these modules provide information, activities and suggested discussion topics to aid in the learning process.
- Provide answers to questions that frequently arise as an artist considers whether or not to take the plunge into the ecommerce world. Artists can use the questions-and-answer modules in this guide to help shape their approach to ecommerce.
- Underline the importance of ecommerce to artists, while at the same time pointing out the need to develop a broad range of business skills in order to ensure success in the business of art.

Audience

Specifically, this curriculum is targeted for use by:

- Instructors at community and technical colleges who work closely with artists.
- Arts Councils whose constituents are eager for entrepreneurship training.
- Cooperative extension agents who wish to introduce these concepts to their clients.
- Individual artists as a guide for their self-directed study of entrepreneurship strategies.

Course Objectives

The users of this course can expect a multifaceted learning experience that will:

- Help artists develop their plan for developing an ecommerce business.
- Provide information about writing effective content and developing strong designs in support of establishing a strong Web presence.
- Provide basic information about what to expect in constructing and maintaining an ecommerce site, including building an increased volume of traffic to the site.
- Introduce the various methods by which artists can establish an ecommerce business and develop sales online, including aspects of customer service.
- Provide information about establishing secure and legal online sales transactions.
- Help students develop critical thinking skills.

Course Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this guide, the learner will:

- Have completed the basic planning requisite for establishing an online presence.
- Demonstrate an understanding of various methods to sell online.
- Identify small business management resources that fit with the individual artist's plan.
- Exhibit an understanding of Internet sales requirements.
- Demonstrate knowledge of customer service issues.
- Demonstrate knowledge of order fulfillment as it relates to production and customer service.

Course Requirements

Basic requirements for tackling the learning assignments in this course include:

- A computer with Internet access, preferably high-speed DSL.

- Materials and records already developed by the artist to build their business.
- A body of work ready to sell.

Content Modules

This guide considers broad questions like:

- Web presence feasibility.
- Hard costs.
- Time investment.
- Other options.

Specifically, the complete curriculum includes an Introduction, 11 Content Modules, and an Instructor’s Guide. The Content Modules, whether taken individually or as a sequential set, pose an integrated series of 100 learning questions that provide a comprehensive look at the fundamental steps an artist should take toward establishing a viable arts-based business presence on the Web. Those 100 learning questions, organized by Content Module, are listed immediately below:

MODULE 1: Start Here to Plan

Why should I have a presence on the Web?

How will my life change if I have a website?

If I don’t want to handle my website, is it feasible that a member of my family might run the ecommerce side of my arts business for me?

I don’t want this venture into ecommerce to take time from my art. What kind of time commitment am I making?

What does that word “branding” mean, why is it important, and what does it have to do with having a website?

Okay, so I am convinced I need to have a Web presence. What should I expect from developing that part of my business?

What is (are) my goal(s) for developing a Web presence?

What is the first thing I need to do to start developing a Web presence? And...if you say it involves doing research, why do I need to check out my competition?

MODULE 2: Lay the Basic Foundation

Do I need my own website or should I develop a Web presence through a portal? And, for that matter, should I include my website in a portal, or should I just have a page accessed through a website?

What is a “portal,” and what role it could play in developing a Web presence for my art?

What is a “domain name,” and how do I secure one?

How do I pick a domain name?

What does “hosting” mean? Is it the same as a “server,” and how do I find a reliable one?

What are the major components that I need to be sure to include on my website?

What is a “sitemap?”

MODULE 3: Write Content that Engages

My art needs to stand alone. Why do I need to be concerned about “explaining” it? Does my website have to be written in a certain way?

As part of marketing, how much of my own personal story should I tell on the website?

What are the “Five W’s” and what do they have to do with writing content for the Web?

How do I use words to interest people in my work?

Why are “key words” important in writing for the Web?

Do I need to find someone else to read and proof what I have written?

MODULE 4: Develop a Design to Entice

What elements need to be included to make a good website?

What is a “template,” and what does it have to do with the Web and me?

What are “typefaces and fonts?” Why are they critical to a website?

What do I need to know about the psychology of color as I work on my site?

How can I use line, shape, and texture to add interest?

How do I position the different components of my site?

How should I organize my website pages so that it is easy for a customer to navigate the site?

Why is it important to avoid clutter?

Should I have advertising on my website?

What kind of links should I have on my site?

MODULE 5: Create Images to Make an Impact

How much of my work should I put online?

How do I take good pictures of my work?

What do I need to do to ensure good lighting for my photography?

What do I need to do if I want to scan a photograph taken with a film camera?

What do I need to know if I am thinking about hiring a photographer?

What is a thumbnail and how can I use it?

Why do I need to know about *jpegs* and *gifs*?

What is the difference between file size and physical size, and why is that important?

How do I upload my pictures?

MODULE 6: DIY vs. Hiring a Professional Web Designer

So far, this all sounds too complex for me. Should I really create my own website or should I hire somebody?

What should I expect of a Web designer?

If I decide to hire a Web designer, how do I find a good one?

How much does it cost to design, implement, and sustain a website?

MODULE 7: Add Income through Sales

I have no idea of how to price my art. Where do I start?

What is a call to action?
How do I take orders and sell online?
How do I do order fulfillment?
How do people pay for things they have bought on a website?
How do I make a website secure for customer payment?
Do I have to pay monthly merchant fees to use the services of Visa, Master Card, and Discover Card?
Should I have a shopping cart on my website?
How do I put a shopping cart on the website?
What about sales tax for items sold on the Internet?
Is a handling charge something I should include in the final cost?
When I sell an object, do I take down the photo or leave it up, marked "SOLD"?
Do I constantly have to check my website for orders, or will it notify me somehow?
How many methods of shipping do I need to offer?
How can I use Web forms to build my online business?
Instead of all this, could I just sell my work on eBay or Etsy?
How do successful artists keep business records of their online business?
Should I stay or should I go...or, how do I know if my ebusiness is working?

MODULE 8: Put the Customer at the Center

What is customer service, and how do I provide it with an online business?
What if the customer calls and says the item they bought never arrived or that it arrived broken?
What if the customer wants to return the item because after seeing it, they don't like it?
Who pays for return shipping if a customer returns a piece and I agree to replace it?
So you keep saying that I need a return/shipping policy. What makes a good return policy?
As a service to my online customers, should I send out an e-newsletter?
If so, how do I set up enrollment?
Should I charge for a "membership" to receive a newsletter?
How can I make sure that my site is accessible to the widest audience, and why is that important?
I have heard the term "target market." What does that mean, and do I need to worry about that?
In order better to meet my customer's needs, should I accept commissions?

MODULE 9: Ensure Protection for You and Your Customer

How can I protect (copyright) my work that I post online?
Do I really need a lawyer for this whole process?
Should I watermark images to protect them?
If I don't watermark my images, are there other ways of protecting them?
If images are so easily co-opted or stolen on the Web, should I even post high-quality photos of my work?
I really thought that everything on the Web was available for public use, and so I regularly use information from the Web. What is the rule for use?

Is there any liability for me if a customer's private information is compromised?

MODULE 10: Increase Traffic

What is traffic? (Let's assume that we aren't referring to *automobile* traffic!)

Why do I want to make my site "sticky?"

What then can I do to make my website one that people want to visit again and again?

How often do I need to introduce new work on my website?

Do I need to advertise or market my website in some way?

With all the electronic communication around, does traditional promotion still have a role to play in promoting my site?

It seems to me that using electronic promotion might be less expensive. What techniques are the easiest and most inexpensive to use?

How does linking work?

How do I get Google to see my website and list it near the top of its search engine returns?

Do I need a blog, and how do I use it?

In addition to what you already have mentioned, are other ways to promote my site and build traffic?

What are some commonly made mistakes that adversely impact traffic to a site?

MODULE 11: Look at the Whole Picture

What else do I need to know about running a successful business?

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

RESOURCE LIST

CREDITS

MODULE 1: Start Here to Plan

Why should I have a presence on the Web?

Growing as an artist has required you to invest in a number of resources – including your time. You also have used a number of tools in creating your art. The same is true of building a successful business in art. You need to utilize a number of tools, one of which is developing a presence on the Web.

Taking the time to create a website is part of reviewing your whole plan of building your business. Just as your art is created out of a rhythm, so will your business. You need to start defining how you manage your business and how you fulfill your customer's expectations of you.

However, merely having a presence on the Web is not a guarantee for a successful business, nor should it be your only tool in building a business. You might want to remember that research shows that it may take a visitor up to 12 visits to your site, in addition to personal contact, before that person will conduct a business transaction on your site.

A website is, nonetheless, a very powerful tool and does provide you with a number of advantages:

- **Exhibit.** In our dot.com world, having a website helps you to build credibility. Nothing beats a website for providing visible proof that “I have arrived and am open for business.” Galleries representing you also can use it to show samples of your work to potential clients.
- **Equalize.** The Web is a great equalizer. Even a microbusiness can develop a powerful website that can creatively compete with a large corporation in putting products in front of a customer.
- **Market.** Developing a Web presence can be more effective in reaching more customers than printing flyers to post on the bulletin board at the local grocery store. Only a handful of people will notice a printed flyer on a bulletin board, and the chances of someone taking it down or posting over are great. What you have spent designing it, printing it, and posting will have been wasted. On the other hand, a website may be seen by thousands of potential customers.
- **Contacts.** Having a website gives you the ability to maintain contact with previous customers. It provides a vehicle for them to continue to “visit” you and view your new work.
- **Branding.** In an increasingly competitive world, a strong Web presence can help you develop a business that is uniquely different from the rest of the crowd.

ACTIVITY: Visit three websites and analyze each in terms of the above points.

How will my life change if I have a website?

This is a great question. When you make a commitment to a website, it is an extension of making a commitment to your business or your art. You are making an online pledge with your expanded audience, and you have to hold true to that. That pledge includes:

- A website needs to be maintained—and that requires an ongoing investment of your time. Customers typically are turned off by an out-of-date website. So, added into your already likely overcrowded schedule, you or someone else will have to budget time for this routine maintenance.
- If you have open studio hours and advertise that on your website, you are bound to observe the hours you say you are open.
- When you venture into ecommerce, you put yourself into a world like Amazon.com. In that world, customers will expect to receive their order in a reasonably short time. Transacting sales on the Web raises the bar for your business performance.
- Informality can no longer be the mode. You must professionalize your interactions with your customers.
- Your website needs to be integrated into your overall plan for your whole business. It cannot stand apart as just one separate little project.
- Realistically, don't expect a huge return in dollars from a website, but consider any extra as a plus. Don't have unreasonable expectations. There are many unknowns.

If I don't want to manage my website, is it feasible that a member of my family might run the ecommerce side of my arts business for me?

If you have a family member with a talent or interest in this area, your idea could work. However, you will need to face the typical challenges associated with working with family members. Those challenges will require clear communication and a clear understanding of everyone's expectations.

I don't want this venture into ecommerce to take time away from my art. What kind of time commitment am I making?

It is understandable that you would be concerned about an ecommerce business taking time away from your art, which you obviously enjoy. In weighing the time commitment, you should consider the following:

- More time will need to be dedicated at the front-end of the project. For example, you will have to commit some time to sketch a verbal picture of what you want on the website, review its ongoing development, and test the website. If you are reluctant to spend time on the front end, you may not maximize the full potential of the website.
- The aggregate number of hours that you spend in going to craft shows needs to be weighed against the time that you invest in your ecommerce business.
- Any marketing takes time.
- The more business you transact online, the more time you will spend managing the website.

After considering all these points, if you don't think you want to take any time away from your art and yet you understand the need to have a website, you will need to hire someone to develop the site.

What does that word "branding" mean, why is it important, and what does it have to do with having a website?

Branding is the process of showing your potential customers that you offer them the best choice of products or services. By branding your product, you ensure that your product and any images, logo or words that you use convey a unified message that connects with the buyer emotionally, motivates your potential buyer, and builds customer loyalty. A website is an excellent additional tool to use in creating your own distinctive brand.

For more information about branding, please visit:

<http://marketing.about.com/cs/brandmktg/a/whatisbranding.htm>

ACTIVITY: Investigate how three different artists have branded their artwork successfully in terms of consistency, emotional impact, motivation, and building loyalty.

Okay, so I am convinced I need to have a Web presence. What should I expect from developing that part of my business?

If you develop a strong Web presence, then the following are reasonable expectations:

- Increased market exposure.
- A credible professional image.
- Increased opportunities for branding your art.
- Increased sales. Berea College reports that their website accounts for 25 percent of their total sales.
- An easier way of showing your customers new work.

In short, the answer to what you can expect from an ecommerce business will depend on the website that you create and how effectively you learn to use that tool. Increases will be proportional to what you invest in advertising your website—whether through dollars or networking.

Although having a Web presence is an important tool, it is important not to expect that the Web will serve all your business needs. It probably won't provide:

- Instant riches.
- A substantial increase in first-time sales. Rather than expecting quick sales to first-time buyers, artists are finding that the Web is better used for strengthening customer relations with individuals they already have met.
- More time to spend just on your art because now you will have a quick and easy way to sell your work.
- A comprehensive approach to marketing. Your Web presence is only one part of your whole marketing plan.

As a final note, you can't expect to develop and launch a website and then never return to it. You will need to change and tweak your site, to update it, to correct all errors, and to amend and improve it as you receive feedback from your customers.

ACTIVITY: Contact and interview one artist in your area. Choose an artist who has developed a Web presence and ask about their expectations and how those expectations were or were not met through the website.

What are my goals for developing a Web presence?

Clearly setting down your goals for your Web presence is an important first step. Setting goals will help to ensure that your own expectations are in line with reality. Because they are based on needs and expenses, clearly defined goals also will help you achieve the result you seek in your business.

For example, it is unrealistic to expect that a website will solve all your problems in marketing your art or that, upon posting your website, you immediately will become financially successful. On the other hand, if your goals are clear and realistic, they will help you to stay focused in how you go about developing your Web presence. It is important that you write your goals down...and then keep that sheet of paper handy as you work on your site. It will remind you of what you want to achieve.

Achievable goals that you might consider are to:

- Provide my customers with easy access to my newest pieces of art.
- Reach a new group of potential customers.
- Make enough income from my art to provide a second part-time income.
- Develop ongoing relationships with my customers.
- Help people better understand the process that I use to create my art.
- Build my professional persona.
- Help people more easily find my work and my studio.
- Provide a schedule of future shows.

In developing your goals, you also will need to consider your audience. You will be developing your Web presence for a particular type of customer, and you will need to clearly identify that customer. That is an important part of building a business.

ACTIVITY: Imagine your prospective customer. For example: Where do they live? What do they wear? What do they do in their spare time? This portrait is important, because it informs how you will build your website.

ACTIVITY: Write your goals for your Web presence. Try to make these goals as specific as possible. Avoid goals that read simply, "To make me more successful."

What is the first thing I need to do to start developing a Web presence? And...if you say it involves doing research, why do I need to check out my competition?

Remember the old cautionary, "Don't reinvent the wheel?" Part of any successful business is doing market research. This stage is the research and development part of your endeavor and will help you shape the kind of website you want to develop. It also is how you can then position your business in the marketplace. If you can offer visitors to your website

something that your competition doesn't, you will have a better chance of drawing and holding visitors.

It is a wise use of your time to visit and study websites developed by your competition—to see how other artists build their businesses. This study saves you time and money if you learn from your competitors' mistakes and successes.

As you visit these websites, pretend that you are a potential customer and ask yourself:

- Does the site make you feel good, like you can trust the business?
- Does the site load quickly? Or does it take forever, making it very tempting to move on to another site?
- Is it boring?
- Are there obvious mistakes in grammar or spelling?
- Is the site easy to navigate and can you find what you are looking for?
- Is the site missing important information?
- What about the site really appealed to you?
- Does the site have items for sale...and if so, is the process easy to understand?
- Is the website easy to find and do key words help you find it?
- What specifically about the website makes the visitor want to return (or not return)?

As you visit different sites, keep notes about what you liked and what you didn't like about them. Take notes about potential features that you think they may have missed. The idea is to form an idea of how you can build your presence to fill a niche or present your art in a compelling way that draws and keeps customers.

ACTIVITY: Find and research the websites of three artists. Then analyze each in terms of the questions provided above.

MODULE 2: Lay the Basic Foundation

Do I need my own website or should I develop a Web presence through a portal? And, for that matter should I include my website in a portal, or should I just have a page accessed through a website?

A website is an independent destination, while a portal is a website that is a gateway for the customer to get to a number of businesses or services. In other words, the portal is not restricted to one artist or one business. In fact, in some ways, it could be compared to a shopping mall.

When making up your mind, consider the following:

- The portal can help the visitor find your art more easily.
- The portal may not allow you to the opportunity to create a highly individualized presence.
- There may be a difference in cost to you.
- A portal can be a way to start building a Web presence, without the hassles of developing and maintaining a separate website.

What is a “portal,” and what role it could play in developing a Web presence for my art?

Imagine an online shopping mall—a community of businesses and services grouped together to more efficiently draw the customer through a consistent look and multiple services. The portal is the access point to that resource. A portal can also provide an easier access for customers to your page or website.

Examples of portals are:

- Southern Highland Craft Guild: www.southernhighlandguild.org
- Arkansas Arts Council Artist Registry: www.arkansasarts.com/programs/registry
- Wholesale Crafts: www.wholesalecrafts.com

ACTIVITY: Visit one stand-alone website and one portal. Determine the differences between the two sites. Do you see pluses and minuses for each?

What is a “domain name,” and how do I secure one?

A domain name is often referred to as a “Web address,” but it is probably more correct to compare it to a telephone number. The name itself ends with an extension, most commonly either .com or .net. Because most people are used to using .com, that extension is preferable. However, if the domain name you’d like to register is not available with .com, try to obtain it with .net. Once you register a domain name, that name cannot be used by anyone else. Domain names are usually registered for one to 10 years, and, if desired, can be renewed or transferred to a different owner.

Many desirable domain names already have been taken, but it is still possible to come up with a name that is easy to find and remember. However, it is important to be sure that the

name you come up with has not already been registered. To check on the availability of a domain name, go to www.whois.net.

Whether or not you need to obtain a domain name depends on your goals for a Web presence. If your goal is to post a number of photographs of your artwork as an introduction, you may not need to register a domain name. You could just post your images to a photo-sharing website, like www.Flickr.com. However, if you want to build credibility by developing your own unique Web presence, a domain name is essential.

To find a qualified domain registration agent and to check prices, go to www.icann.org/en/registrars/accredited-list.html. Another option is that your Web host may register your domain. You might want to check a site like www.godaddy.com for this kind of service. Once you have decided upon an agent for registering your domain name, you will need to provide such information as your name, address, phone number, and email address. It is worth shopping around, because prices vary. However, you should be able to register a domain for around \$10 a year. Another option, if you are working with a professional Web designer, is to have that person register the domain name.

How do I pick a domain name?

A domain name is important because it needs to be tied to your business and its brand. In short, it is how people will know you—and find you—on the Web. Once you have selected a name and registered it, changing it isn't a wise marketing move because of the recognition factor. You may want to use your own name, although this choice may not be the easiest for customers to find. Or you may want to pay attention to what names will be easiest for search engines to find.

For example, Barking Spider Pottery (<http://barkingspiderpottery.com>) is a business name that does not contain the names of either of the two artists who create the pottery. It is, however, quite memorable.

For more information on choosing a domain name, visit:

- <http://ezinearticles.com/?Domain-Name---How-To-Pick-One&id=40294>
- <http://ezinearticles.com/?How-To-Pick-A-Domain-Name-That-Works&id=898519>

ACTIVITY: Brainstorm at least three domain names that could work for your website. Then analyze the viability of each.

What does “hosting” mean? Is it the same as a “server,” and how do I find a reliable one?

A Web host is a business that provides space on a server, which is a computer system that provides 24/7 access to your website and others. You store the files for your website on the server, which has an assigned number that allows another computer hooked to the Internet to find your site. When a potential customer types your Web address into the browser, it goes to the server and asks for the webpage, which is then loaded into the surfer's browser. (For more information, visit sites such as <http://www.ironspider.ca/website/webhosting>.)

As you may guess, this service costs money to set up and maintain. Therefore, a host will charge you a fee for the space on the server. The prices for this service vary widely—from several dollars a month to over a thousand dollars a month.

What a host can offer is a range of services, such as allowing you to set up an email account, such as info@myartbusiness.com. Before you pick the host best for you, you need to consider a number of things, including:

- Does the company offer technical support?
- Can you reach them by phone?
- Does it offer a high bandwidth to support the number of visitors to your site?
- Are the reviews online positive? (Search reviews of the company online to answer this question.)
- Do they require that your website display advertisements as a way of offsetting expense?

Sometime a Web designer will have recommendations for stable, secure hosts. Or, you might ask other artists you know about what providers they use as a host for their Web sites. Some people prefer to use a host located in their local area, while other individuals utilize hosts located thousands of miles away.

ACTIVITY: Research at least three hosting organizations and compare their services and costs.

What are the major components that I need to be sure to include on my website?

The cardinal rule to remember here is that creating a Web presence requires you to pay attention to what your customer needs. What will they gain from visiting your website?

To start out, you might want to make a list of all the things that your customer may want to find by visiting your site. For example, if trying to sell art quilts, you might want to include:

- Great images of your work.
- Your story.
- If your work is for sale, the prices.
- Payment method.
- Security of the site.
- Description of the quilts.
- The process you use in creating your quilts.
- Return policy.
- Shipping.

In more general terms, you will want to consider how include the following:

- A homepage—The first place where your visitor will usually land. Don't try to crunch all your information onto this one page. It is like a cover page, an entry point for the visitor to enter your site.
- Content pages—These exist to be read and looked at. They need to be attractive and easy to read!
- Contact information—This page gives your visitors easy ways to get in touch with you.
- FAQs—"Frequently Asked Questions" are questions that your customers may ask about navigating your website or completing a sale, or that you previously may have been asked in-person at a craft show. FAQs save you and your visitors a lot of time by providing customers with quick information.
- Action Page—This page asks your visitor to take some kind of action, whether to complete a sales transaction or contact you for more information.
- Links—Web addresses for related sites or those that may simply be of interest to the customers visiting your website. These links should be "hot," so that clicking on them will take the visitor to the linked website.

There are a number of websites that offer additional advice on what features you might want to include on your own website. They include sites such as <http://expert-webmasters.com> or www.ideasblog.com.

ACTIVITY: Make a list of the activities that you would like potential customers to do when they visit your site.

What is a "sitemap"?

A sitemap is a picture of your organizational plan for the website. It shows the different pages and how they relate to each other. It is truly a map of what your website will look like. Drawing a site map of your pages will help you to keep your site clean and tidy...in the process helping your visitor to navigate its pages successfully and not become lost in a maze. A site map is invaluable whether you or a Web designer actually creates your site.

How you organize your site must be easily understood by your potential customer. Thus, the sitemap could be called the outline or blueprint for your site. For example, a listing of your different fiber arts products shouldn't be placed under your "About Us" page. Instead, you might want to have a page apiece for "Wall Hangings," "Table Runners," and "Handbags," each one located under an overarching category entitled "Fiber Art."

Software like Inspiration, Visio, or even Microsoft Word are tools that can help you create the visual branching map of your website. Or if you think better with pencil and paper, start by creating a bubble chart of your ideas linked by lines showing the hierarchy of your site.

ACTIVITY: Draw a site map of how you would like to organize your website. If this does not come easily for you, practice by diagramming a sitemap for an existing website that you like.

MODULE 3: Write Content that Engages

My art needs to stand alone. Why do I need to be concerned about “explaining” it?

You are right; strong art, regardless of medium, is timeless. However, selling fine handcraft often is problematic because of competition from mass-produced items and cheaply produced foreign imports. We all know the story of the issues that arise when your needs in pricing meet your customer’s pocketbook.

Your success in marketing your art depends in large part on customers who understand the process and benefits of owning a piece of fine handcraft. Each artist needs to be part of a growing nationwide movement to increase the public’s interest, understanding, appreciation, and support of fine handcraft.

You can do this by telling the story about:

- You the artist. (See question, below, “How much of my own personal story should I tell?”)
- Your process of creating your art. Explaining the time involved in creating a beaded handbag or the skill involved in choosing natural plants for dyeing the fiber in a tapestry adds value to your art. It illustrates the difference between mass-produced and one-of-a-kind.
- How your art fits in a larger picture. Don’t be afraid to place your art in a bigger picture—to use it to help tell the whole craft story.

Over time, if each artist tells these stories, they will have an impact upon the targeted likely customers...and over time, these customers will become more informed and supportive in their purchases. Look upon this storytelling as an investment.

ACTIVITY: Brainstorm a list of points that you would like to include in the stories you will tell. An easy way to do this is to draw three columns on a sheet of paper. At the top of each column write “My Story,” “My Process,” and “The Bigger Picture.” Then jot in each column some details and ideas that could help in writing that particular story.

Does my website have to be written in a certain way?

How your website is written determines to a large degree how your site will succeed in building a presence on the Web. You need to look at things through your customers’ perspective regarding what they want to learn or do when they visit your site.

What you write needs to be:

- Concise.
- Easily and quickly read. Because people want to save time, your site needs to cater to that desire. You do not want to force a potential customer to have to wade through pages of long, wordy text. If you try this, the person will probably quickly give up and go on to another site.
- Informative.

- Possibly entertaining, but not overly clever.
- Well organized so that your work is easy for the customer to find.

Writing for your website is not the same as writing an essay for English 101. There are some things that you can do to shape your writing to make it more “website readable.” These strategies include:

- Use headlines to separate your content into more readable chunks and to summarize the contents of the site. The reason that newspapers use headlines is that it helps the reader quickly scan the paper and decide what to skip and what to read. People do the same thing with websites, because the headlines also help to create interest. Remember that these headlines also will help search engines look through your site, so you want to make sure that important words are placed in your headlines.
- Use links that take your reader to another part of the page or site when clicked on. These links are underlined and appear in a different color. Your potential customer can click on them as a shortcut to another section of your site.
- Use images to add interest and to break up the written content. Images are a key feature in your site. And, don’t forget that images aren’t limited to photographs. Logos and patterns also comprise the visual makeup of your site. Find out more about images in the section below.
- Utilize lists to provide readers with succinct information. If you write long paragraphs, the reader’s attention will wander. Lists and short paragraphs are better to keep your reader’s attention from wandering.

As part of marketing, how much of my own personal story should I tell on the website?

Your personal story is an integral part of the value that you add when you market and sell your art.

People who buy craft often want to identify with the artist and vicariously derive pleasure by knowing about you, your studio, how you make your art, and the place where you live. They may want to learn about the history of your place as well as the background of your experiences there. Consider the following:

- Is your studio a converted barn?
- Does it overlook the mountains or a river?
- What is in your viewshed as you create your art?
- What are the themes and overarching message to be found in your work?
- What about your family, your pets, or your sources of inspiration would provide your customer with something that they can share with others when showing your work?

Those are all factors that are part of what you create. Because we are all creatures of story, your personal narrative adds to the value of your work.

ACTIVITY: Write several paragraphs about yourself and your art. Be sure to include for the potential customer specific examples that make you and your art more particular and tangibly real.

What are the “Five W’s,” and what do they have to do with writing content for the Web?

The Five W’s are Who, What, When, Why, and Where. The answers to these very basic questions are probably the key answers that your potential customers are seeking.

- *What* are you offering for sale?
- *Who* are you?
- *Why* should the customer buy your work?
- *When* is your work available?
- *Where* is your work available for purchase?

These five questions form the basis for how newspaper journalists write a story. As you write for your website, you need to think like a newspaper journalist. You must first grab your reader’s attention, and then you need to get straight to the point.

In addition to answering the Five W’s, your introduction is also important. A successful journalist creates a news story based on the inverted pyramid. The most important information is provided first, and then, in decreasing order of importance, the other points of the story. Your introduction should follow the same rule, with the first sentence the most important. Your reader will probably only allow you a paragraph or two to get your point across before they switch to a different site if they find your writing to be boring. You need to grab their attention straight out of the box!

How do I use words to interest people in my work?

There really are no magical words for holding people’s interest. Words like “free” or “guaranteed” may be considered “power” words, but they don’t guarantee that your reader will believe you or even remain interested. Writing involves building trust, and one of the best ways to build trust is to avoid grammar and spelling errors. Use a spell checker and a style guide like *The Chicago Book of Style*.

Use active verbs to hold your reader’s interest. Consider the following two sentences:

- “This piece of art work was created by Jill Doe.”
- “Jill Doe created this piece of art work.”

In the first sentence, the verb is inactive and as a result not compelling. The second sentence has an active verb that pulls the reader along. Beware the use of *be* verbs (*is*, *are*, *was*, and *were*) because they are passive.

Remember to describe and not to tell. That means, don’t write, “My pottery is amazingly functional.” Why should the reader trust your judgment? What makes your pottery amazing and functional? If you describe, the customer has the chance to make up their own mind. A stronger sentence would be, “These hand-thrown bowls hold both hot and cold food and are dishwasher safe.”

Don't rely on any kind of jargon. Saying that a bracelet is made with ".925 silver content, 18-gauge round wire, using a .25 diameter mandrel" doesn't further the description of your hand-wrought, sterling silver bracelet. Remember George Orwell's admonition, "Why use 10 words when one will do?"

Be aware of current trends while writing. For example, being "green" is currently very much in the public consciousness. Tie your art to that movement. Pottery cups save paper and avoid plastic, which is petroleum-based. Hand-woven linen napkins do the same. Or perhaps you work in a studio that is solar-powered.

Finally, remember that customers want to know that your work is one-of-a-kind, limited edition, handmade by you, made from local materials, has a historical basis, or has been featured in some noteworthy publication. The more special or memorable your work seems can become the key to having someone invest in your art.

ACTIVITY: Using a photograph of one piece of your work, write a description of the process of making it. Remember, describe; don't tell.

Why are "key words" important in writing for the Web?

Using key words helps Internet search engines pick your website when someone types in a request at their desktop. It is a good idea to pick several key words that the customer would use if looking for a site like yours. Then try to include those key words in a number of places in the body of your copy, as well as in your headlines.

Do I need to find someone else to read and proof what I have written?

Always have someone look at what you write for public consumption. What may seem perfectly clear to you may puzzle or confuse someone else. You can read through something you have written several times and still miss the same typographical error. You also have a vested interest in your art and may not be objective enough to judge the reader's reaction. Proofreaders provide valuable insight to improve your writing. However, pick someone you trust, who knows spelling and grammar, and who will not just tell you what you want to hear.

MODULE 4: Develop a Design to Entice

What elements need to be included to make a good website?

When you design your website, you should ask yourself a number of questions:

- Can the customer easily understand my website?
- Can that customer find what they are looking for?
- Can they leave the site feeling good?

How you design your site to accomplish those ends requires you to consider how you use the following components:

- Written content.
- Headlines.
- Pictures and other images.
- Lists.
- Tables.
- Forms.
- Navigation tools, like footers and links.
- A tool for searching your site.

You also need to decide whether or not you want to include any kind of paid advertising. Many people feel that it makes a site feel too commercial, but others see it as a way of making money to support and sustain a site.

There are a number of websites that can provide you with additional information about these elements. For one, check out <http://www.wdvl.com/Authoring/Design>.

ACTIVITY: Visit three sites and using the first three questions in this section, critique each site, noting elements that you would like to include in your site.

What is a “template,” and what does it have to do with the Web and me?

You don't have to “reinvent the wheel” if you decide to design your own website. A tool called a template can be used to help you create your website. In some ways, it is like following a format for a business letter.

A number of templates are available for free as downloads, while others can be purchased. You as the “designer” then can fill in the information fields with your own product information. To find these site design tools, either do a Web search for the term “Web template” or go directly to one of the following sites:

www.templatemonster.com/
www.freewebtemplates.com/
www.buytemplates.net/
www.oswd.org/

ACTIVITY: Find a template that appeals to you. Then find online reviews of that particular template and, if it's available to download on a trial basis, use it in a test run to explore the ease of actually using it.

What are typefaces and fonts? Why are they critical to a website?

The shape of a letter is its typeface. That shape affects how we respond to the word it forms. Some typefaces—like Garamond or Times New Roman—are very easy to read. A non-serif typeface like Arial or Helvetica (without the small lines on letters like t's and i's) tends to convey a more contemporary feel.

Typefaces, also called fonts, come in a variety of sizes (like 10-point, 12-point, or 16-point) and effects (bold, italic, underlined). How you choose to handle a particular typeface enhances its effect. For example, a headline might be bolded and cast in much bigger point size than the body copy. Bolded copy tends to draw attention, while there are style rules to check for the appropriate use of italics.

There are some do's and don'ts to follow in using typefaces:

- Don't fall into the trap of thinking that by using a wild mix of typefaces, you will add excitement and individuality to your site. It will simply confuse the look of the site. Remember the old adage, "Less is more."
- Be consistent in how you use the typefaces. Don't shift typefaces from page to page.
- Be sure that your typeface is large enough to read easily with causing eyestrain. With an aging population, you need to increase the type size.
- Use contrast to help your text become more readable. For example, a bright red font on a black background will be difficult to read, while a dark font on a light-colored background likely will be easy to read.
- Be sure that you allow enough space between lines. Cramping your words adversely affects readability of the passage.

What do I need to know about the psychology of color as I work on my site?

Color is a very personal thing. Everyone has a "favorite" color. However, color can be used to grab the potential customer's attention, as well as convey meaning and catalyze action. Color has been proven to trigger emotions. On the other hand, an uncomfortable combination of color at best confuses your message and at worst chases away customers.

How color is translated, emotionally speaking, varies depending on factors like age, nationality, profession, or the influence of the most recent fad. Most interior designers consider red, orange, and yellow as colors that excite. On the other hand, green, blue, and purple are colors that calm.

Also, there are some generally accepted meanings of color:

- RED—Passion, danger.
- BLUE—Trust.
- GREEN—Growth.

- GOLD—Preciousness.
- PURPLE—Royalty.
- BLACK—Death.
- WHITE—Purity.

However, it is important to remember that those meanings can change from culture to culture. For example, a customer from China or Southeast Asia likely would use white, not black, to signify mourning.

Other points to remember about color are:

- Use color to “brand” your business. Once you have decided on your company’s color or colors, stick with that combination.
- Too many colors are worse than no color. Pick one main color and no more than two complementary colors. Or use lighter or darker shades of your main color.
- Don’t forget basic color theory in your design work. Use a color wheel to show you what colors work best together. Colors that are opposite on the wheel are complementary and work well together. Colors near to each other also can be easily and effectively used together.

Consult www.colormatters.com or www.tamingthebeast.net for additional information about using color effectively on your website.

ACTIVITY: Decide on the colors that you will use on your website. Then test your choices against the guidelines presented in the above section.

How can I use line, shape, and texture to add interest?

There are other graphic elements that help in building an effective website:

- Lines can be used to help organize a site, because the eye will naturally follow a line. However, you need to remember that there are a number of types of lines (straight, dotted, dashed, curved, textured, doubled), and each type can help to convey a mood.
- Shapes help to organize your site. If your site has rectangular text boxes, adding a circle, an ellipse, or even an irregular shape adds a different component that grabs the reader’s attention.
- Dividing a page into sections helps to improve readability. The customer’s eye doesn’t need to take in as much information at once.
- Texture can really help you add another element subliminally. Texture can be added, for example, by screening an image back to 20 percent so that it provides a “ghosted” image on the page. Imagine scanning a photograph of a tree and its leaves, scanning it back to 20 percent, and then using the much lighter image as the backdrop for a page about ecology. Be cautious and sparing in how you use this element, however, so that you don’t clutter the visual dimension of your website and thereby muddy its meaning.
- Contrast in size, shape, and color all add interest to your site. Again, too much muddies your message.

How do I position the different components of my site?

A website are like newspaper sin that both are designed to be read quickly. Newspaper editors strive to place their most important stories on the top half of the page, or, as they would say, “above the fold.” When the paper is folded in half and sits facing out in the newspaper sales rack, the stories that show themselves and immediately draw the reader’s interest are the ones presented in that top half of the front page.

The same holds true for a webpage. Even though a potential customer can scroll down the page, you will want to put the most important information near the top of the page. Check out <http://library.albany.edu/imc/webdesign> for more detailed information regarding webpage layout.

How should I organize my website pages so that it is easy for a customer to navigate the site?

You, the business owner, want to help your customer find the information they want as quickly as possible. English-speaking customers read from left to right and from the top of the page down, so the first place that their eyes land is in the upper left-hand corner. After landing on a page, the eye will naturally look briefly at a sequence of several points on the page.

All this means that as you design your page, you need to remember what will draw the reader’s eye as it scrolls down the page. A large headline, a photograph, a spot of color all will help draw your reader’s eye from element to element. Then, using short paragraphs will help your customer quickly absorb information, retain their interest, and keep them reading.

How you place the elements on a page also will help your customer navigate a page. For example, if you have a photograph of a side view of a person, be sure that the person faces into the page, not on the edge of the page looking out. The latter situation will draw the reader’s attention off the page and away from the content.

Why is it important to avoid clutter?

It is always tempting to “throw the kitchen sink” at a potential customer, displaying lots of options in the hopes of prompting them to buy. The same is true with designing webpages. You may be tempted to use too many colors, too many shapes, streaming video, shadowed letters, etc. The result can be highly confusing.

Don’t forget the power of white space—the empty space around your content, photographs, or other design elements. The old saying, “Less is more,” holds true here, because if your website is too crowded, the reader’s eye doesn’t know where to look. In the confusion, it’s probable that the reader will simply leave the site.

Remember that your website needs to be useable. That means it needs to be easy to use *and* easy to understand.

Should I have advertising on my website?

Again, this is a personal choice. Having advertising, whether it is a banner ad or a pop-up ad, on a website is a continuing debate.

Display ads undoubtedly can be used to earn at least a little money, which may defray some of the expense involved in maintaining your website. That advantage, however, needs to be weighed against what the advertising will do to the design of your website, as well as your own ebusiness. Pop-up ads are especially annoying to customers. Because you are selling art, you need to be especially careful that your website reflects the quality of your artwork and your professionalism.

What kind of links should I have on my site?

A link is a word or image that the reader can click on and be taken to a different website, a different page, or even a different part of the same page.

Such links, called “hot links,” usually will be underlined and displayed in a different color. Some may change color as the mouse passes over them or, alternatively, after they have been clicked. If used effectively, links help a reader find information more quickly. They also can lead the reader to additional information.

To ease navigation in your own site, you need to add a navigation bar that runs along the top of the page or down the left-hand side. If you change the placement of this bar, it may be difficult for your reader to figure out how your website “works.”

As with other elements on a page, too many links can be confusing. Research shows that more than seven links are too many and confuse the choices that the reader makes. If you have more than seven pages or sections that you want to link to, you may want to create some subsections.

As a final thought on links, you will also want to include a link on every page of your website that will take your reader back to the website’s home page.

ACTIVITY: For each of your pages, sketch a rough draft of how you plan to place the difference elements you want to use.

MODULE 5: Create Images to Make an Impact

How much of my work should I put online?

The first questions you need to ask yourself as you look at each image of your work are:

- Why does this particular image belong on my website?
- How does it help to further my goals?
- Am I choosing images simply to add visual interest to my site, or are they needed to prompt a response in the potential customer?
- Do the images fit with the “brand” of my business and my website?
- How and when am I going to update the images?

When you go to sell at a craft show, you “edit” the work you take with you according to your knowledge of the customers coming to the show. When you send slides to a jury, you likewise edit the images and the work. The same is true of a website. You need to edit the work that you post. Do not put up photographs of all your work. You want to create the best image possible by showcasing your best work that reflects the range and depth of your talent.

In addition to having photographs of your best work, you need to include some photographs of you at work in your medium, creating your work. Showing the work in process helps to add value to the work, because it shows the potential customer that your work is an individual creation, not a mass-produced, machined item.

ACTIVITY: Keeping in mind the guidelines suggested above, carefully choose your artwork that you plan to photograph.

How do I take good pictures of my work?

Think of the public as the ultimate jury. The jury process requires professional quality images. If you do not have the equipment or the knowledge of photography, you need to invest in buying a professional photographer’s time. If you choose to do that, remember that just because a photographer takes great landscape photographs, she may well not do well with close-up shots of blown-glass vases.

If you decide to do your own photography, there are some crucial elements to remember:

- Be aware of how to place the object in the photograph. Remember, you are photographing the artwork, not the desk it sits upon.
- Be sure that the photograph is properly lit.
- Ensure that your photographs are clearly focused.
- Don’t use a photograph that is overexposed (too light) or underexposed (too dark).
- Pay attention to the backdrop that you use behind the object you are photographing. If the object is dark, do not place it in front of a dark curtain.

What do I need to do to ensure good lighting for my photography?

Lighting for photography requires extra care. Photography utilizes what is known as K-values (K). Sunlight is 6400K while Tungsten photo lights have a 3200K. Your camera settings must match the light source in K value or your colors may be completely skewed.

Consider the following for lighting solutions:

- Construct a light box for photographing small objects. Using such a tool, you can direct lighting and eliminate “hot spots” on shiny objects.
- Create a drop-off effect. In this technique, the foreground is lighter and gradually the background gets darker, giving the object being photographed a more dramatic effect.
- Bouncing light off a ceiling or wall also helps to soften the photograph and reduce or eliminate the glare.

There are a number of sites that give suggestions for taking photos. One of these is: www.pbase.com/wlhuber/light_box_light_tent, which gives instructions for making a light box.

What do I need to do if I want to scan a photograph taken with a film camera?

If you do not have digital photographs of your work, you will need to scan the hard-copy print images you have. You will need a scanner, but many photocopiers/printers today also have a scanning function built in and will have instructions for scanning.

You may find that you need to trim—or crop—the background. Or you may want to adjust the image resolution of the scanned photograph. Again, each individual scanner will have instructions. Alternatively, you may use commercially available computer software like Photoshop—or a free open source image editor, like GIMP—to adjust your scanned images.

If you decide that you don’t want to scan your photographs, you will need to get a digital camera. The quality of the images produced by the camera is very important. Don’t expect to use your cell phone to take acceptable photographs of your work. If you are planning to take high-resolution photographs of fine jewelry, you will need a better, more expensive camera with a superb lens and more processing power, capable of producing larger image files.

What do I need to know if I am thinking about hiring a photographer?

As has been pointed out, just because your next-door neighbor takes amazing landscape photographs doesn’t necessarily mean that she can take compelling close-up photographs of your artwork.

Some points to consider include:

- Get a recommendation from another craftsperson you trust. You may still need to be cautious because some photographers do really well with fiber, but fail with other media, such as metal.
- Look at examples of images the photographer has taken. Be sure they are of craft objects in your medium.

- Know exactly what you are being charged. Is it per set-up, per “slide,” or per piece? All are legitimate ways of pricing.
- You also will need to be aware that many photographers will sell you the images they take “for one time use only.” If you agree to that, you will need to contact the photographer and ask for an additional permission if you want to use the photograph again.

If you find that you cannot afford to hire a professional photographer, don’t give up on getting good photographs for your website. Try one of the following:

- Get together with several other artists who work in your medium and hire a photographer to do a gang shoot of all your work. Then all can split the cost.
- Check with a teacher at a local college to recommend a student who would be willing to take photographs of your work in order to build their portfolio.

ACTIVITY: Using the points given above, locate and analyze the work of three professional photographers.

What is a thumbnail and how can I use it?

Thumbnails are small versions of full-size photographs. They allow potential customers to more quickly access a webpage since the whole image file doesn’t need to be downloaded. They are especially important for any of your customers who have dial-up access.

Without thumbnail images, such customers would find surfing through full-size images nearly impossible because of the time it takes to download the bigger images. Often a page will have a number of thumbnail images, allowing the viewer the choice to click on the image they want to see full-size.

Why do I need to know about *jpegs* and *gifs*?

There are two key formats in which you can save photographs for use on the Web. A jpeg shows millions of colors, making it ideal for photographs. However, jpegs tend get blurry around the edges. A gif is not ideal for photographs because it only shows 10’s of colors. Instead, it is useful for small images with few colors.

What is the difference between file size and physical size, and why is that important?

In the digital world, file size and physical size of photographs are two different things. The physical size of an image is the size that it appears on the screen. The file size of an image is how much space it takes to store it. If the photograph is a large file size, it will take much longer to download.

To have your photographs download more quickly, you may want to compress your images. Although some quality is lost in the process, it may be worth it in terms of time saved for your potential customer. Graphics software usually has a way to save images in formats and sizes that work best for the Web.

How do I upload my pictures?

How you upload photographs to your site will depend on the program you are using. You may be able to simply drag and drop files. Other ways of uploading will be covered in your software tutorial.

ACTIVITY: Make your arrangements to either take photographs of your best artwork...or hire the photographer who will best meet your needs. If you hire a photographer, be sure you are present during the shoot, not only to learn techniques, but also to ensure a quality shoot.

MODULE 6: DIY vs. Hiring a Professional Web Designer

So far, this all sounds too complex for me. Should I really create my own website or should I hire somebody?

You are right, building a website is not a simple task. It involves a number of things:

- Knowledge of design elements.
- Strong writing skills.
- At least a passing knowledge of the technical side of Web design.

You may feel at ease with designing the visual dimension of a website, but the writing and the technical aspect may not be your strongest skills. A professional Web designer has training and experience in balancing all the necessary skills.

The other point to consider is that you may not want to spend the time necessary to build a successful site. You need to ask yourself if you have the time available to spend away from your artwork so that you can develop a Web presence. So gauge your strengths and limitations, weigh the constraints on your time and against your budget. Only you can make a well-balanced decision.

As a final thought, even if you hire a Web designer, you will need to be an integral part of the planning, in shaping the written content, and in determining the visual aspects of the site. You can't expect to simply hire a designer and then check back in when everything is done. You know best

What should I expect of a Web designer?

There's a lot of competition among Web designers. You need to beware of those who may not have the expertise to design the type of site that you envision. To ensure that your Web designer meets your expectations, you first of all need to be sure that you have answers to the following questions:

- What kind of information do you want your site to include?
- Who do you think will visit your website?
- Are you going to use your site to sell your artwork or is your website going to serve solely as a gallery?
- Do you think you will want to use a database for your website?
- How much do you want to utilize search engines?
- How quickly do you want your website to become available online?
- How much can you afford to spend?

It is important to answer these questions, because the answers will go a long way in answering questions you may have about what to expect of a designer. It also is important that you have your expectations clearly in mind because doing so will lead to a healthy relationship with your designer. Building a website is a back-and-forth negotiated process, so it is important that you and your designer understand each other.

You should expect the following from this Web development process:

- The clearer you are about what you want—what sorts of basic features, how the website generally will look—before you meet with the designer, the smoother the process will be.
- Once the work is complete, the designer should provide you with a digital copy of all the files that she has created for your site.
- The designer should help you place your website with the Web host.
- The designer may be willing to help you optimize your site for Internet search engines.
- The Web designer you choose should be able to ensure that your website functions efficiently in a number of different popular browsers, such as Internet Explorer, Firefox, and Safari.

Check out the following site for more complete information on what to expect from a Web designer: <http://www.sitepoint.com/article/how-to-hire-a-web-designer/>

ACTIVITY: Responding to the questions above, write out your complete answers, because you can expect that the Web designer is going to ask you similar questions before starting work on your website.

If I decide to hire a Web designer, how do I find a good one?

To begin your search, you need to research and compile a list of potential designers:

- Use a referral from another artist or someone you know and trust. However, don't expect to simply take the recommendation without doing your own research.
- The Web host you chose may also provide design services.
- Try using Google or check www.craigslist.com to find Web designers in your local area.
- Check out the Yellow Pages in your telephone directory.

Include both freelancers and agency designers on your list. Also, at this point, include both local and out-of-town designers, if you like their work. Telephones and email make it possible to collaboratively build a website at distance and virtually, although meeting face-to-face to resolve design issues may be the easiest way, logistically speaking.

Once you've collected a list of designers from several sources, you need to do some thorough research. There are many things to consider when reviewing your list of potential Web experts. One of the most obvious tests is to check out each designer's own professional website, in addition to sites that the designer has created. Browse through the pages and find as much information as you can, asking yourself a number of questions as you analyze each site:

- Does this Web designer appear to understand ecommerce?
- Is it easy to find information and to get back to where you started?
- Do you like the navigation system?

- Do the links work?
- Is the design consistent and fitting with the artwork (or other products)?
- Is the use of colors appropriate?
- Is there a site map that can be found easily?
- Does the site have rich content, in other words, plenty of detail?
- Is the text easy to read, with the use of fonts consistent?
- Does the site load quickly? (If the customer is using dial-up, you may not know.)
- Are the pages designed so that the customer won't have to do unnecessary scrolling up and down and back and forth?
- Has the designer included the artist's portfolio?
- When you visit the designer's website, does it provide information about technical expertise?
- Are there titles (headlines) that help focus the reader's attention and move it along?
- Does the site have a contemporary, up-to-date look and feel—both in the technology used and its overall appearance?

ACTIVITY: Develop a list of three potential Web designers that you think would fulfill your purpose. Visit their websites and answer each of the questions above.

How much does it cost to design, implement, and sustain a website?

Costs will vary according to where you are located and how you approach your choices. Remember the following with regard to cost:

- The clearer you are about what you want, the less time it will take the Web designer to complete your site, which means you will spend less money. Having the draft text written and the images available, in addition to knowing what kind of look you want, all will help the designer create a strong site that suits you.
- Special features such as a shopping cart will add to the cost.
- Keeping changes at a minimum will help to keep costs down.

Some typical approaches to costs for a small site with between three and 10 pages are:

- Hire a Web design firm—likely \$2,000 to \$5,000.
- Hire a local designer—likely \$500 to \$1,500.
- Hire a designer to customize an existing template to fit your needs—from \$200 on up.
- Use a template like those offered by Dreamweaver or Microsoft FrontPage. Others are Joomla, Rapid Weaver, Sandvox—up to \$400.
- Utilize a service for a template offered as part of your website hosting package. One example is www.homestead.com.

For more information, visit: www.costhelper.com/cost/computers/website-design.html.

MODULE 7: Add Income through Sales

I have no idea of how to price my art. Where do I start?

There is no exact science to pricing your art. Every artist needs to find a level of comfort in the price they put on their work. Pricing your work is a skill that you will acquire over time as you gain confidence through working with the business side of your art.

However, one approach is to use the Rule of Thirds in determining your cost:

- One third of your cost needs to cover materials and time.
Example: \$10 materials needed to make a beaded purse
 \$80 time required (8 hours x \$10 per hour)
 \$90 cost for materials and time
- One third of your cost covers indirect expenses.
Includes expenses such as marketing (shows, advertising, promotional materials), tools, rent, insurance, utilities.
- One third of your cost needs to be your profit.

The resulting total, \$270, is your wholesale price. This price is NEVER posted online, unless you have setup a system for a wholesaler to sign in and be admitted to only a portion of your website. You can expect that the retailer will keystone (or double) that price. In this case, the suggested retail for this item would be \$540.

Here is where pricing becomes an inexact science! If you believe that the retail price is too high for your targeted customer, you will need to revisit your wholesale price. The first cost to trim is in your profit section and, if need be, in your indirect costs. You also may want to revisit what you are spending in time and materials. Whatever price you arrive at, you need to be consistent in how you arrive at it.

Be cautious about negotiating price, and always remember the line between wholesale and retail. Good references you may wish to consult include: *Crafting as a Business* by Wendy Rosen and *Making a Living in Craft* by Donald Clark.

ACTIVITY: Choose three items that you plan to sell online and examine the prices that you have arrived at for them. Test your prices against the Rule of Thirds and analyze any differences.

What is a call to action?

You need to decide what you want the reader of your website to *do*. What action should they take? Do you want them to immediately use a shopping cart to buy a piece of your work...or do you want them to contact you directly?

A call to action is part of any successful sales process. You can provide all the information that the customer may find interesting and helpful, but if you don't tell the customer what you want them to do, they may never actually do what you want them to do. In this case, it is laying down their money to make a purchase?

ACTIVITY: Visit several artists' websites and locate their call to action. Then visit several highly commercial sites and identify their call to action. What is the difference and why do you think that difference exists?

How do I take orders and sell online?

This should be one of the first questions you ask yourself. The answer may depend on your comfort level with ecommerce and your desire for more or less contact with the customer.

There is no one magic way to take orders. Some alternatives include:

- By phone.
- Over the Internet with simple email.
- Through a shopping cart system on your ecommerce site.
- By "snail mail" (U.S. Postal Service).

Artists are discovering the value of the convenience in allowing customers to shop 24 hours a day and make use of an ecommerce site fully equipped with a shopping cart system.

However, not everyone needs to offer this degree of service. Some artists only seek a Web presence in order to share their art and information with potential customers.

Still other artists prefer to talk directly with their customers, so their sites may offer only information about sizes, shapes, colors, material and processes as well as directions for ordering by phone. If you fall in this category, you may well want to invest in a 1-800 number by checking with your local phone company.

How do I do order fulfillment?

Order fulfillment begins when the customer first contacts you. It continues through taking the order, producing the work, defining the shipping method, arranging for payment, packaging and shipping the item, and setting out conditions for returns.

In considering order fulfillment, you will need to choose from a number of production models. By industrial definition, those models are:

- **Engineer-to-Order**, or commission work, means building to customer specifications. Here the customer gets exactly what he wants. Although not an easy way to run an online business, it is a common method for artists to sell work.
- **Build-to-Order** involves building an object from a defined design, with the customer adding their own special requests. A good example is a potter who lets you pick from a series of glaze samples or surface patterns. This could work for some artists, but others might feel this approach to be less than creative.
- **Assemble-to-Order** means that your works are built from existing components selected by the customer. The example often cited is a Dell computer. The customer chooses from parts available, thus taking the design process out of the artist's hands.
- **Make-to-Stock** is work that is sold from preexisting stock. It generally was made in response to a market forecast and then warehoused until needed. This is a normal

artist studio or retail business. You have produced a body of work; you market the work and then produce and fill orders from stock.

Another consideration should be your ability to produce a body of work in quantities needed to meet customer demand. The more visibility you have in the marketplace, the more chance you have of generating a lot sales—and that’s what you want to do, right?

As you read this section, ask yourself this question: How long will it take me to produce the object, and how long do I think the customer will wait to get it? This could be considered the most essential question for determining your market and your method of production.

An important thing is to realize that over time you can expand! Don’t get caught up in trying to do more than your business can handle logistically or doing things that others are doing because they seem to have the best solution. From the beginning, how you decide to fulfill your orders must work for you. If you are the only one producing, every minute away from your studio influences your ability to meet customer demand and that reduces revenue in a very direct way. You will have to balance your production life, marketing presence, and business administration duties.

Some tips for making sure that you can produce enough product to serve your marketing technique are:

- Decide how you will work with your customers.
- Produce a finite or limited line of work that suits your production style.
- Choose to work by commission.
- Form or join a cooperative of like-minded artists to help solve the pressures associated with order fulfillment.

ACTIVITY: If you have not done it already, create one of the objects that you plan to sell. Keep careful track of all time needed to create it, including planning, gathering tools, preparing materials, making the object, etc. Then extend that to how many objects you could make in a week or month.

How do people pay for things they have bought on a website?

You can offer a number of payment choices. Your choice of which to use will depend on both your comfort level and that of your customer, and each situation requires planning and forethought.

- **Personal check** if orders are mailed to you. Quite frankly they bounce really well! Unless you want to have a collection company track down the offender, checks may be best only for face-to-face purchases, although that still doesn’t prevent the problem. If you do offer this mode of payment, be sure to hold off on shipping the purchase until the check clears the bank. You will need to be sure the customer is aware of this potential delay in fulfilling his or her order.
- **Credit card** (Visa, Master Card, Discover, American Express, debit). If you choose not to accept credit cards, you will lose a lot of sales. Also, people are fairly

- comfortable using credit cards, and most have used one online. You will need to pay the credit card company a set-up fee, a fixed monthly fee, and a charge per transaction (see below). But, it does make shopping online simple and direct. You'll need to make sure that your site has some type of online security to let your customers know their information is as safe as possible. Don't skimp on this. There are various companies that can provide this service as part of your site.
- **PayPal.** A PayPal account is very easy to set up, and it allows you to take credit card or debit payments right away. PayPal will take a percentage of each sale, with the rest of the money going into your account. People tend to trust this mode of payment, because it is well known.
 - **Cash.** We all know "cash is king," but it really doesn't help you online. Face-to-face is really the only way to use cash, unless someone chooses to send cash or a cashier's check in the mail.

ACTIVITY: To better understand how PayPal works from the customer's vantage point, set up your own account as a buyer and then find a purchase to make online, utilizing this service.

How do I make a site secure for customer payment?

The question shows that you already understand the need to keep your customer's credit card information safe. You can do this by:

- Encrypting the credit card information and sending it over a secure connection, which appears in your browser's address window as a URL beginning with *https*. The customer further can tell that they are at a secure site by the locked padlock icon that will appear beside the URL.
- Using a company, such as VeriSign, to assure the security of your site by providing a certificate of security (SSL) to show that they protect your site.

Do I have to pay monthly merchant fees to use the services of Visa, Master Card, and Discover Card?

Generally the answer is "yes." The credit card companies charge a monthly fee for their assistance in helping you manage credit card purchases. When you think about it, it's worth the cost to pre-approve cards and save you the problem of extending credit to accounts that are unstable. While situations can still arise, this pre-approval is a valuable method to assure success in accepting online charge cards.

Should I have a shopping cart on my website?

Whether or not to have a shopping cart depends on the type of Internet site that you want to establish. If you have only a few items for sale, or if you prefer that the customer calls you directly to place an order, then you do not need a shopping cart to help the customer keep track of what he intends to order.

However, if you want to encourage active online shopping, and you have lots of art for sale, then your customers will need to browse through a number of pages. In this situation, a shopping cart can increase your sales while making the customer shopping experience more

enjoyable. The customer can choose items for the cart and then at checkout a total will be calculated that includes shipping charges.

Think of your last trip to the grocery store. Perhaps you intended to purchase only one or two items. As you walked along the aisles, however, you saw additional items that you genuinely wanted, but you didn't pick them up because you couldn't carry everything. So, you went back to the front of the store, set your items down, and then returned to shopping until your hands got full again. A shopping cart could have saved you a lot of time. It also would lessen the likelihood that you might decide to leave the store without purchasing everything you wanted to buy, simply because of the inconvenience associated with shopping.

How do I put a shopping cart on the website?

A shopping cart is added to your site in two possible ways:

- You download special software for which you have obtained a license. You then install that software on the server. In this system, there is usually a one-time fee, but you then own the software.
- Instead of purchasing and downloading software, a service provider (to whom you pay a regular fee) provides the service and keeps the software updated.

To find out more about shopping carts and their features, please take a look at: www.shoppingcartreview.com or www.shopping-cart-review.toptenreviews.com. You may also want to visit www.zen-cart.com.

What about sales tax for items sold on the Internet?

Assessing a sales tax can present a sticky wicket, because every state has different laws. Most likely, your state offers classes and online information to help you understand more clearly the issues surrounding sales tax. Generally speaking, the vendor only collects tax in the state where he or she has their business—meaning, where it is physically located. It becomes the customer's responsibility to pay the sales tax in their own state—that is, unless the customer actually picks up their purchase in the state that they bought it. You can see why enforcement can be difficult.

Check a resource like www.nolo.com for further information. This website is a reach resource for legal questions and answers. Better still, schedule a talk with a certified public accountant in the state where you live and operate your craft-based ebusiness.

Is a handling charge something I should include in the final cost?

A handling charge often is necessary to cover costs associated with shipping. Packing materials, boxes, and labor are all handling expenses that the artist may well forget to recoup. If you choose to forgo assessing the handling charge, make sure these the costs are recovered somewhere else in your pricing structure. Many merchants simply attach a flat handling charge, while others have a sliding scale depending on the total value of the order.

When I sell an object, do I take down the photo or leave it up, marked “SOLD”?

Leaving object images on the site with a “SOLD” label may seem to show your work’s popularity. However, those images also occupy prime space that could contain new works for sale. If the purpose of your Web site is to create revenue, then you can’t afford to dedicate such expensive space to non-productive activities. Again, the type of business you have and your website intent will guide your decision.

Do I constantly have to check my website for orders, or will it notify me somehow?

An online store allows a shopper to buy your art 24/7 without you having to watch the shop in person all those hours. However, if you choose to open an online store as part of your Web presence, you still have to be a “shopkeeper” to some extent. You need to check for orders at least once a day. In the buying season before a holiday, you should check for orders more often because your customers likely have more urgent shopping needs and timelines.

In addition to a number of other services, business sites such as <http://smallbusiness.yahoo.com> can notify you by email of online orders. However, you will still need to check the site email to retrieve the orders.

In a related matter, you should also consider that once you have received an order, you will need to notify the customer regarding the pending status of their order.

How many methods of shipping do I need to offer?

First of all, it is important to know and understand the regulations of the shippers that you plan to use. Each shipper has rates and plans that can provide you and your customers with great service and a great price.

The size of your business will be measured on the shipping costs that are billed each month. Depending on the size of your business (shipping cost billed each month) you may qualify for volume discounts. If you can give customers a choice of USPS (US Postal Service) and either UPS or Fed Ex, you will be able to serve most people’s needs. In addition, offering UPS or Fed Ex Two Day, Next Day, or Overnight Service resolves most rush orders.

- USPS is generally cheaper for packages under five lbs. and will deliver to addresses that have P.O. boxes.
- UPS has a reputation for good service and has a wide range of rates based on zone. Again, based on volume each month, you can qualify for rate discounts that can be passed on to the customer, if you choose. UPS must have street address to deliver packages. They will not deliver to P.O. boxes.
- FedEx has a service similar to UPS and can offer some different benefits based on your need. You also may find that customers in some areas of the country may prefer FedEx over UPS (or vice versa) because of service to their location.

Regardless of how the order is shipped, it is a good idea to notify the customer that their order has shipped and to provide them with a shipping number that they can track online.

ACTIVITY: Visit the websites of each of the three shipping services mentioned. Analyze each in terms of cost, limitations on size, and delivery options.

How can I use Web forms to build my online business?

An online form resembles any kind of printed form that you need to fill out when you subscribe to a magazine or open a bank account. It is an excellent way for the person visiting your website to send you information electronically. This information can be used in a variety of ways:

- Create a mailing list of customers.
- Create a mailing list of potential customers.
- Provide you with feedback about your art.
- Place an order.
- Provide demographic information about your customers.

As you consider the alternatives, you will want to check with your Web designer and consider the expense. For example, an order form may be best for a production artist, while other artists may prefer to take orders by phone because they then have the chance to establish direct contact with the customer.

Instead of all this, could I just sell my work on eBay or Etsy?

Yes, you could, and many people have opted for this type of forum. These communities offer a relative ease of doing business, because many business management issues are handled for you:

- eBay offers two ways to sell—either through an auction or by fixed price. With the auction option, you will name a starting price and, if you choose, a reserve. People then place bids and at the end of the auction, the person with the highest bid wins. The fixed price option is like purchasing an item in a shop. eBay uses PayPal as a payment system. Signing up as a seller is also fairly straightforward. See www.ebay.com.
- Etsy bills itself as “the place to buy and sell all things handmade.” It offers a wide range of categories and since its beginning has grown rapidly to over 100,000 registered sellers. See www.etsy.com.

Although both these sites offer the seller a number of services, there are several points to remember:

- Expect to pay a commission or cost for the services.
- If you use one of these sites, you are just one member of a larger group of “sellers.”
- Users have reported that if you use Etsy, you will need to update your page daily or you will drop to the bottom of the listings.
- Because these sites offer such a broad range of products, it may be difficult or even impossible to maintain the level of professionalism that is consistent with your artwork and your own site. Having your own website is like a stand-alone building that you can decorate to suit your particular vision. Being on Etsy, eBay, or similar sites is more like being in a shopping mall where you can be judged by the style and appearance of your next-door neighbor.

For further information and tips on getting started on eBay or Etsy, check a resource like www.ecommerce-guide.com.

How do successful artists keep business records of their online business?

The records that you keep for an online business are no different from the records that you keep for your creative arts enterprise. You need records of your online business for a number of reasons:

- To build the respectability of having written records.
- To pay your tax obligations.
- To keep records of your customers.
- To fulfill federal obligations with credit card records.
- To be able to accurately analyze and evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of your business.

Your online business is a day-by-day operation. It requires that you have a system of checks and balances that are followed to close out business each day. Since you are doing business online, it is best to process orders on the day they arrive or on a regular schedule each week. A daily closeout of business will ensure that credit cards are authorized, orders are marked for shipment or back order, and production needs are evaluated.

There are a number of software systems that will make the task of recordkeeping easier. Quicken and Quickbooks are two examples, or visit www.intacct.com to investigate an online alternative.

Should I stay or should I go...or how do I know if my ebusiness is working?

As with any entrepreneurial venture, an online business will require you to invest time and money. Although producing your art may seem to be the most crucial part of your business, monitoring its sustainability is of equal importance. On an ongoing basis, you will need to decide the following in order to make the decision whether or not you still want to pour money and time into the endeavor:

- The measure of success for your business.
- The length of time that you feel you can “hang in there” with your business.
- How the ebusiness fits with your original goals.

To help you make those decisions, you will need to collect a variety of information including:

- Number of hits (visits to the website).
- Phone calls you receive.
- Emails that you receive from potential customers.
- The sales that your site generates.
- Increased customer visits to your working studio.
- Number of other sites linking to your site.

- Number of repeat customers.
- Increase or decrease in your income.
- Feedback and comments that you receive.
- What the site actually costs you in time and money to make it work.

ACTIVITY: Because your website needs to be incorporated into both your business and marketing plans, review those two documents to ensure that your Web business is included. Add it to those plans now, if you haven't already done so, because you will want to have a clearly defined method for analyzing customer response to your ecommerce efforts .

ACTIVITY: Create a plan for regularly checking the statistics you have gathered (listed above) against your goals for your Web presence, your marketing plan, and your business plan.

MODULE 8: Put the Customer at the Center

What is customer service, and how do I do it with an online business?

Customer service is at the center of any successful business. It trumps price cuts and sales promotions. It is the force that can keep customers coming back, and it is accomplished by keeping customers satisfied. The key to customer service is building a solid, trusting relationship between the customer and you.

Some tips for building your reputation for solid customer service in ebusiness include:

- Depend on doing, not simply saying you will do. (The corollary is “Keep your promises.”)
- Ensure that when visitors leave your site, they go away with a good feeling from having had a pleasant experience. A good start is to make sure that your site is easy to navigate.
- Be sure that your contact information is complete and easily found.
- If you have an online store, be sure that your shopping cart is easy to use.
- Provide your customer with an easy way to return artwork.
- Handle complaints promptly and in a way that makes the customer feel satisfied.
- When your customer contacts you, respond quickly.
- When a customer contacts you, pay close attention to what they are communicating.
- Ship purchases on time.
- Remember that your website’s FAQ (frequently asked questions) is very important.
- Go the extra mile.

Additional tips on customer service can be found at: www.technologyconcepts.biz or <http://sbinfoCanada.about.com/od/customerservice/a/custservrules.htm>.

ACTIVITY: Visit the websites of several artists and based on the list above analyze the strength of their customer service. Use your analysis to decide on the elements that you will include on your site in order to ensure especially effective customer service.

What if the customer calls and says the item they bought never arrived or that it arrived broken?

When you ship, always ensure for the accurate value of the object! If it is your fault, replace the piece right away as it can only benefit you. If it is a problem caused by the shipping company, be active and thorough to get this resolved as quickly as possible.

If a piece arrives broken, ask the customer to keep the shipping container and packing materials, because they usually are required to make a claim. It may be necessary to prove that you packed the purchase correctly. Even though you may have to wait for the claim to be paid, it will serve you well to ship the customer another item ASAP if another is available. If it is a high-dollar object, you may need to discuss with the customer the need to settle the claim before proceeding. You may simply have to make a judgment call.

What if the customer wants to return the item because after seeing it, they don't like it?

Before you begin to sell, you need to develop a policy for returns in situations like this. Having a customer want to return something that they don't like is a matter of *when*, not if. Thinking about this issue in advance and putting it into print in the form of an established policy will be helpful so you won't be caught off-guard.

All that having been said, it is usually a sound approach to be very willing to take returns after seeing that the piece is not damaged. Remember the caveats of customer service?

Who pays for return shipping if a customer returns a piece and I agree to replace it?

The answer to this will vary with the circumstances. For example, there is a huge difference in shipping a piece of pottery and shipping a piece of furniture. Again, this is a situation in which there needs to be a policy in place before the purchase.

So you keep saying that I need a return/shipping policy. What makes a good return policy?

A good shipping policy is a fair one—both to you and to the customer. To start shaping your policy, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- Will you accept returns?
- Do you need to know why the object is being returned?
- What is the time limit in which a customer can return something? A 30-day return policy is generally accepted as fair. However, whatever the timeframe, it needs to be displayed prominently.
- Will you accept a return after the object has been used?
- Will you accept a broken object as a return?
- What is the customer's duty in the return process?
- To what address should the returned item be shipped?
- Who is going to pay for the product to be shipped back? And, if you choose to pay for the shipping, what are the circumstances? Some artists have a policy that provides for the customer to pay for shipping when the item is ordered. If the customer doesn't like the object and sends it back, then they pay for the return shipping. If the artist sends back another item, the artist pays for the shipping.
- How will the customer receive a refund?
- Will you charge a fee for restocking?

You need to use your best judgment to play the returns game. If the back and forth in a situation looks endless, experienced artists advise, "Cut your expenses and return the money." You also might want to check the tips at <http://returnpolicies.net>.

ACTIVITY: Using the points above, write your own return policy for your online business.

As a service to my online customers, should I send out an e-newsletter?

An e-newsletter allows you the opportunity to communicate with your customers on a regular basis. You can choose to send out your e-newsletter monthly, quarterly, or only before special holidays. The benefits of an e-newsletter are that it can:

- Be a cost-effective way of communicating with your customers.
- Open opportunities to reach your customers and invite their response.
- Save money instead of sending a hard-copy newsletter.
- Help to build your company's look and reputation.
- Retain customers who have proven to be buyers.

Remember, the e-newsletter can take any form that matches your business goals and coordinates well with the level of effort required to produce it. It could range from a single sheet to a number of pages in length. It can carry your logo, provide descriptive information about what shows you will be attending, or introduce new objects that you have created.

You need to remember, however, that most people really hate receiving spam in their inbox. It is a better idea to develop a mailing list by asking your customers to “opt in” or subscribe to your newsletter. Also, your customers will appreciate having a simple way to “opt out” if they decide that they don't want to receive the e-newsletter any longer.

Other benefits can be found at <http://www.evancarmichael.com/Business-Coach/223/The-Top-Ten-Benefits-Of-An-ENewsletter-According-To-Your-Strategic-Thinking---Business-Coach.html>.

ACTIVITY: Design and write a trial issue of an e-newsletter that you could use for your ebusiness. Be sure to keep your writing brief and yet informative. You also will want to include several photographs or other images. Keep in mind that an e-newsletter doesn't have to be lengthy to have a positive impact.

If so, how do I set up enrollment?

As a start, you ask visitors to your website if they would like to sign up to receive an e-newsletter. Here is a great place to use a form, because the visitor can fill in all the necessary information and it can be added to your email list. Remember also to include a way for subscribers to unsubscribe.

Moreover, you also can use the contact list that you have been collecting over the time you have been open for business, as well as sending it to anyone who previously has shown an interest in your art.

Should I charge for a "membership" to receive a newsletter?

It probably wouldn't be the best use of your time to try to charge for receiving a newsletter. A newsletter is just one more way to keep in touch with your customers and to introduce new work. An e-newsletter makes such outreach very affordable because there are no printing or mailing costs.

How can I make sure that my site is accessible to the widest possible audience, and why is that important?

Accessibility, which involves making your website usable by individuals with disabilities, is both important and complicated. It is important to have an accessible site to in order to demonstrate your desire to serve all customers.

There are a number of ways to help make your site usable for a more diverse group of customers:

- Use “Alt text” which provides blind customers with audio descriptions of onscreen visual images.
- Be sure to use a spell checker and avoid misspellings, which confuse readers.
- Try to avoid abbreviations if at all possible. Again, a screen reader can’t read them and gets confused.
- Beware of low-contrast colors that make text hard to read. Dark text on a white background is the most readable.
- Input text that can be resized onscreen by the reader to meet their specific needs. Not only partially sighted people but also an aging population makes this flexible capability especially important.
- Make sure that your links make sense if they happen to be read out of context.

If you want to learn more about accessibility, check sites like www.webaim.org, www.accessify.com, or www.diveintoaccessibility.org. Free technical assistance is available at www.ada.gov/publicat.htm.

I have heard the term “target market.” What does that mean, and do I need to worry about it?

Successful businesses determine how to predict which types of customers are the most likely to buy their goods. Such an effort results in a win-win situation. The customer is put at the center of the effort to sell goods, and the business owner gains access to willing and receptive buyers. Ebusiness is not any different. Too often there is the temptation to take the shotgun approach to determining who your target market is because there is the mistaken notion that targeting a broader, less specific market demographic will result in more sales. Such campaigns can be expensive and their results generally fall short in expected sales.

You need to describe your target market as clearly and completely as possible. You might want to consider:

- Gender.
- Age.
- Place of residence.
- Profession.
- Income category.
- What forms of recreation do they enjoy?
- Where do they shop?
- Education.

As you work on identifying your target customers, keep in mind that markets shift over time. For example, there is today a growing movement to “buy local” or to be “green.” If you want to pursue that emphasis in your business, you may need to for your marketing efforts

more regionally, taking care to keep a finger on the pulse of how local fine handcraft sells to visiting cultural tourists.

To identify your best potential customer groups, you need to do some research that will paint a clearer portrait of who they really are, including their buying preferences when it comes to craft. For example, you may want to access and review the demographic survey completed by CODA (www.codacraft.org/pages/survey) or peruse studies done by the Americans for the Arts (www.artsusa.org).

ACTIVITY: Research your potential market and create a written description of your target customer.

In order to better meet my customers' specific needs, should I accept commissions?

Commissioned art pieces are created for a buyer, who may well want to provide input about the design, the color, and, of course, the price of the piece. Whether or not you should accept commissions will depend on how you feel about receiving input as you create your art.

To avoid problems later on, you need to have an understanding with the buyer before you start the project. Be sure that you talk about the following:

- What are the buyer's expectations? The expectations of what the artwork will include need at some point to be written down.
- What are the payment terms? Quote a set price for what has been commissioned and then set up a payment system: either one-half paid at the beginning of the work and the balance on delivery or one-third at the beginning, one-third part way through, and one-third on delivery. The initial payments should be yours to keep, even if the buyer changes their mind.
- What is the time frame for completion? Provide the buyer with progress reports during the various stages of the project.
- What is the allowance for changes? To avoid any chance of trying to respond to multiple last-minute changes, be sure either to limit the number of free changes you are willing to make after the piece is completed or quote a fee for what you will charge for each change.
- What are the expectations for preparing the piece for display? Is that cost included in the initial price?
- Who pays for shipping and insurance?
- Who will own the rights to the piece? For example, does the artist retain the right to show a photograph of the work, even after it has been sold? Can you reuse and sell the same, or a very similar, design?

For more information about working on commission, visit sites such as www.artbusiness.com/privcom or <http://emptyeasel.com>.

MODULE 9: Ensure Protection for You and Your Customer

How can I protect (copyright) my work that I post online?

The Copyright Act of 1976 is designed to protect a broad range of creative and intellectual works. Your work is under copyright protection the moment it is created and you have fixed it in a tangible form.

There is a quite a bit of misunderstanding about how to obtain a copyright. No action is needed to secure a copyright because something called common-law copyright protects everyone. However, that protection does not allow for the creator to claim any damages if the work is copied. Such protection is not in place until a copyright is registered with the federal government. Registration is recommended for a number of reasons. The act of copyright fixes a date for when the work is “fixed in copy” for the first time, so it proves when the work was created.

Registration involves completing an application form and submitting it to the Copyright Office, along with the correct fee (fees will vary according to what is being copywritten) and a copy of the materials to be copywritten. The address is: Library of Congress, Copyright Office, 101 Independence Avenue, SE, Washington D.C. 20559-6000. It takes about four months to process an application.

For further information on copyright, go to <http://www.copyright.gov>.

Do I really need a lawyer for this whole process?

Obtaining a copyright is a relatively simple process. However, this site is not intended to provide legal advice. It is meant purely to guide you in your questions. You should keep in mind that to form a strong business team, you will need to contact a lawyer.

Should I watermark images to protect them?

A watermark is an overlay image that protects a primary image by lightly marring its visual integrity. There are two kinds of watermarks:

- A visible watermark is translucent yet clearly documents who owns the image. At the same time, the original image shows through. This method is, by the way, the most popular way of protecting images. You can still showcase original images, even though the copyright protection is clearly readable. Remember, though, that a small watermark can be removed digitally.
- An invisible watermark is also laid over the primary image. It cannot be seen, but still can be detected if there has been an attempt to alter it. However, because it cannot be seen, your copyright remains embedded and established. This strategy for protecting images is used far less frequently.

In short, it probably is a good idea to consider protecting your images in some way, and watermarking offers you sound options.

For further information, visit: http://www.research.ibm.com/image_apps/watermark.html

www.watermarker.com/how-to-protect-digital-images.aspx.

ACTIVITY: Visit the tutorial on how to watermark an image at <http://www.psptoybox.com/tuts/psp7/watermark.html>. Then choose one of your images and follow the steps to test the method.

If I don't watermark my images, are there other ways of protecting them?

If you don't want to watermark your images, there are several other ways of protecting them. They include:

- Reduce the size of your images. This can be a very effective way of protecting your images. These smaller, preview images will be high-enough quality for showing the images on the Web, but not for printing.
- Reduce the quality of the images. This is not the best method for protecting your images. You are trying to build an image of your art, and poor quality images do not help that.
- It is possible to disable the right click on the mouse. This lets the user know that the images are copywritten and not to be saved for themselves.

If images are so easily co-opted or stolen on the Web, should I even post high-quality photos of my work?

Consider the underlying purpose of your presence on the Web. Research indicates that there is a relationship between sales and the quality of the images on a site. If you don't post any images of your artwork, you won't run any risk of having your images stolen. And yet, if you don't show your images, you won't be delivering your art to a larger market and most likely will not pick up any sales.

It comes down to your personal preference. Caution and balance are not bad approaches. If you are going to use a specific design again in future work, you might want to consider using a different context for showcasing it.

I really thought that everything on the Web was available for public use, and so I regularly use information from the Web. What is the rule for fair use?

Global online exposure has made this whole problem of copying or "borrowing" another artist's ideas far easier and, regrettably, more prevalent. However, the guide to what is considered fair use can be stated rather simply: Don't be the person who uses someone else's design and then sells what is created. Just as you don't want others to impinge upon what you create in order to make a profit, you shouldn't use what they create.

Also, be aware of instances in which you may unintentionally infringe on another's rights, such as in the case of using a photograph taken by someone else who has not granted you permission to use it. Err on the side of caution: Don't use a photograph that you didn't take yourself, unless the photographer or owner of the image has granted you the right to use it.

ACTIVITY: Go online to research the difference between creating, out-and-out copying (plagiarizing), and using with acknowledgement (citing).

- *Discuss with a group of artists the concerns surrounding these issues.*
- *Consider if or when it is okay to copy to learn or for inspiration?*
- *What is the ethical line that needs to be drawn between using a design for inspiration and creating a derivative piece?*

Is there any liability for me if a customer's private information is compromised?

Yes, there is a liability factor involved. You will want to consult with the attorney on your team for more specific information. There are at least two important issues:

- **Privacy Policy.** Federal law specifies that if you collect personal information (for example, name, nationality, social security number, gender, address, phone number, credit card number), you must have a privacy policy posted on your website. This policy needs to tell the customer how they can expect you will handle the information about them. In other words:
 - * How will you use the information?
 - * Will you share the information with others?
 - * How will you collect the information and keep track of it?
 - * How will you ensure that sensitive information is handled?

If you provide private information about children younger than 13, you must include a privacy policy that follows the rules of COPPA (Children Online Privacy Protection Act).

You might also want to reference the information provided in Section 7: “Add Income Through Sales.”

- **Terms of Use.** This is a policy that tells your customer what they can and can't do with information on your website. Some points you might want to include are:
 - * Can the customer copy content?
 - * Can the customer download information?
 - * Can the customer hand out information they have copied?
 - * Can they publish information on their own website or in another format?
 - * How do they provide citation information?
 - * How do you handle liability issues with links to other sites?

For more information about security issues, you might want to visit:

www.ibls.com/internet_law_news_portal_view.aspx?id=1990&s=latestnews

ACTIVITY: Visit several artists' websites that have security information/policies. From what you find, begin a list of what you would want to include in your security policy on your website.

MODULE 10: Increase Traffic

What is traffic? (Let's assume that we aren't referring to *automobile* traffic!)

You are correct. “Traffic” in this context does not refer to the number of cars on Main Street downtown. It refers to the number of users that visit a website over a specific period of time.

Why do I want to make my site “sticky”?

A “sticky” website is one where a visitor stays awhile during their visit, or one to which they return for a second (or more often) visit. You probably will find that it is easier to attract a person to your site for the first time than it is to get them to come back for repeat visits. Therefore, it is very important that you post content and elements that are likely to make a visitor want to return.

To make it even more involved, what makes a site “sticky” will depend upon who your customers are. Different age groups, genders, professions, regions will have different points of view, and those points of view will determine the sorts of things that a particular group will find interesting enough to stay awhile or return again. Also, remember that you may want your visitor to become a buying customer, but they likely will visit your site simply to find something useful, informative, or entertaining, depending on their individual perspective. Having them linger upon or return to your website enhances the likelihood that they will eventually make a purchase.

What then can I do to make my website one that people want to visit again and again?

There are those marketing people who believe that the successful marketer contacts individuals on the mailing list at least once a month. How often you contact your former and potential customers remains your choice. However, it is a given that establishing a relationship with them will bring them back to your site.

There are a number of strategies that you can implement to improve the chances of a visitor returning to your site:

- Update your website regularly to ensure that it is current. If it is obvious that its content hasn't changed for several weeks or months, why should a visitor bother to return? To show that you are regularly refreshing your site, you may want to plainly state somewhere on the home page when the site was last updated. You also may want to plan and implement a regular schedule for updating your site—a strategy that will help you routinely meet visitors' expectations for freshly posted new content.

A corollary to this suggestion is to take down items that have been posted on your site for a prolonged period of time. Items that linger too long give off a negative message! If a piece of work doesn't sell, donate it to charity and gain yourself some favorable publicity in the process.

- Provide visitors to your site the opportunity to comment both on your craft pieces and the website itself. Of course, you will need to bear some cost in time or resources to

regularly monitor and, if need be, clean up any comments that are spam or simply in poor taste.

You will want to ask your customers what they prefer. What example:

- * Did the customer find what they were looking for?
- * What are their suggestions for making your site easier to use?
- * Is there a significant drawback that they found in using your site?

If you don't receive any comments, then you will need to remove this interactive feature or, more likely, to ask yourself *why* you aren't getting comments. The most likely analysis may be that your site is not yet attracting many visitors. One relatively easy remedy: Making thoughtful comments on others' sites will help to build traffic on your own site. There is definitely something to be said for the value of networking!

- Give something away without charge. For example, Dover Publications (www.doverpublications.com) offers on its website free samples of the designs it features in its books. The cost of doing this is low, but it encourages people to return frequently.
- Provide your customers with something they can use. A tutorial describing how to make a simple craft project or a map of where to find necessary craft supplies are just two examples of what you can offer.
- Have a page featuring the latest news, whether about your own work or the larger field of craft as it relates to your particular niche. This information can be about a recent award you received or a show you have been to...or it could focus upon news about a person or event in your local area. In fact, a regular news page—or perhaps an ongoing blog—can be a great place to begin to build a deeper appreciation among your potential customers for fine handcraft in general. You might also add an RSS news feed, which is an automated, free, digital delivery system that allows a subscriber to receive regular email updates from a particular website. For example, such an email might prompt a subscriber that new content, such as new work that is available for sale, has just been posted to the website.
- Offer visitors to your website the opportunity to post comments on a dedicated discussion board where they can share information with one another. If you choose to do this, however, you will want to be sure to have a diligent moderator. This person can edit or delete an offensive post to the discussion board—not an uncommon event given that a discussion board provides open access to anyone.
- Offer a drawing or contest with a prize, preferably a piece of fine handcraft that you created!

ACTIVITY: Visit a number of websites and identify which features at each site do or do not make it a site to which you would return.

How often do I need to introduce new work on my website?

The answer to this question will depend entirely on the individual artist, because what is posted on a site is an individual choice. Newer artists who haven't yet settled into a style may choose to post artwork more often. A more mature artist may not have the need to share a new direction or style so often.

However you choose to introduce new work on your site, you need to have changing artwork be part of a plan for regular maintenance. Customers will become accustomed to whatever routine you establish (consciously or unconsciously) and will come to expect new work at those intervals. You don't want to disappoint them!

Do I need to advertise or market my website in some way?

There is an old saying about success in a retail space, "Location, location, location." No matter how prepared your staff may be, no matter how good your art is, no matter how beautifully decorated the space is, unless you are located in a spot that's hand and convenient for customers, your business won't be sustainable over the long run.

The same is true of your space on the Web. Just as you need to get customers in the door of a physical storefront, you need to get visitors to come to your website. No matter how beautiful your website, if you don't have visitors, all your work will have been in vain.

There are a number of ways to promote your site:

- Using traditional print-based media (newspapers, magazines, flyers posted on local kiosks and bulletin boards).
- Using broadcast and other electronic media (chiefly radio/TV, but also including answering machines).
- Using Internet-based promotion (linking to other websites, tapping into search engines, developing blogs and podcasts).

Please refer to the sections immediately below for more specific information on these strategies.

With all the electronic communication around, does traditional promotion still have a role to play in promoting my site?

With all the electronic capabilities at our fingertips, it is easy to forget a host of more traditional ways of advertising your site. Some of these will be more expensive than their Internet-based counterparts but could well reach a different viable segment of your target market.

- Include your website address on every piece of printed promotional piece that you have done. This means business cards, any brochures, invoices, letterheads, postcards, receipts, even shopping bags.

- In any article that is written about you and your art, don't forget to mention your website address. In fact, when you launch your website, you will want to create a simple press release for your local, state, and regional media outlets that announces your Web address.
- Include your website address on your answering machine message.
- If you have a sign on a trailer that you take to shows, include your website address.
- If you have a studio window visible from the street, include the website address with the name of your studio in the window display.
- Include your website address in any relevant newspaper or magazine ads.
- Use direct mailer postcards or flyers.
- Check with your local or state arts council to ensure that your site is included in any registry, listing, or brochures that are produced.

In all of these cases, you are trying to drive traffic to your website. Therefore, it is doubly important that you have a uniform look for all of your business promotional materials that the public will uniquely identify as being from you.

ACTIVITY: Review all your printed materials, adding your website address to all pieces. Then write a press release on your newly edited letterhead that announces the launch of your website.

It seems to me that using electronic promotion might be less expensive. What techniques are the easiest and most inexpensive to use?

You are correct that promoting your site does involve expense. However, that does not mean that you can't promote your site with a very small budget. There are a number of rather inexpensive strategies:

- Visit the message boards of other sites related to art, your medium, or even more specifically, the connoisseurship of collecting craft. Then post a message (not an advertisement) to which you affix your name and your website address. If you are helpful and thoughtful in your comments, people will be interested and over time will visit your site.
- Use email to promote your art and your site. This can be a very effective way to get people to come back to your site, because you can share your latest news. To do this, you will need to maintain email lists of those who contact you and to include a disclaimer explaining how you protect your email list. Without it "going over the top," you can still make sure that your email grabs attention visually and then is well written so that it holds the reader's attention. Remember to keep the email's "look" harmonious with the look of your other promotional materials.
- Search out directories on the Web that share commonalities with your art and your business. Then request to be listed in those directories. Check with the Open Directory Project (<http://www.dmoz.org>), which is an open source (free) catalog of the Web.

ACTIVITY: Find a site with a message board on which you can post a comment, introducing yourself and your website in the process.

How does linking work?

Another way to promote your site is to link to other sites. Links are what form the network of the Web. They point the visitor to other sites that might be of interest, and if a site that is highly popular links to you, it can boost your site in Google rankings. Also, linking with other similar sites is akin to having a group of small shops in the same location. The lure of the group as a whole can help to increase customer traffic, while simultaneously helping to build your “brand.”

If you want to link to another site, it is a courtesy to contact them first. You might want to ask them to include a link to your site on their site and you, in turn, will link your site to theirs. For example, many Chambers of Commerce facilitate their members linking sites in order to build traffic among them. Another useful site is www.stumbleupon.com, which helps a self-selected cohort of like-minded potential customers discover and share exciting new websites.

Although linking to other sites is beneficial, you do need to exercise caution, because whom you link to can affect the brand that you have established for yourself and your work. In a related issue, be aware that as a member of any organization, like a chamber of commerce, that offers or encourages links, you may lose control of who links to your site down the road.

How do I get Google to see my website and list it near the top of its search returns?

How you build traffic will depend in large degree on how people are able to find your site by using a search engine. Currently there are a number of search engines, of which Google is the largest. You need to make your site easy to find by listing your site on the search engines such as Google, AOL, MSN, Yahoo, etc.

It really isn't difficult to get listed on the search engines mentioned. However, that will not guarantee that people will find their way to your site. By some estimates, there are over 25 billion webpages. Although some estimate that 90 percent of Internet users use a search engine to find what they need, only 13 percent of sites are registered on a search engine.

Search engine optimization is the process of ensuring that your website is highly visible to the major search engines. There are many ways to achieve this end, and they boil down to:

- Onsite optimization involves changes on the website itself such as changing article headlines to present more popular key words.
- Offsite optimization doesn't alter the website itself, but instead uses strategies such as getting another website to link to yours.

You also need to be aware that search engines continually change how they rank sites. Nor does any one search engine optimization strategy offer a fool-proof magic formula. Even so, there are a number of points that are used in the process:

- Popularity of links. A large number of links to your site is considered good.

- Keywords. Search engines look at where the keywords appear and how often, giving preference to the page that mentions a keyword high on the page.
- Preference for certain html tags that appear on a page.
- How Google ranks your site in overall popularity.
- The rank of sites that link to your site. Higher ranking in another site helps your site.
- Having a “friendly,” easily memorable website address.

Some points to avoid are:

- Loading the top of your home page with keywords to trick the search engine into noticing the page.
- Using all images and no text. The search engines are for all practical purposes “blind” and can’t interpret or assess images. They only detect and decode text.
- Using tables, frames, or Javascript in your site.
- Using too much Flash (plays animation) which interferes with navigation.

For more detailed information on how to be “seen” on Google, you might want to read Ben Norman’s best-selling book, *Getting Noticed on Google in Easy Steps*. The website www.myownbusiness.org provides free do’s and don’ts on how to market and optimize a website for search engines.

Do I need a blog, and how do I use it?

A blog, essentially an online diary or journal, is an easy way to keep your website updated and to build traffic. With a blog, you can help your customers learn about new artwork you have completed or new directions in your field of art. Because a blog needs to be updated regularly, a blog also can help increase a site’s search engine ranking, in addition to offering visitors something new that encourages them to return to your site.

Starting a blog is very easy, especially with special blogging software that is available. Basically, with this service, you create an account with a username and password, name your blog and determine the Web address, and then choose a template. Some examples are:

- Google’s Blogger, www.blogger.com
- Wordpress, www.wordpress.com
- Movable Type, www.moveabletype.org

A couple of caveats: First, if you start a blog, stay focused chiefly on one consistent topic or overarching theme. People will return to read what you have to say about that topic, especially if you display a certain depth of knowledge, but they won’t be as patient if you wander off topic. Second, once you begin a blog, you will need to post regularly, ideally at least once a week, if you are to sustain reader interest.

In addition to what you already have mentioned, are other ways to promote my site and build traffic?

Yes, there *are* some additional ways you can promote your website. They include:

- Teach about your medium, offering either design or technical instruction. Whenever you make a presentation, be sure to provide your website address.
- Get involved in podcasting, which is tantamount to broadcasting a short radio program over the Internet. At its most basic, you record (at home) and post a mostly spoken-word audio file to your website or blog, and listeners download the program as an MP3 file.
- Write reviews in the local press of craft shows and sites, always including, of course, your website address
- Publish reviews of books and craft techniques on your website
- Embrace and promote cultural tourism, as has HandMade in America (www.handmadeinamerica.org) or Hands of Harvest (www.handsofharvest.org).
- Offer open studio time for the public to visit your studio and advertise it on your website.
- Become part of a larger organization with common goals (such as a guild), and always be sure to include your website address as part of your signature.
- Collaborate with other artists and plan an event likely to attract the public. A great example is the metalworker who wanted to get the public into his smithy. He worked with a group of flamenco dancers to produce a presentation in the smithy with forge fires blazing. All in all, stunning presentation.
- Develop your connections to your particular community, place, and the past. All help the customer to buy in and return to your site as an authentic, trustworthy place.

What are some commonly made mistakes that adversely impact traffic to a site?

Probably the most important thing to remember is that your customer probably is someone keenly interested in authenticity. If you don't live the story that you tell, your customer won't return to your site. The quality of being what you say you are is all-important.

If you don't know who is visiting your site or why, you may never know why your ecommerce flounders. So, obviously it is essential to become aware of who is visiting your website. Those demographics are important, because they will help you to improve your website-based business. For example, as a businessperson involved in fine handcraft, you need to be aware of:

- The demographics of who buys fine handcraft because that will help you target most successfully your best potential customers.
- How many visitors your site receives each day.
- What websites led your visitors to you.
- The geographic region where your visitors live.
- What kind of Internet service your customer has. This is important, because if you have used a great deal of animation, it will negatively impact the download time for someone who only has a dial-up connection.

MODULE 11: Look at the Whole Picture

What else do I need to know about running a successful business?

As you already have discovered, making your art is just one part of a whole, well integrated life. Creating art requires the development of a number of skill sets, in addition to the investment of many hours of work. Running a successful arts-based business *also* requires an investment of time and energy, in addition to becoming a part of your local community.

For many artists this might mean the need to develop a basic set of business skills; marketing, accounting, and management may be only a few. Acquiring such skills does not necessarily mean that you will need to do everything yourself. There aren't enough hours in the day for that, and the development of your art is, after all, the underlying key to your business success. However, knowing what has to be done and being able to ask questions about business functions are valuable assets.

A list of what you will need for running a successful business in art includes the following:

- Journal of observations about where you create your art, how it inspires you.
- Marketing plan.
- Business plan.
- Professional photographs of your work.
- Professional photographs of the process of making your art.
- Artist statement.
- Portfolio.
- Profile of your customer.
- Booth for use in professional shows.
- Press kit.
- Promotional materials (for example, business card, brochure).
- Bookkeeping system, software, and forms.
- Product list with wholesale and retail prices.
- Information about legalities.
- Display materials.
- Financial and tax information.

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

Each module presented in this curriculum can independently be integrated into a larger curriculum, perhaps alongside other modules that already has been developed by your particular college.

These modules also can be used together, functioning as a comprehensive “Introduction to Ecommerce 101.” If used in this latter way, the modules are intended to build upon one another, each component adding to the skills taught within the former.

Moreover, while many of the preceding modules suggest specific activities for the engaged learner, the following sections offers additional activities for each module (except Module 11) that the instructor can adapt to his or her classroom.

For example, the Web Presence Checklist (*Figure 1*, below) can provide an excellent pre-test to offer students and teacher a way to decide which curriculum modules need to be covered, and as a post-test to evaluate learning outcomes produced as a result of working through the modules in the overall curriculum.

Figure 1: Web Presence Checklist

Do You Have?

- A list of specific goals for your Web presence.
- A domain name for a website.
- A sitemap for a website.
- A short written piece about yourself (an artist statement).
- A written description of the story of your art.
- A list of topics/sections to that will require written content for a website.
- The colors you would use on a website.
- A rough sketch of placement of page components.
- At least six professional photographs of your work.
- The name of a Web designer whom you trust and with whom you could work.
- An analysis of time and expense in producing one piece of your art.
- A product list of your inventory, complete with retail prices.
- A return policy.
- A written description of your customer.
- A written security policy.
- A press release announcing your new website.
- Printed materials that include your website address.

Each of the items on the checklist corresponds with a “takeaway” activity presented in each module. On completion of each particular module, the student will have in-hand a completed piece of their professional Web presence jigsaw puzzle. If the student completes all modules, each item on the checklist will have been completed. The checklist minimally provides an

overview of the modules, while ideally providing a chance for the learner to actually develop an effective Web presence.

General Introduction

Because of the need to reestablish the validity of the word craft and its place in the world of art and creativity, it is important to have an on-going discussion with students that touches on a number of issues:

- What is craft?
- Is it part of industry?
- How does it fit into the bigger picture?
- What do balance, equity, and fairness have to do with craft?
- Why is authenticity important?
- Why is buying local and becoming sustainable important for their art?

Because art is in great measure an expression of the physical and cultural landscape around the artist, lead the students to a clearer consideration of their roots and the importance of balancing the traditions of where they are from with the excitement of the infusion of ideas from the outside.

Consider with your students the question of lifestyle, the creation of art, and the development of a Web-based business. Among the issues are:

- What is the perception of time commitment?
- How do the students view their work ethic? Are they efficient in producing their art?
- Why should lifestyle be included in a discussion of craft and the business of craft?
- How does an artist know whether they are or aren't ready to venture into ecommerce? Is it the teacher's responsibility to tell them? Why or why not?

In an effort to continue to build a customer base, consider with your students:

- How does craft relate to ecology?
- What is the relationship between craft and sustainable farming, and how could that be used to position oneself?
- How does the fine handcraft created at your school relate to the issue of the manufacture of offshore craft, imports, and exports?
- How do craft, globalization, and offshore production relate?

Now, let's take a look at each module in turn, with its suggested activities:

MODULE 1: Start Here to Plan

Section Takeaway: A list of specific goals for the student’s forthcoming Web presence as a professional artist.

- Emphasize to students the need to set goals for their website. Help them to write down their goals before they embark on the activity of developing a Web presence, pointing out the importance of this step in developing a clear set of expectations for their ebusiness.
- Lead the student through a simplified planning process.
- In dealing with the issue of promoting a professional image, lead a discussion that includes a conversation about why to develop and maintain a personal website.
- Discuss what results in ease of access to a website.
- Broaden the definition of branding and then discuss issues involved in the process.
- Have students study different websites and then evaluate in terms of the checklists provided, all towards the goal of determining what makes the sites professional or nonprofessional.
- Lead students to examining and finding ways that they can form their management “team”—legal, financial, and marketing. To accomplish this, research small business management partners such as www.smallbusiness.yahoo.com and others.
- Either develop a panel of artists to visit the classroom, or assign students to conduct a survey of artists in their community. The topic they will discuss/research is “How a Web presence has or has not changed my life.” Some of the questions to be considered could include:
 - * How long did it take you to make money on your website?
 - * How much time did you spend in the beginning?
 - * How much time do you spend now on the website?
 - * What problems did you encounter with your website?
 - * How did a Web presence change your life
 - * Has a Web presence affected your studio production?
- Emphasize to your students the need to consider the feasibility of their website before launching and the need to evaluate it after launching it. Consider gathering a group of artists to visit the class to serve as a craft focus group for the students.
- Visit the website, www.website101.com. It addresses the question why a business needs to have a Web presence.

MODULE 2: Lay the Basic Foundation

Section Takeaways:

- * A domain name for a website
- * A sitemap for a website

- Discuss a portal in terms of the advantages that it can offer.
- Discuss the connection between a business name, a brand, and selecting a domain name.
- Bring in a Web designer to explain hosting, a server, and the major components of a webpage.
- Discuss the courtesy of linking to another site, including the pros and cons.
- When talking about the site map, the instructor can refer to software that can help to create one. However, it might be easier to create a simplified one on the board, drawing a bubble map or a branching tree. Then work with the students to fill in the branches or the bubbles.
- Check www.entrepreneur.com, which has a large collection of articles about hosting and domain names.

MODULE 3: Write Content that Engages

Section Takeaways:

- * A short written piece about the student artist (an artist statement).
- * A written description of the story of the student's art.
- * A list of topics/sections to that will require written content for a website.

- Emphasize the importance of the “story” behind what students create. For starters, have each student bring an object they created to class to talk about how and why they created the object. The writing can follow.
- Always emphasize that a customer who purchases fine handcraft wants to be involved in some way with the artist. This customer wants to know about the artist and the process of creating his or her art. Remind the student that when he tells the story of his art, he needs to be ready to respond to the customer, because a door has been opened to a continuing relationship.
- Talk about the 5 W's and apply to sample news stories. The instructor might want to also discuss about the journalist's inverted pyramid approach to discussing the most important points first.
- Have students exchange and comment upon what they have written in class.

MODULE 4: Develop a Design to Entice

Section Takeaways:

- * The colors the student will use on a website.
 - * A rough sketch of placement of page components.
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- Using current websites, discuss the elements of design, including line, shape, and texture.
 - Lead a discussion with students on typefaces and fonts, in relation to design of the websites you visit as a class. Be sure to bring out how both typefaces and fonts have a psychological, as well as design, influence on people who visit a site.
 - Introduce basic elements of page layout and apply to websites that the class studies. Then have the class discuss their findings.
 - Introduce the class to the psychology of color, in addition to discussing the color wheel in terms of what colors work well together.
 - Check with Web design instructors at your college to see if they would be willing to lend some expertise as a guest lecturer or if they have advanced students who would be willing to help your creative entrepreneurs in developing their Web presence.

MODULE 5: Create Images to Make an Impact

Section Takeaway: At least six professional photographs of your work.

- Lead the students in the selection of which artwork they will post and the images of that artwork. Too often students find it difficult to “edit” either their work or pictures of their work.
- Invite a photographer to visit the class and talk about what makes a good photograph.
- Have a photographer demonstrate a simple photographic set up and then provide time for the photographer to work with the students in actually photographing their work.

MODULE 6: DIY vs. Hiring a Professional Web Designer

Section Takeaways: The name of a Web designer with whom the student can trust and work.

- Invite a panel of Web designers to the class. Ask them to discuss with the class the question of what should be expected of a Web designer and how to find a good one.
- Bring in a Web designer as a guest lecturer to clearly outline what they do and what they charge.

MODULE 7: Add Income Through Sales

Section Takeaways:

- * An analysis of time and expense in producing one piece of the student’s art.

- * A product list of the student's inventory, complete with retail prices.
- Through this module students should exhibit an understanding of sales requirements, to include:
 - * Sales tax and reporting
 - * Shipping, shipping partners and charges
 - * Working with Visa, Master Card, American Express, and Discover Card.
- Mail order possibilities and related concerns, including whether to accept a personal check.
- Talk to students about tracking expenses. Work with a spreadsheet to help students start to build a budget.
- Using their expense sheets, help students work through the pricing of their work. What they end up with can then be the start of a product inventory list.
- Work with the students on setting up a system for both organizing and keeping their records. Include customer information, product information, craft show information, and profit-and-loss information. Discuss with the students how this kind of information is important in building a business.
- Walk the students through an analysis of their profit and loss information overlaid on the goals that students have written.
- Bring in a local museum person to demonstrate basic tips on packing and labeling objects for shipping.
- In order to gain confidence in researching on the Web, it is a good idea to have students find examples through their own searches of the Web. However, a couple of strong examples of successful sites that sell fine handcraft are:
 - * www.sattvagallery.com
 - * www.guild.com
 - * www.greenjeansbrooklyn.com
 - * www.berea.edu/studentcrafts/

MODULE 8: Put the Customer at the Center

Section Takeaways:

- * A return policy.
- * A written description of the student's ideal customer.
- Through this module, students should gain an understanding of customer service-returns, exchanges, and repairs.

- As a way of helping students stay in better touch with their customers, demonstrate the use of mail merge to quickly generate letters and envelope labels.
- Work with students in laying out and developing a newsletter template that they can use in future promotion of their business.
- Help students find Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) links as a way to illustrate how artists can demonstrate social responsibility by ensuring that their sites are accessible to all users.
- Develop with a rubric (a scoring tool) with students to help them evaluate sites on their ease of use, including navigation, shopping cart, final sales, and overall customer service.

MODULE 9: Ensure Protection for You and Your Customer

Section Takeaway: A written security policy.

- Through this module, students should understand safeguarding customer credit card information, secure-site encryption, and www.verisign.com
- Invite a copyright attorney to class to discuss topics such as: Copyright legislation that may or may not be pending, derivative objects, and copyright law in general, including what documents artists may need to file fully to protect their work.
- Discuss with the class the differences between copying and creating. Include in the discussion, pointers on how to use copywritten work legally.
- Demonstrate for students how to create a watermark on an image. Then discuss the pros and cons of using one.
- Have students go online and start filling out the forms for copyright.

MODULE 10. Increase Traffic

Section Takeaways:

- * A press release announcing the student's new website.
- * Printed materials that include the student's website address
- Discuss the terms "traffic" and "sticky" with the class. Visit a number of websites in class and talk about them in terms of these two words.
- Have students show to the class a website that they revisit. Then, discuss why they go to a website and why they return. Was it recommended by a friend? What brings them back...specifically?

- In a related exercise, visit websites as a class and evaluate the negatives in terms of impacting traffic.
- Have students ask themselves why would someone visit their site. Discuss what they identify.
- Emphasize that if feedback from visitors is requested on the website, the artist will need to respond to the feedback. The artist is building a relationship with the customer through the feedback. It is part of the artist's overall marketing and time commitment.
- Discuss why it might be bad for your business to have too much traffic on your site. Remind students to reference their business plan.
- Help the student develop a plan for building and maintaining a sticky site.
- You will want to work with students to create individual plans of how often to get in touch with their regular and potential customers. This needs to remain an individual choice for what they think they can handle—whether it be once a week, once a month, or every three months. But there needs to be the understanding that the rhythm with which they contact customers or change Web content will directly affect the number of repeat visits to the site.
- A resource for more information about search engines is: www.searchenginewatch.com.

Resource List

- Arts Business Institute (www.artsbusinessinstitute.org). This organization works with small business development centers and conducts teleconferences. They sponsor an annual conference and are developing a course with Etsy to teach business skills.
- CODA (www.codacraft.org). This group provides educational and professional development in order to build public appreciation of craft.

Credits

CraftNet is an international learning and innovation network of post-secondary colleges—community colleges, technical schools, and four-year schools—and selected other arts organizations that are dedicated to the teaching of fine handcraft and the business of fine handcraft. It is sponsored and facilitated by **Regional Technology Strategies, Inc.** (RTS).

CraftNet expresses its gratitude to the **Appalachian Regional Commission** (ARC) which awarded RTS a \$36,000 grant to develop an educational, promotional, and marketing website that could help teach and demonstrate the effectiveness of ecommerce for artists.

Accordingly, the project's overarching goals have been to:

- Offer a set of curriculum modules that can be used by CraftNet member schools (and other institutions both in the U.S. and abroad) to teach artists how to use ecommerce effectively;
- Provide a virtual marketplace for the creative products of students and faculty at CraftNet member schools and organizations; and
- Expose students to the culture and products of other regions and nations.

CraftNet member colleges located in Appalachia took the lead in developing the curriculum modules, chiefly through working group meetings in Asheville, NC and Louisville, KY, supplemented by conference call discussions. A small number of other CraftNet member organizations located outside the ARC service area also contributed their efforts to the project,

Special thanks are due to **Cindy Kittredge**, folk arts and market development specialist for the Montana Arts Council, who assimilated and condensed the working group discussions into the initial draft of the curriculum. **Robert Donnan**, CraftNet's facilitator, took part in those discussions, edited the curriculum, and worked closely with the website development team that created the new website.

Other CraftNet members who commented upon the early drafts of the curriculum included **Gary Clontz** at Piedmont Community College (SC); **Tim Glotzbach** at Berea College (KY); and **Bob Mitchum** at Arkansas State University-Beebe. **Robert Gipe** at Southeast Community College (KY) suggested the format of 100 learning questions for the curriculum.

The project team also acknowledges the leadership role played by **Stuart Rosenfeld**, principal at RTS, throughout all of its working group deliberations.

Dan Alberghetti, an instructor at Sheridan College in Wyoming, and his business partner at 14th Story Design, designed and implemented the programming for the new CraftNet website.

The complete listing of CraftNet member organizations that collaborated to create the new curriculum and website includes:

- Arkansas State College-Beebe, Arkansas
- Berea College, Kentucky
- Haywood Community College, North Carolina
- Hazard Community College, Kentucky
- Montana Arts Council, Montana
- Patrick Henry Community College, Virginia
- Piedmont College, South Carolina
- Sheridan Community College, Sheridan, Wyoming
- Southeast Community College, Kentucky

The “Ecommerce for Artists” curriculum is now available both for viewing and as a free PDF download through the CraftNet network’s new website: <http://www.CraftNetGlobal.com>. For more information, please visit the website or contact Regional Technology Strategies at 919.933.6699.