



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.

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Instructor's Guide

Introduction

Each module presented in the *Ecommerce for Artists* curriculum can independently be integrated into a larger program of study, perhaps alongside other modules that already have been developed by your particular college or arts organization.

These modules also comprise a whole, functioning as a comprehensive “Introduction to Ecommerce 101.” If used in this way, the modules are intended to build upon one another sequentially, 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 exercises for each module (except Module 11) that the enterprising 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 Overview

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, <http://www.website101.com>. It addresses the question, “Why does a business need 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.
- 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 Takeaway: 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 good resource for more information about search engines is: www.searchenginewatch.com.