



# 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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## 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 fundamental 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 to launch 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 with “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 *jpgs* 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?  
Does Creative Commons offer an alternative way to protect my work?  
Should I watermark images to protect them?  
If I don't watermark my images, are there other ways to protect 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**