



## 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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### 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](http://www.southernhighlandguild.org)
- Arkansas Arts Council Artist Registry: [www.arkansasarts.com/programs/registry](http://www.arkansasarts.com/programs/registry)
- Wholesale Crafts: [www.wholesalecrafts.com](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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.htm>).

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](mailto: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](http://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.*