



## 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.*

---

The complete *Ecommerce for Artists* curriculum—or any of its individual modules—may be downloaded free-of-charge at [www.craftnetglobal.com](http://www.craftnetglobal.com). © 2009 Regional Technology Strategies, Inc. Permission to reproduce and distribute this document is granted provided citation is given.

---

### MODULE 3: Write Content that Engages

#### **My art needs to stand alone. Why should I be concerned with “explaining” it? Does my website have to be written in a certain way?**

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.