



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. © 2009 Regional Technology Strategies, Inc. Permission to reproduce and distribute this document is granted provided citation is given.

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.