

PANDEMIC ADVICE GUIDE FOR ARTISTS STRUGGLING TO ADAPT TO THE NEW HELLSCAPE

by an opinionated Aquarius who runs their own small business and therefore feels qualified to speak on the subject even though they have no real training

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BUT THINGS ARE GOING TO GET BACK TO NORMAL REALLY SOON?

My sweet dear artist, they are not.

Besides, this is basically a guide for how to set up an online shop and not suck at customer service, which are both good things to know anyway.



I WAS JUST GETTING STARTED SELLING AT IN PERSON EVENTS AND NOW I'M RUNNING EVERYTHING THROUGH INSTAGRAM DMS-- ISN'T THAT ENOUGH?

It's my packet, which means it's my opinion, and my opinion is NO.

Here's why I think everyone should **suck it up and do the work of starting a real online shop** through a real online shopping site (like Etsy, Society6, etc.)

I know, transitioning to an online shop is *--sad--* because it means that we are giving up hope on being able to sell at the market *"that's way off in March-- things should be settled down by March, don't you think?"* But I'm telling you now, you need to give up your hope. Because your hope is a lie, and it's causing you to fail your business by refusing to adapt.

1. Buyers buy things that are easy to buy.

Having to scroll through dozens of poorly lit and unorganized photos sucks.

"But you simply need to log onto my Instagram at 12:36 p.m. and scroll through 17 photos in my Insta story and then message me for prices (which I didn't mark at all for some reason even though no one wants to buy something without knowing the price) and then coordinate with me over how to take payment (I only accept expired gift cards to Taco Bell). What's so hard about that??"

Um, well, everything.

Don't get me wrong, I know people who have had successful Instagram story sales. (Hi, Betty!) But the vast majority of people I see are trying to use sites like Facebook or Instagram to do the *same job that Etsy was literally made for*.

Unless you have a pretty large following, you're wasting time and energy by not just using a real shopping website.

2. It's literally not more work. In fact, it's less.

I'm going to speak about Etsy the most, since it's what I use. *"But didn't Etsy do that bad money thing one time that I don't really remember?"* I don't know, maybe! All of these sites are pretty comparable, so pick whatever you want.

You're already photographing your work anyway, so why not upload those photos to Etsy? Etsy has a number of optional fields that help buyers find your items, and they even have tons of tutorials on how to properly use tags and sell your items. They'll even collect (and remit!! which means "give to the IRS on your behalf") any sales tax that's due. Plus, you can find a yearly summary of your sales, fees, and postage to make quick work on your taxes.

"But I sell through Instagram so I can cheat on my taxes!"

What you tell the IRS in the sanctity of your personal tax report is up to you.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE ONLINE FEES?

3. The fees aren't that bad.

Most sites take somewhere between 2-5%, and Etsy's listing fees are 20 cents per listing, and the listing lasts several months.

4. Buyers buy things from sites and people they trust.

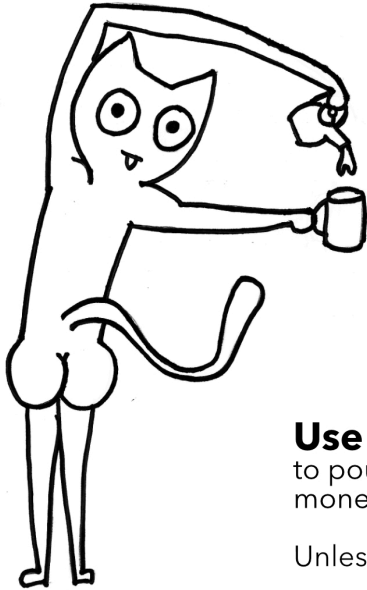
Maybe you are trustworthy, maybe you are like soooooo trustworthy you would never even eat a grape at Whole Foods without paying for it.

But I don't know you! You could be horking down grapes by the fistful while you crouch behind the artisanal cheeses for all I know!

In person markets already have trust worked in, because customers can see that the item does, in fact, exist and could, in fact, go home with them.

As a hive mind society of buyers, we trust backchannel sites like Instagram and Facebook about as much as Boomers trusted eBay in the early 2000s.

How do I know all this? I researched it! A bunch of ethically questionable people studied marketing psychology and wrote a bunch of stuff about it.



Use a legitimate online selling platform
to pour yourself a moderately sized cup of making
money.

Unless your art reeeeaallly sucks, then I can't help you.

OK OK I GET IT! I MADE AN ETSY!

Wow! Great job! Now that you've stopped sucking at slinging your wares online, here are a couple of other things to avoid sucking at:

1. Social Media Presence

Unlike an in person market, you don't have people just toodling around ready to drop \$50 on a scary mug because you're charismatic and are secretly kind of flirting. You have to go find those people and drag those suckers in.

If you're like me, you didn't start a real business Instagram until the pandemic because you thought "*Oh my godddddd how many fricken social media accounts do I have to haaaaaavvvve. I sell way more at markets anyway.*"

You've heard it before, and you'll hear it here too. Post frequently on Instagram. For it not to be a total drag, focus on documenting the work you're *already making* (as opposed to making brand new work just to satiate the Insta gods). Am I perfect at this? No. But people want to feel like they know you, and the only way they'll see your work is if you show them.

2. Customer Service

I feel like this one should be obvious, but **be nice!!** I see SO many artists complain about their customers *on their public business profiles!!!*

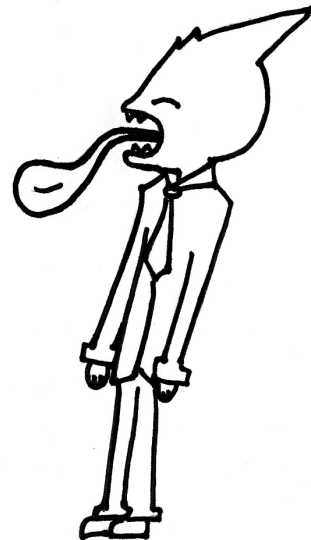
A customer asked you what your prices were when they were posted on your website?? Who cares! You're getting a sale, and you can copy/paste a friendly message back to them.

Businesses are all about relationships, and those types of complaints alienate buyers (turns out, people don't like being complained about publicly, who knew).

There have been far too many times where I was poised to support a fellow local artist and then stumbled upon some ungrateful, and quite frankly, mean, jab at a customer. If that's the way you speak about your customers, I don't want to be one.

On a more positive note, make sure you respond to messages frequently, professionally, and friendly...ly.

Although Etsy does most of the work for you, people sometimes still do have questions, and it's part of the sale for you to be nice to them and answer.



I'M NICE, I'M ONLINE, AND I'M STILL HAVING A BAD TIME.

Selling stuff online is *hard*. Buyers need a **sense of urgency** combined with a **limited (yet varied) set of products**.

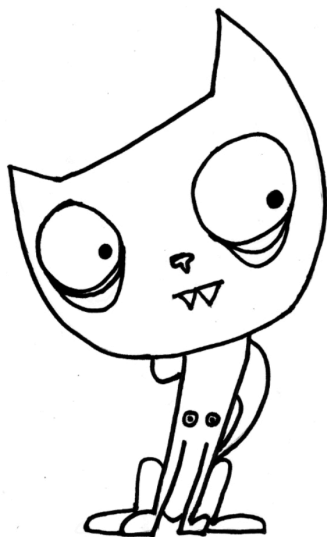
We've all been there-- searching for a gift for our cat for his birthday, we type in "butt plug shaped cat toy" on Google and get 6,000 options--

We would *love* to support a local artist and buy this gift for our baby on his special day, but we're simply too overwhelmed by all of the options to slog through them all. Besides, we don't have to buy him a gift *today*. We could wait till tomorrow, or the next day, or the next...our cat doesn't really have a sense of linear time (and neither do we this far into the pandemic) so "birthday" could really mean any day.

So, as humble artists, what can we do?

1. Be part of an online event

Now that you have an easily shareable link through a reputable online selling platform, you're ready to be a part of online markets! Be wary of markets that charge large participation fees (you likely won't sell half as much as you did at in person shows). **Do** respond quickly and kindly to the organizers and **do** advertise the market. Online markets have a curated selection and a limited time frame, which helps buyer make decisions and actually buy stuff.



2. Have a sale!

No one loves a sale as much as my mother. Just kidding, we *all* love a sale just as much as my mother! Two for ones, 10 percent off, free shipping....Most online selling platforms have built in tools to help you launch sales.

3. Make friends

Some people call this "networking." I call it "being an active part of your community." You'll sell more if you're connected to other artists, and you'll be happier, too!

Just because we can't meet in person doesn't mean we can't show each other love on social media, arrange art trades, and discover new friends.

4. Pay attention and promote yourself

Someone on Facebook is looking for a bookshelf made out of human hair? *YOU* make bookshelves out of human hair! Don't be shy, slap that shop link in the comments.

5. Keep your dang shop stocked

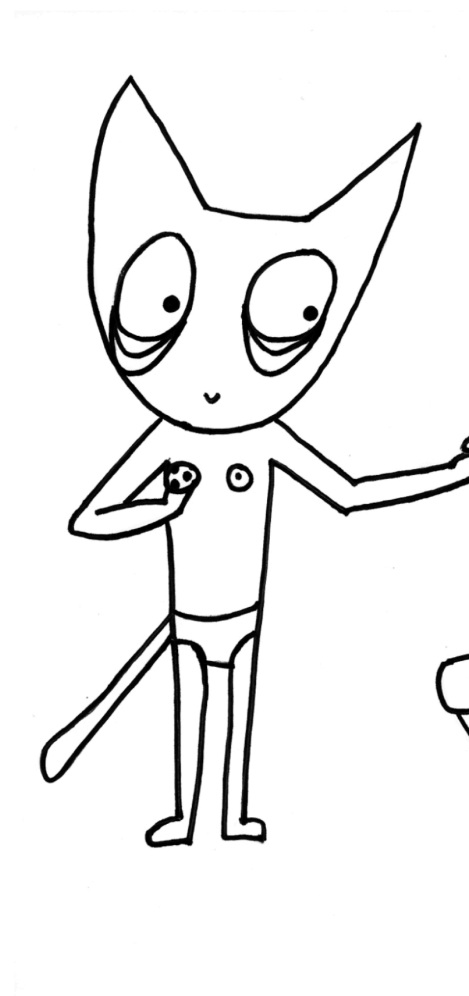
No one can buy from you if you don't have any stuff!! Any shop with less than 10 items is almost an automatic "no" from me as a buyer. Buyers are fickle; they want choices, but not too many choices, but not too few choices...10-100 should do.

WAIT--IT'S OVER? I STILL HAVE SO MANY QUESTIONS!

Good! Google them! Ask an artist you respect (and pay them for a consultation if they don't want to give out their knowledge for free).

I made this packet because I spent the first half of the pandemic waiting around preparing for a future that didn't exist any more.

Now that I've really started utilizing my online resources, my sales have picked up and I've built a much more robust online presence than I had ever done pre-pandemic. Right now, all we've got is the internet, so we better learn how to use it.



I hope the remainder of the pandemic has you using your creativity to make a way forward for yourself and your art.

As I always say (to the great annoyance of everyone around me) every problem is just an opportunity for a creative solution.

and be generous. be safe. be kind. be still in business.