5 Non-Negotiables When Building a Successful Art Business

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The starving artist trope is alive and well. Creatives and artists have been told from a young age that they will have to "grow up" or "find other ways to make a living." The truth is, though: It's entirely possible to make a living — and build a successful business — as an artist.

Of course, building an art business doesn't come with a handbook. On top of that, few traditional business-building practices apply. What's more: As creatives, we often think of ourselves as right-brained (creative and intuitive) and not equipped with left-brained analytical or planning abilities. Most artists don't view themselves as entrepreneurs, and we don't see many examples of artists who've supported themselves through their art.

They exist, though. Every day, artists make a living from their art — without sacrificing their passion or their creativity. Following the five steps below, you can build a successful art business that supports you and your creative spirit.

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1. A great product

It's the same for any business: You need to have a solid product that people want to buy. While "great" is subjective

in the art world, there are still standards for any medium. Potters need to create usable pottery, painters need to consider composition, and composers need to write music with certain notes in mind.

Your craft is critical when selling art. While you are an artist, and the raw talent is there, you also want to make sure that the art you're creating is *the best possible version* of itself. This means potentially investing in art training, practicing your craft and even learning from fellow artists.

Learning from other artists, however, is not the same as *emulating* other artists. When we start to think about selling our art, it's normal to start looking around to see what other artists are creating or selling. This isn't the way to create our strongest art that people want to buy, though. Creating "honest art" is, however.

Honest art is the art that's true to you and your skills. Honest art is the art only *you* can create. The more true to your skills and experience, the more likely your art will draw eyes and buyers.

2. A business plan

Most artists will avoid "planning" like the plague. It sounds too structured, too rigid and too detailed. Generally, artists are visionaries and dreamers, *not* planners.

The good news is: Your art business plan does not have to be an 18-page typed document that you submit to the bank or investors for funding. This plan is just for you, so that you can *clearly* see if you're on track (and on task).

You'll want to plan for things like collection drops, gallery shows or art fairs, commissions and artistic development. If you want to make your first sale in the next two months, that's part of the plan. How will you make that sale?

Overall, it also helps to know how much money you need to make from your art business and how you'll price your pieces. This way, you know you need to sell a certain number of pieces to reach that goal – and you can create a plan that helps you reach that goal from there.

Numbers, like planning, are often overwhelming for artists. However, it's a necessary step if you want a business that's viable and supports your needs.

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3. Marketing strategies

Every business has to market its products to sell. Of course, when we think about marketing something as personal and raw as our art, it's normal to freeze up. This is also where artists might come up against resistance – especially from art purists who believe that art and commerce should never mix.

The most effective way to overcome this is to remind yourself that sharing your art is how it makes an impact. It also helps to look to other artists, to see how they're promoting (read: *marketing*) their art in ways that feel true to their passions.

Take musicians and bands, for example. They may release their newest songs on social media or send newsletters about their upcoming appearances. Does that feel like marketing? No, it feels like they're excited to share their creations with their fans.

Potters and illustrators also frequently announce "new product drops," letting followers know that they've restocked their shelves of gorgeous ceramics or most-loved prints. Painters show themselves, on video, painting their latest commission in real-time. Even some of the most famous performance artists out there, like JLo, Lady Gaga and Dr. Dre, add hype to their upcoming events or releases by sharing behind-the-scenes on

social media.

When artists think of marketing, they might be thinking in a left-brained, structured way. There is a way to "do" marketing in a way that feels both effective and creative, though. It all comes down to finding the right platforms that make the artist feel their most authentic, while also attracting people.

You might find that you share your work best in a newsletter, or that you want to focus on social media. You may also find that networking and local events are the most natural for you. The key is to find the marketing strategies that get you in front of people *who want to buy your art*.

4. Build a brand

People aren't just buying the art; they're buying the artist. Think of your favorite musician, painter or band. You love what they create, but also *how* they create and *who* they are. As humans, we rarely (if ever) detach the art from the artist.

This is why creating a brand is so important. The most basic definition of a brand is the ways in which you can distinguish your product from others and communicate that difference in your marketing.

As artists, we often think of our "brand" as our artistic styling. How many times have you been in a museum and automatically known that the art you were looking at was a Picasso or a Kahlo? But your brand extends beyond your distinct artistic patterns.

Your brand is your story, your medium, your personality, the way you talk – even the visual patterns in your art and in your online presence. Your brand is also how you draw in your people (i.e., your potential buyers). Who are you selling to? What speaks to them? Do you create in a specific way that

people have said they enjoy?

Consider your brand and how you represent yourself and your art everywhere you show up. From local art fairs to your website and your social media, your brand (and your presence) needs to be consistent.

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5. Just start

Nobody — not even those with a degree in business management — knows what to do right out of the gates. As an artist, you might be entirely new to the business world, and there's a lot to learn in what might seem like a little amount of time. Remember, though: You are not new to being an artist.

You have the innate skills, the heart and the drive to create meaningful, honest art. People have created businesses with less drive than you have and found success. The *true* key to finding success with your art business, though, is just to start. Decide how you want to sell your art, how much you want to sell it for and who you want to buy it. It's time to make a living from your art.

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