

artBiZcoach.com

The Artist's Marketing Plan

3: DEFINE YOUR ART

Good marketing calls for performing a lot of small tasks thoroughly and intelligently. Great marketing requires that the tasks be done well, that you have good products and services, and know your customers and prospects better than your competitors do.—
David H. Bangs, Jr., [The Market Planning Guide](#), page v.

There is no sense having a marketing plan if you don't have artwork to market. Concentrate on production until you have a body of work that is of high quality and is consistent in style. You have to be proud of it and believe in it! A friend of mine who moved to New York spent at least three years producing new work before he felt he was ready to start approaching galleries. While you are preparing a body of work, however, you should be thinking about what you will do with it and forming your plan along the way. You should be doing things such as building your mailing list, researching venues, and meeting the people you need to know.

Several frustrated clients have approached me with comments like this: "I do so many different things. It's hard for me to describe my art." My response? **Pick one and get on with it!** You have to do what you are compelled to do, but know that if you choose to market, for example, realistic Western landscapes, colorful abstractions, *and* figurative bronzes, you will have to do three times the work because you will necessarily need to target three different audiences. And you must be able to articulate your goals for all three.

Conveying a clear, consistent message makes your marketing efforts so much easier.

When you want to sell your work, you can rarely get by with "I make art." Your words have to be much more descriptive and "user-friendly." **You only get one chance to make a first impression!** If you fumble, it will be hard to correct your mistakes. If you haven't done so already, consider the journaling process available to you in *The Relatively Pain-Free Artist Statement*. You can download the e-book and start immediately by going here:

<http://www.artbizcoach.com/resources/statement.html>



Once you make a deliberate effort to do this, you will be able to use good language on press releases, grant applications, and in interviews and public talks. If you do nothing else, at least begin recording your thoughts in a journal.

pricing your artwork

Obviously, you would like to sell everything you create, right? That's a great goal to have and not one that is unrealistic. But you know that you have to be a businessperson as well as an artist in order to achieve that. In fact, I would go so far as to say that you are presumptuous if you assume the title of "artist" without maintaining good business practices.

How do you establish your prices? Are they consistent? Are you covering all (all!) of your costs in addition to paying yourself a wage?

The information on pricing will guide you in determining your prices. It is kind of a pain to keep track of minutia like that on the first page (actual cost pricing), but I think it's important to do it for at least as long as it takes to get a good average. Most people cannot comprehend all of the costs that go into making artwork, which you should be able to articulate to your customers and collectors. You don't want to give them the sense that you are pricing your work without any thought to what it actually cost to make it. I recommend market pricing (page two) while you are gathering the data for actual cost pricing or after you have completed actual cost pricing and you have some sense of what your costs are.

Keep track of your costs and know where the money goes.

two pricing methods

1. ACTUAL COSTS PRICING¹

Step 1: Keep track of overhead costs.

- rent
- rental insurance
- advertising
- utilities
- professional fees
- transportation
- dues & publications
- postage
- documentation (slides, photos)
- materials
- education

Step 2: Figure out overhead costs per each work.

To be calculated on an annual basis:

$$\text{Overhead Costs} \div \text{Number of Works} = \text{Cost of Overhead per Work}$$

Step 3: Calculate cost of individual piece.

- Cost of Overhead per Work
- + Labor²
- + 10% profit margin
- + Commission³
- + Framing

Sales Price

¹ This is a conflation of pricing guides by Caroll Michels and Constance Smith. I think it's useful to go through the exercise, but don't let it drive you batty. Market value pricing is a much saner way of pricing your work. Michels leaves out the 10% profit margin and framing costs in her formula, but suggests you price work at a few hundred dollars over what you actually want for it. Smith suggests you price at least one work, perhaps one you feel most strongly about) well above the others. See Caroll Michels, *How to Survive and Prosper as an Artist* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2001) and Constance Smith, *Art Marketing 101: A Handbook for the Fine Artist* (Nevada City, CA: ArtNetwork, 1997, updated 2001).

² Don't forget to pay yourself! Your hourly wage is something you have to assign yourself based on what you would like to be paid for your work. Multiply it by the number of hours it took to complete the work.

³ Anticipating sales from a gallery, consultant, or other possible source, you should add in the full amount of what a commission would take from a sale, usually 50%. This should never be subtracted—even in sales from your studio. Otherwise you wind up with inconsistent pricing and underselling your dealers.

Stanfield Art Associates, Inc.

Copyright© 2005-2008 Alyson B. Stanfield. Written for the art marketing community at www.artbizconnection.com.

Any part of it may be copied and distributed as long as these three credit lines remain intact.

2. MARKET VALUE PRICING

Market value pricing is probably the easiest and most common way to price your work.

Simply research art sales (not just prices, but actual sales) in your area. Look for work similar in size, medium and subject and by artists at a comparable point in their careers. If you are just starting out, you don't want to compare your work to that in high-end galleries. Check out juried exhibits, outdoor art festivals, open studios, and non-profit artist spaces and co-ops.

Just make sure you are actually *making* money. And follow the general guidelines on the next page.

In General

- **Original** paintings on canvas and sculpture sell for more than works on paper or multiples (prints, photographs, editioned sculpture).
- **Bigger** works command higher prices.
- Works with **more expensive materials** command higher prices.
- **An artist that produces 300 paintings a year** will ask for less per painting than an artist who only produces 10 in a year.
- **You have one price, the retail price, for your work.** You should sell at this price from your studio and have it written in your contract with anyone else who sells your work. Keep a price list on hand at all time so that you don't offer work to someone at one price, then someone else at another price. Yes, this means that you will be getting less if you sell your work through a gallery. You want to ensure that the gallery is also selling at your retail price (thus making sure it is part of your contract with them). If they buy a work at \$500 (your asking price), but can sell it for \$3,000, you still only make \$500!
- **You are free to offer discounts** for cash payments versus credit cards or monthly installments.
- **Ask for payment for drawing up plans or creating models** for commissioned artwork, even if it is a modest fee. Always have a written contract for your commissions and ask for 50% down and 50% upon delivery.

Briefly describe the physical aspects of your art (size, subject, color, medium, etc.):

What is the price range of your art?

Using your answers to the previous two questions, complete this sentence:

I create _____ that sell for \$_____ to \$_____.

This description should be from a business standpoint, not art historical and not philosophical. Be very specific about those things that are relevant: size, color, material, technique, subject matter, and whatever else might differentiate your work. Or you can think of it another way. You can take your description from your 10-second commercial, like this one I developed from the 10-second commercial of my fictional painter, Arthur Jackson:

I create large-scale, colorful, abstract paintings with collage elements that sell for \$3,500 to \$7,000.

How has your work changed recently?

List any new bodies of work, products, or services:

What sells the best and why?

If you have two or more bodies of work that are significantly different from one another, I suggest you have a separate marketing plan for each one. Why? Because you have a different market for each body of work! For your first plan, just select one body of work. The second plan will be much easier as many of the answers will be similar.

next session: differentiate yourself from your competition
What one thing do you want to accomplish before the next meeting?