



ARE YOU READY TO EXPORT - Video Summary

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Tip Five:

Learning How To Sell

I remember an old friend worked at a high end audio/video store and had to do all kinds of sales training as part of his job. I would have hated it, but I will always remember one thing he came away with – if you can get the customer to utter one word, then the sale should be sealed. The point was that once they opened up and showed some interest or revealed something about themselves, that was enough of an invitation to ‘do your thing’.

I used to have a philosophy that the work should sell itself, I hated being pushy. But as the maker and designer, you are full of information the buyer wants to hear and it has taken me years to figure out how valuable your voice can be in making more sales. Not selling. Just talking.

At a craft show or in your studio, if someone has stepped in or come to visit, they probably want to come away with something. A little story about why you chose the material, where you sourced it, how you have used the same item in your own life, etc. – that’s gold to the customer. Customers want to meet the maker and hear how it was made, what inspired you, and feel your personality.

At large trade shows I needed not only to sell the line, but also define the ‘brand’. People came in asking for the spiel and at first, I didn’t know what to say. However I was trying to seem bigger than I was, surrounded by all these huge companies from all over the world, and really, what I was offering was that I was small. Now I proudly announce that I am a small business, that the work is designed by me, and is all made in our studio. Start to finish. It is a great time to be a local small maker because consumers want local hand-made things and stores who don’t carry them are foolish not to meet the need.

Continued...

I have learned:

- To put work out in front of people as a body of work, display it as you want it displayed; this can show stores how best to showcase your work and inspire users to use the item in their homes
- that customers want to meet the maker and hear how a work was made, what inspired you and feel your personality
- to spend time getting 'the spiel'; it's really important to describe your brand/line in one sentence
- that if you're not good at talking to people or are weak at sales, send someone else or bring someone who can.

I know from personal experience that I can be a wimp about standing up for minimum prices and charging the full amount to lovely people that come by.

The second half of selling is also important. To direct customers, I always try to wrap or package things nicely, find out what they are intending to do with it, how they found me, and if they want to keep in touch. I remember being in New York City where I made a small purchase. The clerk asked if I would prefer paper or cloth bag (of course I chose cloth), she wrapped it tenderly and then walked me out the door holding my arm and thanked me sincerely for coming. I have been back to that store and bought something every time I'm in New York.

I have learned that:

- People like to feel special and that is something that as a small business/maker we can give them
- The packing materials you choose, the thank-you cards and brochures you send with the order will help you secure another order
- Communication is important. Once the order is confirmed, send an email confirming it with a target ship date.

It's important to treat online sales with the same attention. How an order comes in the mail with a hand-written thank-you note or special wrapping makes all the difference to the customer coming back. And returning customers should be the easiest sales to get. I have lots of repeat customers who purchase from all over and they like that I make it easy for them, respond and ship quickly, and have somehow built up a relationship with a few of them without ever meeting.

Usually stores give you a 'ship date' to accommodate their finances or to spread things out so not everything arrives at once. I also try to follow-up with wholesale orders after they are placed to confirm, to let them know if an order might be late and when it has shipped. It helps them to keep tracking, particularly when they are placing so many orders at the show. If you prepare the invoice (without shipping) to send as a confirmation, then it is done and can make shipping out orders easier when the time comes for it to go out.

Getting stores to re-order should be easy, but it takes some work. I am amazed how often I see a retailer at a trade show and they mention that the last order sold out right away, but they haven't re-ordered. But I am also particularly guilty of shipping off an order and never following up.

I have learned that:

- I should always be following up orders and supporting re-orders. Ask how it went. So many stores need follow-up – email blasts, mailings and direct mails are pretty important.
- I have even had the advice that if you are going to pay anyone to do anything, it should involve generating more sales as it will pay for itself
- Continued communication is the key. You need to make it very easy for everybody.

Too often we get caught up in the day-to-day dealings and the making of the product and we never work on the business itself.