

The Art Marketing Project Podcast — Creating Partnerships to Sell Your Art

I'm Cindy Hohman, and this is the Art Marketing Project Podcast, where I help empower artists just like you to take the reins of marketing selling your work into your own hands. So you can sell your work consistently and confidently and get yourself back into the studio where you belong.

All right. **Today, we're going to talk about creating partnerships to sell your art. I'm going to talk about why you should be creating partnerships, who in my experience, it works best to create partnerships with and how to go about doing it.**

Links discussed during this episode and all of my show notes are available as always at artmarketingproject.com/podcast.

I actually managed partnerships for a number of years for a major art museum. So a lot of what I'm sharing with you here comes from that experience of just working with local businesses to help promote art. So this is not coming from, hey, here's what I think you should do, but it comes really from experience of who it's best a partnership and what kind of partnerships work best and how to get partners engaged with you. So let's get into the content.

My first tip is to focus on local businesses. For the most part, large national businesses are really hard to create partnerships with, because local employees don't have the authority to create partnerships and they have no flexibility in their marketing and communications. It really is directed by a corporate office. So you're just not going to have much success if you walk into a national corporate business. In my experience, it's just not something that's going to work very well. So you're going to have much more success going to your local Bed and Breakfast that is owned by a local family, rather than going to a massive hotel chain.

Most of the large businesses that I have spoken to just don't have the interest in being involved on a local level. But two that I have found exception to this rule are Whole Foods and IKEA. I will tell you, my experience with Whole Foods came before they were bought out by Amazon. So this may have changed but my experience with Whole Foods, in general, was they wanted to be seen as a community store, grocery store community business rather than a corporate business. I have found have been good partners, in general. And then IKEA. IKEA is another large international corporation, but their local stores like to partner with local businesses to help bring entertaining, interesting activities and content to their shoppers.

So those are two that I have found to be actually really good local citizens who are corporate entities. So when you're thinking a business or organizations that you can partner with, I would at least start with local. Because local bookstores, local restaurants, local boutique stores are just going to be more interested in you as a local artist in your community than if you were trying to reach out to corporate office that is located in some large city far away from where you live. You're just going to find more success in that, I think.

Not saying that you shouldn't pursue big partnerships with bigger corporations. But I think it's really good to start with the smaller ones because it gives you a taste of putting together partnerships and how they might work without having to work with some really big corporate entities. And it also, I think,

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on the local level, you're going to find that you're going to be more successful getting yeses and so you'll be able to actually do that work sooner. If you're pursuing large corporations, it could take you a number of years to get into that business or maybe it would never happen. So it can be a really long game if you're looking for those larger businesses to be engaged with.

I have a list of potential partners that I created as a free download. So I will link that in this episode in the show notes for you so you can grab that.

Then my second tip is to connect with local artists, museums and cultural organizations. Other artists in your community can be great partners. So if you can find someone else with a similar but not duplicate style and create a partnership, you can double your audience. And they can do the same while creating something that could bring you more media attention as well as them.

Maybe a good way to approach this is to look at artists who would be complimentary to you. Whether it is complimentary in your skills or complimentary in your style, or whatever criteria, but find somebody who complements you rather than duplicates you. Because maybe you could partner with an artist who really does a great job at publicity. Or maybe you do a great job of publicity, and you can work with another artist who has a large following even though they're not as talented at what you are. So find an artist who you can partner with where there will be benefit on both sides. And I think You will find some success there.

I have an example of that, that I will share with you here in the show notes, which is partnership between artists here in Denver, where I live, Jonathan Saiz and Wes Magyar. Those two artists here locally partnered up for a portrait painting partnership and kind of a long-term project that they partnered on. And they got a decent amount of press coverage for it locally here. Because between the two of them, they were able to create something bigger than either one of them could on their own. It really gave them the opportunity to do something of a magnitude that the local media would pay attention to. So that's one of the big benefits of partnering with somebody else. It just gives you kind of leverage in doing something bigger than you could on your own.

Then I mentioned museums and other cultural organizations as good partners. The reasons why you should pursue these kinds of organizations is because the marketing and communications departments within museums and other cultural organizations, number one, are pretty good sized. And number two, they're always up to something creative, from PR stunts to artists in residence programs to special events. And if there aren't any partnership opportunities right now within those organizations, it's great to get your name on their list and be in touch, so when opportunities do arise, they'll think of you.

I think you need to be thinking for partnerships how you can leverage organizations like museums and cultural institutions who have large marketing staffs. Because these institutions have big followings, but then they also have a team of people out there promoting it. So if you can get yourself engaged with them, that will benefit you in the long run. Absolutely.

Tip number three is to use your network. The best way to get connected to potential partners is through your network. When I say network, I don't mean networking, where you're going to random

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meet-ups in your community and handing your business card to a bunch of random people. I mean, a network that you build for yourself to help connect you to the people who you want to meet, who would help your business move forward. So reach out to people you know and ask them if they can connect you to a specific partnership opportunity that maybe you have in your head, or even connect you to someone else who could.

This is how I like to approach building a network, which is, you know a certain number of people and those people know people and then the people that they know, know people and so it really expands exponentially. By sitting down and talking to someone you know or a handful of people that you know and saying, I am looking to create a partnership or to be introduced to this organization. Or even if you don't have a particular organization in mind, say, I'm interested in partnering with businesses in the community, and here's the kind of business I might be looking to meet.

So whether you're specific or you leave it a little bit open-ended, your contacts should be able to come up with one person to introduce you to. And that person may be able to connect you to two or three people, or they might be able to connect you to the business that you would like to talk to. So use your network. get out there, talk to people, ask them for connections. And then on the opposite side, when they ask you for connections, it's your responsibility to follow through and offer them the connections that they need as well.

So I am going to share in the show notes here, my tips for building a network, which basically involves, being a good person, sitting down and meeting with people in person, offering to help them when you can, go into the meeting with a ... I like to call it a servant's heart. So asking them what you can do to help them first before you ask for anything from them. And then follow through with what you promised from, you know, that you promise to them. But ask them, going with a specific thought in mind, who you would like to be introduced to if you're thinking of a specific business, or if you're thinking for a business that fits a certain description. So either way, but you need to give the people who you network with some detail as to who you would like to meet so they can help make those introductions.

My next tip is to make sure you approach partnerships as a business venture. This is really a big one for you as an artist, is to make sure that there's value for you in the partnership. It's really easy to be kind, friendly, creative and build a partnership that asks a bunch from you, but doesn't pay you back at all. So you should make sure that there is value on both sides, and not just a vague promise of visibility from your partner. So make sure that you are assessing the value that's going to come to you. Whether that is just visibility, because visibility is in front of your ideal buyer is a very good thing. But it should be defined.

So you should not let a partner just say to you, we'll give you some visibility for that. What you need to do is ask for details. Make sure you understand that the visibility that you would be getting is worth this expenditure of your time and energy and creativity and the effort you're going to put into it. And then also be clear on what you're promising to give and what you'll get in the partnership. Make sure that you're providing value to your partners because you want a good reputation.

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You want to be the artist when marketing communications directors, executive directors from whatever businesses are talking, they say, you definitely should work with this artist. He or she is a total professional, they absolutely follow through on what they say they're going to do. So it's really important that you approach this as a business venture from your point of view, and make sure that you do what you say you're going to do. Because you don't want to build a bad reputation. That's going to hurt you.

The next tip is to enter into any partnership with a goal. That means increasing your audience. Is it actually making sales? Is it getting your art in front of a unique audience to you? Is it increasing your email subscribers? Is it increasing your social media followers? So you get the idea. I can't list for you all of the business goals that might be attached to a partnership. But don't go into a partnership without thinking about what you want to get out of it. Be willing to adjust your goal as the partnership is created. But don't lose track of the fact that you do have a business goal.

The reasoning for this is because if you go in with this idea that there is a goal and a value for you that you're seeking out of this partnership, you will help yourself by asking your partner for ways to achieve your goal. Because if your goal is increasing your email subscribers and you tell your partner that's really your goal here, they can help you figure out how they can benefit that goal, how they can help you achieve it. So they can say, well, if we come up with, in our email newsletter that we give, we share your special offer in our email newsletter and say if they just join yours, don't get this free benefit from us.

Or if your goal is increasing your social media followers, you could create some kind of a partnership where they ask people to go follow you on social media for some kind of reward or benefit or who knows what. Honestly, if increasing your sales is the ... Of course, that's really the bottom line goal of any partnership, any business arrangement that we put together, right. But I would encourage you to think of an intermediate goal, especially with a new partnership. Because if you think that a partnership is going to get your name out in front of this partner's audience, and they're immediately going to buy your work, you're kind of fooling yourself. Because the truth is people take time to warm up to something they've just learned about. If they've just learned about your art, it's going to take them time to decide whether that really belongs in their home or in their collection or in their business.

So even though your bottom line goal is absolutely selling more work, I think you should ask yourself the question of how close could this partnership get you to that? If it is a partnership where you're selling work, hanging work on the walls in a business' location, then actually selling that work would be a reasonable goal. But if you're partnering with them just for some level of visibility, and you say that your goal is to sell work, and then you don't sell much, I think you're setting a goal that's a little bit unreasonable. Visibility, traffic to your website, followers on social media, email subscribers would be a better interim goal for that kind of a partnership. So just make sure you're not setting yourself with a goal that is unreasonable for the partnership that you're creating.

Then my last tip is to track your results and do a debrief. In a debrief, what you should ask yourself, number one, let's go back. If you tracking your results, you can find out, if you're using Google Analytics, you can find out where traffic came from to your website. There are a number of different ways that

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you can track results. So what I would encourage you to do is talk with a partner about how you might be able to track those kinds of results of a partnership.

Whether that is your partner keeping track of something manually when people walk into their business, or if it is you tracking traffic from their website to your website. Or if for you, it's tracking how many email subscribers you got during the month that you were doing this partnership. But think about how you might track information or what information you might track to tell yourself whether this was successful. That will help you design a partnership that can give you those results so you can decide whether it was successful or not.

Doing a debrief is asking yourself, did you meet the goal that you set? What went well? What didn't? What benefits did you receive from the partnership? Were there expected or unexpected benefits? What was your final value at the end? Would you do a partnership like this again? And if so, what would you do differently? What didn't you do as well as you had hoped? What do you think you might do differently next time to find better results? This is how you can continually improve your marketing and sales work in your business, is to always ask yourself these questions as to what went well? What could be improved? What will I do next time?

What I encourage you to do always is to do this kind of a debrief of any kind of partnership or marketing campaign that you run. Because if you do it once, and you say, I don't think it really helped me at all, and you never do it again, you are really shorting yourself the benefit of learning and improving and that what you're doing there is instead of approaching marketing as a marathon, you're approaching it as a sprint and saying, I'll try it once and if it doesn't work, I'm never doing it again. That's just not the kind of mindset that you need to be successful here. You need the mindset of, I've done it, I'm going to look at what could be improved and I'm going to do it again with some changes and give yourself the opportunity to keep working at it and improving.

The action that I would love to see you take after listening to this podcast, is to make a list of three to five potential partners in the community, whether it is specific businesses, or maybe it's a category of business, right. Maybe it's just a cultural institution or a visual arts organization. Or maybe you just say, restaurants or some kind of broader category, or maybe you know, three or five businesses, actual names of businesses, that you think would be possible potential successful partnerships. So make yourself a list of three to five businesses or categories of businesses to reach out to, and start the process. Do the outreach and start having these conversations. It takes time to build this kind of a partnership, but once you get some of these in place, you could really see the benefit in the long-term.

So again, the freebie that I mentioned is a list of potential partnerships that you could consider in your local community. So you can grab that freebie in the show notes at artmarketingproject.com/podcast, you can find this episode. Thanks so much for joining me today. I look forward to hearing all of the great partnerships that you put together. So absolutely feel free to send me a message or tag me on Instagram and let me know how you did with this action. Thanks so much. I'll talk to you again next week.



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