

February 2009 Oregon Potters' Association Newsletter
SPECIAL SECTION: BUILDING YOUR BUSINESS

ARE YOU EXPERIENCING A SLOWDOWN IN SALES? Use the time that you are not in your studio to get your business in order. In the next few Newsletters we will try to have some informative articles on preparing photos, writing resumes and artist statements, blogging, booth design, etc. Several OPA Members have submitted articles for this Newsletter. If you have an article idea you would like to submit, please contact Janet Buskirk, JanetBuskirk@gmail.com.

A few tips from a recent Sculptor's Guild Newsletter article, written by Lawrence (Jerry) Morrell: Update your website; create postcards that are generic and all-purpose; photograph images; update your resume; create effective electronic files for your art with title; size and price of each image in jpeg format (low res for emailing); produce an online and offline portfolio for presentations to galleries; clean and organize your studio.

MARKETING INFORMATION and other important articles are available to members any time by going to the "Members Only" section of the OPA website. To access this, go to www.oregonpotters.org, go to the Member/ Membership section, and log in using the username: opamember, password: potters.

TIPS FOR BETTER SALES IN 2009 by Ellen Currans: The following article was emailed out to OPA membership in early February.

2009 IS A WATERSHED YEAR FOR SHOWCASE! We have been steadily going down in sales from \$496,000 in 2002, while in Hall A+, 37,000 sq. ft. to \$420,000 in 2008 in Hall A 1,2, (60,000 sq. ft). We had 132 booths in 2002 and 154 in 2008.

(Rough count from the hall layout—not accounting for possible dropouts, and not counting the group booth.) Attendance is also down (or leveled off) at around 18,000.

Our decision in 2003 to buy more space to include more potters has not increased our total sales. In fact, it has probably decreased individual sales, while raising the booth fee and commission and the overall expenses of the show. When we voted to enlarge the show, we also agreed to use some of our contingency savings to cover extra expenses we might incur in the change over, or if the sales did not go up commensurate with increased participation. We cannot continue to use our savings in this way.

The SHOWCASE Steering committee is working hard to figure out why this has happened, and what we should do about it for the future. We have options to move, most likely to Expo, go back to a smaller room and stay at OCC, raise the booth fee to what it actually costs to put on the show, or take a higher commission. If we go smaller, we will have to figure a way to allot space that will probably be some form of lottery, jurying, longevity or sales. Whichever we do, people will be unhappy.

Along with our own internal problems with increasing expenses and lower sales, we now have the double whammy of the whole country in financial turmoil. People losing jobs and houses, or in fear of losing them, are not good customers for pots. So, what can we do in 2009 to keep SHOWCASE the viable venue many of us depend on, and possibly avoid changes we surely won't like?

At one of the SHOWCASE Steering meetings it was suggested "if our members sell better, we will have a better show. (duh!)" "To help our members sell better", we have compiled a number of ideas from the top sellers in Showcase that we hope you will consider in the spirit they are offered. **IT IS REALLY IMPORTANT THAT WE EACH DO AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE THIS YEAR TO INCREASE OUR PERSONAL SALES.!!!**

So, here in no particular order, are some ideas for improving sales.

GET YOUR PERSONAL CUSTOMER MAILING LIST INTO THE SHOWCASE MAILING LIST CHAIR.. If you don't invite buyers to SC who know and like your work, how can you expect to have really good sales? Every chance you get let people know you are in SHOWCASE and invite them to come

early and get the good stuff. Don't worry about losing your buyers to other potters – you can't control that except by offering really good work yourself. Pass out SC information or flyers at other shows and keep them up front in your home showroom. Update the flyer mailing list every year with new buyers' addresses.

PUBLICITY IS TREMENDOUSLY IMPORTANT. Do not pass up any opportunity for good publicity about you and your work. An article with great pictures can add thousands of dollars to your sales. Plan to make more of the same or similar pieces shown in the article. Many people will come to the show just to get that piece. If it is one of a kind, have more on hand that are similar. If you or your work is not chosen this year for publicity, try to work up some of your own, in your local paper, your company newsletter, or by sending an e-mail flyer to family and friends. People have jumped from so-so sales to top sellers in the year they have great publicity.

BRING ENOUGH STOCK TO SELL WELL. Surprisingly, many potters do not have enough work on hand to have good sales even if they sell all of it. To make the estimated \$800 a full booth should return in commission, each needs to sell about \$4,000. To do better than that, obviously you need to bring more. I find it helpful to keep track of the dollar value when I am preparing for any show. I keep an evolving computer list of the forms I make, including the amount of clay if thrown, and price. I know how many were made and sold at the last show, and I try to figure out what is needed for the next one. I make a list each day of the pieces made and the total retail price. Once a week or so I add it up to see how I am doing. My goal is to have twice as much work on hand as I want to sell at the show. It is kind of a mind game, but I find I will often make just a few more of something to fill out my list instead of going off to bed early.

If most of your work is highly decorated and labor intensive, you might want to add some plainer, complementary pieces, simpler to make and priced a bit lower. People might then buy the group together rather than just one of a kind, or can afford a less expensive bowl along with a very expensive pitcher.

WHAT TO BRING? Beginning potters may not have much choice. You bring your best work, and be as critical as possible about what is best. It is wisest to not have too much variety in style, glazing, clay types, firing, etc.. A "body of work" should have some cohesive similarities that say it is all done by one person. If you do several kinds of clay work, separate them in the booth. Do not bring seconds. If you do not have enough work for a full booth, do a half booth or the group booth. If you do not make a lot of different forms, it might be best to display them in a smaller booth, and replace them as sold, rather than put out many duplicates.

Long time potters have other decisions to make. Have you made the same forms with the same glazes forever? If they still sell well, fine. Continuity is good for customers who want to add to their collection of your work. If some part of your line of work is not selling as well as it used to, is it time to consider that the forms and glazes may be a bit dated? Without changing everything at once, can you begin to add new pieces, more contemporary colors, and in this year of recession, perhaps more useful, reasonably priced items. Customers will return each year to buy more if they know you are creating new forms. Since SC is just before mother's Day, it would be smart to have some relatively inexpensive items up front for kids to buy for their mothers.

If your work is more in the Ceramic Art rather than production mode, in order to survive to pot another day, can you bring yourself to make some smaller, less complicated and less expensive pieces? Mick Casson called it "making some and some". Some to satisfy his own artistic needs, and some sure to sell. It is not a compromise in quality but a recognition that money is tight for many people this year. Potters selling at shows in the past few months are saying that they are still selling expensive pieces (\$500 - 1,000) but fewer in the mid range. Since mid range will be different for ceramic art than production it is hard to figure out exactly what is mid range. In most reports, customers are spending less than they used to and looking for lower priced items. You may not need to change what you are already doing, just add a few more items at lower prices.

PRICING! This just never seems to get easy, especially in a year when the economy is tanking. One potter may be able to mass produce quality work and sell it all at what you think are low prices. They may have years of experience, and low overhead. Another may be renting a studio, have high overhead, selling through 50% galleries, and using labor intensive methods. Each potter has to decide for themselves the return they need for their work. Keep in mind it is easier to raise your prices as your skill and quality increases than to lower them if work is not selling. Established potters have worked for years to achieve the recognition and prices their work now commands. New potters will get a good education on pricing and what is selling if they sign up for workshifts at the sales tables or holding area.

SHOWCASE was started as a **SELLING** event back in the days when OPA was mostly studio potters who needed a good sales opportunity in the Spring.. If your main reason for having a booth is to **DISPLAY** your current work to attract galleries, exhibition opportunities or add to your resume, that's OK, but be aware that it may be necessary in the future to pay more for your **DISPLAY** space.

BOOTHS! Five of the 12 top sellers of 2008 had booths in the front left quadrant of the hall as you come in the door. Three were in the front right quadrant and 4 in the back right quadrant around the Demo stage. (One was on the back wall behind the Demo stage and next to the loading doors.) Two had half booths. Most long time participants will tell you that where their booth is doesn't make much difference in their sales. It is mostly just easier to pick the same spot and not have to work up a new booth arrangement. It is also true that after doing the show for many years, we enjoy catching up on the lives of our potter friends and that is easier if they are nearby. If the perception is that newcomers are relegated to the outer edges deliberately, it may be time to mix it up a bit or change the layout. The most elaborate booths don't necessarily sell the most.

One top seller said they don't try to make their booth especially fancy. They let the work speak for itself. Another suggested having a special pedestal arrangement at the front and center with the most interesting pieces to entice people to stop and look. If people are just walking by, you need to do something to get their attention so they really look at the work. Depending on the kind of work you do, you may want to arrange it sparsely and very carefully by color and size, giving each expensive piece the space it deserves. If your work is mostly useful production pieces with great variety of color and forms, it will probably work just fine to stack it up on the shelves, in some coordinated and reasonable fashion, and get out of the way. You have to decide if you are presenting your work in a "fine gallery" or in a "good pot shop".

If your work is anything out of the mainstream of Northwest pottery, you need explanatory photos and materials in your booth. Most of the public does not understand the romance of pit firing or the difference between an anagama and a Skutt. They don't read Ceramic magazines. You need to educate them to the specialness of your work and how they might enjoy it. Use the small signs provided that say "NO LEAD" or where you can be reached. A short bio with a picture of you or your studio is good too.

MEETING YOUR PUBLIC: Not all of us like to be "on stage" with the pots, but most of us realize that the public does like to meet the potters/artists. Many find their sales are better when they are in or near their booth to answer questions and help customers find what they are looking for. If you are grouchy, sleepy or depressed, stay away. One top seller says "I think one can never stop working on promotion and professionalism to sell one's work. Have your website up to date, professional photos, dress professionally, be a salesperson. I sometimes wish it wasn't true, but to sell more expensive work you are often selling yourself as well." Have business cards available so they can find you later.

WHY PEOPLE BUY: People buy because they see something that just reaches out and grabs them when they go by. They buy objects by color or texture to match their décor. (Yes they do!) They buy functional ware to add to the pleasure of eating and to create a beautiful display of food for guests. They buy an important piece of clay art for a special display place in their home or office. They buy what is comfortable and fits in their life style. They buy what they understand. They often buy something similar to what their sister-in-law bought last year. They come back to buy more because the piece they have

works the way it should. It feels good in the hand and on the lips. It enhances the food served in it. It sits pretty on the shelf and touches their senses each time they pass.

Come to SHOWCASE expecting to have a good time! If you are new to OPA, the newness will soon wear off as you share workshifts and get acquainted. Ask questions and you will be surprised at how helpful others can be. SHOWCASE is organized a bit differently than many other shows but you will appreciate the difference after a year or two.

-Ellen Currans, February 2009

POSTCARDS: If you need to get postcards printed, a couple of discount printers are: Modern Postcard, www.modernpostcard.com and Over Night Prints, www.overnightprints.com. A local company that tries to have competitive prices and works with a lot of artists and galleries is RedKat, www.RedKatImaging.com

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS: Are you comfortable with your digital equipment yet? Here are a few tips that might help:

Cameras: What type of camera should you buy? The point and shoot digitals are getting much better as well as cheaper. Many are high megapixel (six to ten) and have decent lenses. For basic needs, these will do. For truly professional digital photos, digital single lens reflex (dSLR) cameras are still the best. There is also an intermediate camera, the electronic viewfinder (EVF) camera, which is bigger and better than point and shoot cameras, but cheaper and nearly as good as dSLRs. Some examples of these are Fuji FinePix S100FS and Sony DSC H10. They have permanently mounted lenses which are fairly versatile, and they produce high quality images.

Taking pictures: First, decide how you plan to use your photos. Are they for a jury or an ad? Jury photos should present art in a straightforward, clear and detailed manner. Advertising photos should convey feelings and make the viewer feel good. Advertising photos may not show the entire piece of art or they may have more than just artwork in the picture.

When you take pictures with a point and shoot or an EVF camera, the camera automatically saves the photos to 72-ppi (pixels per inch), which is the standard for photos viewed on a computer screen. DSLR cameras can save files at larger resolutions. 300-ppi is the standard for publishing. Take pictures using the highest resolution your camera can do. You can always lower the resolution on the computer. To change the resolution of a point and shoot camera, you will need to go to the menu, use the tools section and go to the format section. Do this when your card is empty, as it can cause you to lose your old images.

If your colors are not coming out correctly, you may need to adjust your camera's "white balance." The more advanced cameras have a "custom WB" setting. Set the camera to that, then hang a large white paper in front of the camera and take a picture of it. The camera will ask if you want to save that setting. You do. Another source of problematic color may be how your camera saves the image. The standard "color spaces" that are used are sRGB or AdobeRGB. Make sure your camera is saving to one of these by going to the "menu" on the camera or the "EXIF" data file of your photo on your computer.

If your camera is making very pale or very dark scenes into gray scenes, you can compensate for that by pressing the +/- button on the camera.

Manipulating photos in the computer: First, before you begin to manipulate your raw image, rename it and save it to a new location. You never want to permanently change your original image.

You should also be aware of what type of file your image is. Most better cameras can save the file as a "Camera Raw" file. This is a large file that contains all of the original data from the camera and requires special software or plug-ins to transfer it to your computer. When you move these files to your computer, you should change them to TIF files. These are also large files that contain all of the original information, and they are readable on any computer. These files are too large to email or use on web pages, though.

For emailing, people typically use a jpg. Jpgs are compressed, and can be saved as large, medium or small files. Small jpgs are great for emailing snapshots, they are quick to download. All jpg files, since they are compressed, are missing much of their original information. Every time you do a "save as" with a jpg, you lose more info. For that reason, you do not want to save your original photos as jpgs.

There is a variety of software available for photo manipulation. Many options are listed below. You need to decide what your needs are before you purchase anything. Most of us need to be able to crop, change file size and manipulate some color. There are inexpensive (\$100) and free programs that can do these things.

Printing, emailing and uploading photos to the web: First, photos that will be printed usually need to be large files. Photos for the web need to be small files. Find out what size you need. Large files are often TIF, and small ones are often jpg.

Whatever method you use to view your photos, you may find that it needs to be calibrated for color. Your computer screen, digital projector and printer all have ways to calibrate their color.

Software to use: GIMP (www.gimp.org) is free, it works with both Mac and PC although it is mostly used on Mac. It has painting, editing and animating tools and can be augmented with plug-ins to customize it. Photobie (www.photobie.com) is free, works with Microsoft systems, and has tutorials that walk you through cropping, color balancing, transplanting and editing. Picasa (<http://picasa.google.com>) uploads images and gives you methods to sort and label them, and gives basic editing options. It works with PC or Mac. Adobe Photoshop is very popular and has all the bells and whistles for editing photos. Photoshop Elements is a stripped-down version of Photoshop that is often free when you purchase scanners or printers, and it will meet most of our photo editing needs. It can also be purchased for about \$100 from Adobe (www.adobe.com). Get Paint (www.getpaint.net) is free open-source for Windows users and can format images. Photo Resizer (www.Faststone.org) and PIX resizer (<http://bluefive.pair.com/pixresizer.htm>) can resize photos. Paint Shop Pro is commonly used as a basic image editing program, it costs about \$100.

Sources of information: Much of this information is gleaned from articles written by Steve Meltzer in *The Crafts Report* (Aug 2008, Dec 2008) and *Art Calendar* (April 2008, Sept 2008, Nov 2008, Jan 2009). He also has a book called *Photographing Arts, Crafts and Collectibles: Take Great Digital Photos for Portfolios, Documentation, or Selling on the Web*. There is also a wealth of information on www.Zapplication.org, where they have information on free downloads of photo editing software and they have tutorials for formatting photos using common photo editing software. Their tutorials are very good and are easy to understand. Many juried shows use the standard Zapplication format for digital photos.

OPA ARTISTS AND THE INTERNET? WEB SITES; BLOGS; WIKIS; PODCASTS; TWITTER... OMG! WHERE TO BEGIN? Article by Jim Johnstone

A **website** is a collection of web pages, images, videos or other digital assets that is hosted on a web server, usually accessible via the Internet. A web page is a document, typically written in HTML, that is almost always accessible via HTTP, a protocol that transfers information from the web server to display in the user's web browser. (Learn more about the Google site creation tools <http://sites.google.com/>)

A **blog** (a contraction of the term "**Web log**") is a Web site, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. (Learn more about Google's eBlogger <http://www.blogger.com/home>) Visit the OPA blog at <http://oregonpotters.blogspot.com/>

A **wiki** is a page or collection of Web pages designed to enable anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify content, using a simplified markup language. Wikis are often used to create collaborative web pages. The collaborative encyclopedia Wikipedia is one of the best-known wikis.

A **podcast** is a series of audio or video digital media files which is distributed over the internet by syndicated download, through web feeds, to portable players and personal computers. A podcast is distinguished from most other digital media formats by its ability to be syndicated, subscribed to, and downloaded automatically when new content is added.

Twitter is a social networking and micro-blogging service that allows its users to send and read other users' updates (otherwise known as **tweets**), which are text-based posts of up to 140 characters in length. No images.

Online social networking such as Bobo, Facebook and MySpace have expanded the way in which artists are able to present their work on the world wide web. This type of electronic communication allows users to join networks organized by geographic location, workplace, school, medium, etc. to connect and interact with other people. People can also add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves.

What can be of interest to artists is the capability of posting photos. Photos of your work can be placed on your "site" along with text and email links. By promoting your URL and encouraging people to visit, a dialog begins that potentially puts your work in front of a very large audience. Talk with friends or generate a web search to see how other artists are using this technology. Your presence can be as simple as a "business card" with images or a full blown interactive experience. To begin, you only need a free account and the willingness to touch base periodically to see what type of activity has been generated.

There are social networking sites that are dedicated solely to artists, visitors can search by artist, medium, location etc. You can evaluate this type of venue and determine if this is for you by visiting www.myartspace.com or www.artlog.com.

If you are more interested in a conventional web site, **Google Sites** is a free web page creation tool available through <http://sites.google.com/>

In its current stage of development (12/08[[update](#)]), Google Sites offers t a web address of the form "<http://sites.google.com/site/claypotssite/>". There are a limited number of theme templates available but you should be able to find one to suit your needs. The beauty is this is free and easy to use. You are limited to 100 MB of storage for a free account. If you images are sized before hand, you should have plenty of space to present yourself and your work. Although there are limitations the ingenious artist can present their work in a format that is completely transportable, to anyone interested, anywhere in the world.

Your internet presence will allow you to direct potential customers to your virtual location allowing them to view your work, get a feel for who you are and find contact directions and information; all from one internet location.

If you're just beginning to think about utilizing any of the current internet tools to promote yourself and your work, the first question should be, where do I start? Here are a few ideas:

1. Start a regular art newsletter with product updates, details of trade shows or fairs you plan to attend and other info, and publish it as an RSS file so that readers can subscript to it. (RSS (Rich Site Summary) is a format for delivering regularly changing web content. Many news-related sites, weblogs and other online publishers syndicate their content as an RSS Feed to whoever wants it.)
2. Use a photo sharing tool such as Flickr to share free digital images of your work, perhaps hallmarked with your web site address or bearing your art business logo. Using Flickr is simply a matter of going to www.flickr.com, signing up for a free account and then uploading images from your computer.
3. Consider using a free tool such as www.mobitsitegalore.com to create a web page that can be seen by mobile devices and includes all your important information like contact details, etc.
4. Consider interacting with art enthusiasts via blogs, discussion forums and other media tools.
5. Join a social network to publicize your art business, network with colleagues, galleries and others.

If you are interested in creating a Google Site, go to the OPA website, members only page and click "VIDEO – Create a Google Site", to watch a short video on "How To" begin (or use this link: <http://www.oregonpotters.org/Video/google-site/GoogleWebPages.html>)

HOW I SET UP A SIMPLE WEBSITE to Feature our Pottery Business 'From Dust to Clay,' by Bill Sanchez: Greetings OPA members. Times are tough so it's time to make sure you get the most out of your business. Although I'm a fairly new OPA member (joined in 2007) I have a little secret for you to make sure you are getting everything you can from your business. It's called **MARKETING**.

So how do you market your business more effectively and efficiently? One sure way is to get a website up and on the internet. That was one of the first things I did when I got started and let me tell you how gratifying it is to point to the www.fromdusttoclay.com on my business card when someone asks me that question 'do you have a website'? Websites are great to have so that you can state that you are part of the 21st century, but they also save me lots of time and money by referring potential customers to the site rather than sending them digital and hard copy images of my work.

Here's how I got started. I first thought I was being fancy when I put a bid request for someone to work on this for me on Elance.com. I got lots of hits ranging from ~\$800 to \$8,000. After I got back up off the floor I read through what these folks were offering. Because I was being fancy opening this up to the world I got lots of bids from everywhere including exotic places like India but even those friendly folks wanted a lot of money – which was a big investment for my fledging start-up. Also, I noticed that there could be lots of charges every time I wanted to change the content on my site. And because I change a lot in both my work and ways to market it I knew this could really add up to be a poor investment if I went with a web site provider. So I really got crazy and decided to do it myself.

And you know what – it was amazingly simple. Because I have used yahoo over the years I thought I would click on one of their links that offer websites. The first thing I realized I would need was a domain name – yep - they offer that service to (there is an annual fee for that they add to the website hosting service). They also do a search to make sure the domain name (i.e., fromdusttoclay.com) is not taken by some big company that will sue you for everything you got. This step took a couple of hours, mainly trying to figure out what I was doing. I ran out of energy staring at the computer that afternoon, so I stopped for the night and got back going the next morning.

The next thing I had to decide on was what kind of tool I was going to use to build my website. Again, trying to keep this simple I chose Yahoo Sitebuilder, one of their lowest cost options. The program downloaded fairly easily and had some pretty good help menus so before lunch I saw the beginnings of my website right before my eyes. My first site must have looked pretty crude but by that afternoon I had a background, digital images loaded, and a brief amount of text that I wanted to share with visitors. After I got it somewhat how I wanted it to look I clicked save and publish and I had my very own URL in cyberspace. The service seems fairly reasonable to me with plans under \$12/month depending on how far out you want to pay in advance.

So that's a simple way to build a website. Over time I have used lots of the features on the site. I used the free email service that includes your domain name. I used some canned backgrounds and menu links to multiple pages in my site. I linked to the OPA site and potters council. I even put together a price list and added 'buy now' buttons that could theoretically pile lots of money into your pay pal account. However, the reality for me was that that did not become a frequent selling avenue so I took those off. I do recommend the 'contact us' features where people can send you email directly from your site – I try to get people to use that approach when I hand them my card. There is a counter app that shows you how many hits you get to your site. I have even used the blog feature but will probably not continue that (because I don't need another full time job). But it has been worth trying all of the options and features because they were all free (less a small Pay Pal fee when I did sell from the website).

So in summary you can have your business up and running on the web in no time at all. A website may just be the thing to help you market your beautiful pottery. If you try this on your own and need help with Yahoo Sitebuilder send me an email to bill@fromdusttoclay.com. Thanks Janet for suggesting that we OPA members write some 'how to' business articles. My next goals are to make my business look and be more professional (so I look forward to reading lots of articles on that subject).

Best wishes, Bill Sanchez, From Dust to Clay