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## **Chapter 6: Marketing Your Ceramics Business**

The first step in successfully marketing your business is to create a marketing plan. It's not as difficult as it sounds. Start by making a list of what you will sell. Your market will be defined by the products you create. Try to create new or unique products that other artisans in your area have not saturated the market with.

### **Developing a Business Plan**

A business plan will help you set goals and keep you on track to achieve success in your business. If you decide to open a studio and want a loan, you will need a business plan to show the loan officer. Follow this basic format, or if you feel you don't have the necessary writing skills, consider hiring a professional writer to write your plan for you.

Developing a business plan is beneficial for you as well as the bank. Putting down your plans in writing will help you refine your goals. You will see your business begin to take shape in your plan. Adjustments can be made to weak areas. Through your plan, you will be able to better define your marketing strategies. This will help you to put your plan into action and make your dream a reality.

There are an infinite number of templates for you to follow when creating your business plan. The typical sections included in a business plan are an executive summary, company analysis, industry analysis, customer analysis, competitor analysis, marketing plan, operations plan, management team, and financial plan. At the end of your plan you may want to add an appendix section to display photographs of your work along with information about selling price.

The Executive Summary section should include a description of your business. Include information on the size of the potential market. Describe what unique qualifications you have that can fill the need. You will find help in defining this in the chapter on promoting your business. Summarize relevant parts of the rest of your plan in this section to give a clear overview of your plan.

The Company Analysis section is basically a profile of your business. A description of the location, including square footage and a description of the surrounding area should be included here. If your business is incorporated, include information regarding the type of incorporation. Past accomplishments and distinctions should be mentioned in this section.

In your Industry Analysis, describe the size of the market for your work. When calculating the relevant size, consider the market as a whole. This means if you sold one hundred percent of all ceramic products in your area, approximately what would your sales be? You should address the share of this market you plan to capture. Be realistic here; don't overstate or exaggerate the potential.

The Customer Analysis section should include information on the people who will buy your work. Who are your customers? Explain the customer base for your products. Is it a growing market? Include some indicators to back up statements about future market growth. If several large influential publications publish information about a significant increase in pottery sales due to trends in home design, include this information if your works fill this need and there are not already a dozen studios producing similar products. Copies of articles describing market trends could be included in the appendix section.

When writing the Competitive Analysis section, include all pottery or ceramic businesses in your general area. The businesses don't need to be exactly like yours to be included. If you operate a full pottery studio, including creating pottery from start to finish, offer kiln firing and classes, the paint your own bisque studio down the street is still your competition. Your products are totally different and will appeal to different clients, but they are similar in some aspects.

It is a mistake to underestimate your competition or pretend it doesn't exist when creating your business plan. Banks and investors don't like to see no competition, it means you are either exaggerating your claim or there is no market for your work. Both of these are negative. Always include at least two competitors and describe in some detail how your business is unique and what will give you the edge over these competitors.

Your Marketing Plan should include the avenues you will use to sell your work. Descriptions of the various selling opportunities available in the ceramics business will be discussed later in this chapter. Briefly discuss the methods you will use to sell your work. Include information on each area, for example, art shows, Internet sales and studio sales should all be described separately.

The Operations Plan is an explanation of how you will execute your marketing plan. What specific steps will you take to achieve the goals outlined in the marketing plan? Describe the process you will use to carry out your plans. Make sure your plan is realistic.

In most business plans, the management team section is used to describe management personnel in larger companies. You will probably be your own employee for quite some time. If you are extremely successful, you may have one employee. For this section, include information about yourself. What makes you the person most qualified to run this business?

Include information on your educational background. Of course you should mention any formal schooling or courses in ceramics in this section, but also include any relevant business experience. If you majored in business in college, but left the field for a career in ceramics, mention this because it shows your ability to run a business. Employment experience running a business, ceramics or otherwise should be spelled out here.

A short autobiographical description of your career as a ceramicist should be part of the management team section. List awards and any prestigious shows in which you have participated. If you ran a home based studio and are moving to a studio, summarize your experiences and success in running that business.

The Financial Plan should include a summary of your current financial situation. If you have ten pending orders at any given time, include this information here. Consignment agreements and orders from Internet sales help in forecasting your financial future. Describe your financial needs at this point. Discuss potential risks and how you plan to overcome any obstacles.

When writing your plan, there are a few things you should avoid.

- Listing no competitors for your business is a huge mistake. As far as most banks are concerned, no competition means no market.
- Don't put all your emphasis on future sales. Highlight current and repeat business, achievements and awards. Mention past and current business along with projections of future business.
- Don't give vague information in your marketing plan. Be specific and include information on the venues where your work will be sold. Describe how your work is a perfect match for each venue. Discuss the diversity in your selling practices.
- Don't overestimate your future financial projections. You will be seen as more credible if your projections are realistic and your goals attainable.
- When describing your market and share of the market, don't define it in generic terms. Give a thorough description of the specific niche market that exists and how you will fill the needs of that particular market.

There are numerous ways to sell your work. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. Selling your work in several different ways will be more profitable than just selling out of your studio. The following section will describe some of the opportunities available for selling your work in person. Later in this book, mail order and Internet sales will be discussed. Use as many of these selling opportunities as possible to increase your chances of running a successful business.

### **Craft Shows and Fairs**

State fairs, craft fairs and art shows offer success to many artisans. Art shows tend to be more selective and charge higher fees to artists. However, the additional cost can be well worth it since people that attend art shows tend to spend more money and your work can be sold at a higher price. Contact your local chamber of commerce or arts council for information on upcoming art shows. State departments of tourism are another excellent resource for finding shows in your state and surrounding states.

Craft fairs are often held with fundraisers for non profit organizations. Entry fees are lower for these fairs, but you can expect to earn less money. Many of the crafters at these

fairs sell mass produced products at low prices, which means you will sell less than you would at an art show. These fairs are good for beginners because you can earn some money as you gain experience and perfect your techniques.

Higher quality craft shows are genuine art festivals and are sometimes seen at festivals and fairs. Some of these events have juries that select artists. Art Show juries can be quite selective. You will be asked to provide information about yourself including your show history and awards you may have received. You will be asked to provide a description of the work and a signed statement that the work is original.

You will be asked to provide several slides showing samples of your work. They often charge entrance fees of several hundred dollars. This is to ensure that experienced artists apply. Keep in mind the travel expenses required if you decide to travel to shows in neighboring states. Include all your expenses when setting a price for the pieces you will sell.

### **Consignment**

Another method of selling your work is to consign pieces in local stores. Gift shops and local markets are great places to look for consignment opportunities. Approach local shop owners and ask about consigning a few of your pieces. Consignment allows you to sell pieces at very little expense. You don't have to spend a lot of money advertising or driving to fairs. Consignment also allows you to test market a few pieces at a time to determine which works are the best sellers.

Be sure to put your agreement in writing and have the document signed by both you and the shop owner. Spell out all the details including the length of time the pieces will be left on consignment. Also included in the agreement will be the percentage of the sale that the shop owner will keep. Expect to pay between twenty and forty percent commission to the owner.

### **Selling Wholesale**

Selling pottery wholesale has its benefits, but there are significant limitations. Wholesale sales require larger quantities of work. You must be able to meet demands for large numbers of items on a regular basis. Wholesale items only generate half the price of a piece sold at retail.

Finding stores to work with in wholesaling is similar to consigning your work in local stores, but in larger quantity. Contact owners of stores you are interested in working with. For larger stores, an agent can help you place your work. However, if you decide to use an agent, be prepared to pay the agent a percentage of your work. Wholesaling can be a profitable way to make money in ceramics, but you will have to be prepared to be more productive to make up for the additional expenses.