

SELLING ARTS & CRAFTS

A collection of articles by Barbara Brabec, republished from her HandmadeForProfit.com blog (now closed).

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[Barbara Brabec's World](#)

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Secrets to Developing a Good Product Line

A MISTAKE COMMONLY MADE by beginners is to produce items in several craft mediums that are not related to one another. It's always better to focus on a particular craft area—not necessarily one craft, but a group of crafts that fall into a family or are compatible with one another. Going to market with a little of this and a little of that suggest you are a hobbyist who can't make up her mind about what to sell. While it's important to focus on an art or craft you love and do well, you must always consider the marketplace. Making what you love to make is not necessarily going to be what people want to buy, so you must do some market research before you begin to develop your product line.

Professional sellers quickly learn the importance of specialization. By building on their particular talents and art or craft skills, they develop one or more product lines that complement one another. Many crafters do the same art or craft, of course, but they have each developed their own style, and that makes them stand out in the crowd.

Tips for Maximum Sales Success

* **Develop a variety of products** in different sizes and price ranges. Specialize in one or two major craft areas and be creative by combining popular craft materials that aren't normally used together, such as stitchery with ceramics or sewn items with wood.

* **Learn to think in general product categories** such as home decor, toys, clothing, gifts for men, collectibles, dolls, Christmas ornaments, bath items, etc. Or, concentrate on one or two crafts and create separate product lines within those categories.

* **Stay up on colors currently popular.** If your product's colors are not "in tune with the times," they may not sell well. Newsletters and magazines for professional crafters generally report on color trends each year, but you can get a good idea of what's hot simply by spending a day in a shopping center and browsing clothing racks. You can also research current color trends from the [Color Marketing Organization](#).

* **Name your product lines and individual products.** A name gives a product personality, which in turn increases its salability. Use humor whenever possible or appropriate, and be sure to create hang tags for everything you make.

Finally, listen to your customers. Often the best and most profitable product ideas will come from your own customers.

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Understanding and Coping with Sales Anxiety

by Barbara Brabec

SALES ANXIETY is a universal problem among all entrepreneurs and home-business owners, regardless of their past sales experience or the type of product or service being offered for sale. Whether you're offering a new product line or individual work of art, announcing the publication of a new book, launching a new website, or introducing a new service, it's only natural to be a little tense about how your offering is going to be perceived by prospective customers or clients.

Will they like it and, more important, will they BUY it? Whether beginner or pro, the more you need money at the time of your new offering, the more uptight or anxious you're likely to be.

Different Kinds of Sales Anxiety

There are different levels of sales anxiety depending on whether one is just getting started in business or has been selling for years. And the type of product being offered for sale makes a big difference, too. The artist or crafter who sells at shows and fairs, for example, is always on display along with their products. If sales are dismal, it's easy for a creative person to think that there must be something wrong with them, when in fact it's only the products themselves that are being rejected.

And products can bomb for a lot of reasons that have nothing to do with an individual's artistic talents or personal worth, including wrong market, wrong price, competition from imports, bad economy, poor booth presentation, etc. The only way past this is to try, try again.

Consider, too, that even successful long-established pros with big egos can feel apprehensive when offering something new. Whenever anyone in business leaves his or her comfort zone to venture into a new marketplace or offer a new kind of product or service, a certain "fear of the unknown" is likely to accompany them. There is something similar in show business, where it's called "stage fright." Performers aren't exactly scared, but they may be very fidgety and uncomfortable until they step on stage or in front of the camera.

To a seller, those first sales of a new product or service are the kind of applause that can quickly kill sales anxiety and fire one with enthusiasm for marketing the new product or service to a larger and even more appreciative audience.

Tips for How to Overcome Sales Anxiety

- 1. Study Your New Product or Service.** Try to look at it through the eyes of your imagined customers or clients. Remember that they are going to be asking

themselves “What’s in it for me?” and “What will I get for my money?” Then make a list of all the beneficial things about the product or service you’re offering. This will not only give you reassurance that you’re offering a quality product or professional service at a fair price, but will also give you some good selling points to use in your sales and promotional copy.

2. Work at Building Your Confidence Level. Yes, this is going to take some time and effort, but self-confidence can be greatly increased through research, self-study, and networking with your peers (where it’s always okay to express your concerns and ask for feedback and ideas). From experience, I can tell you that one key to overcoming anxiety of any kind (or even naked fear) lies in positive self-talk either done mentally or through journaling. Always strive to look confident and successful even when you aren’t because people pick up on body and voice signals and will respond accordingly.

3. Research Your Market or New Sales Outlets Carefully. Crafts author and blogger [James Dillehay](#), told me that in his early days as a weaver, he overcame his sales anxiety simply by positioning himself in front of target audiences of people he was sure would appreciate the kind of products he was offering. “Then all you have to do is sit back and let people sell themselves on your work,” he said.

4. Stay Informed and Up to Date on everything related to your industry, your market, and business and marketing in general. One way to do this is to subscribe to a variety of ezines and magazines, several of which are now offered in a digital format.

A Concluding Thought

If your sales anxiety is related to a shaky economy and the concern that some of your prospective customers or clients simply may not be able to afford the product or service you’re offering, that’s a different problem altogether—one that directly relates to the possibility that you might have to change not only your product or service, but your entire marketing strategy.

For more information on this topic, read [“A Conversation with Barbara Brabec”](#) on Business Week online.

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State Consignment Laws and Pitfalls to Avoid

by Barbara Brabec

NORMALLY, CONSIGNED GOODS remain the property of the seller until they are sold to the retail customer. However, if an establishment goes bankrupt—which is a very real possibility in today’s economic climate—merchandise left on consignment may be subject to the claims of creditors and be seized by them unless certain protective steps have been taken by consignors.

Note that a standard consignment contract will not offer sufficient protection in a bankrupt case. In some states, artists and craftspeople have lost all their merchandise due to such seizures. (In one case I recall, an artist actually had to pay \$10,000 to retrieve her own paintings from a bankrupt gallery.)

Also, rent-a-space shops and craft malls (if any of the latter still exist), fall into a gray area that may not be covered by state consignment laws. The only way I know of to protect yourself here is to keep a keen eye on the shop and watch for warning signs of trouble. If you have consigned merchandise to a shop you can’t easily visit in person, my personal recommendation would be to remove that merchandise now and try to sell it somewhere else where you have more control over it.

States That Have Consignment Laws

Several states have consignment laws designed to protect artists and craftspeople. Those known to me are Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin.

There is a pitfall in state consignment laws, however. Some states protect only “art” and may exclude protection to items that fall outside the area of painting, sculpture, drawing, graphic arts, pottery, weaving, batik, macrame, quilting, or “other commonly recognized art forms.” Each state with a law on the books has a different interpretation of “art,” and other states not listed above may or may not have a consignment law at all. For those reasons, everyone interested in selling on consignment should contact their state legislature for more information. You may also be able to turn up information about your state’s consignment law on the web.

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The Hazards of Handling Foreign Orders: Product Order Scams to Avoid

by Barbara Brabec

BY NOW, I WOULD HOPE that most product sellers are aware of the many variations of product order scams running rampant on the Web. One of the most common scams always begins with someone from Nigeria, Ghana, and even London who contacts a seller on the Web saying they want to place an order (sometimes large, sometimes small) for one or more products advertised on the business owner's Web site.

What these con artists are really trying to do, however (besides order with stolen credit cards or [counterfeit money orders](#)), is get the business owner to go out and buy other merchandise for them and ship it along with the ordered merchandise. This scam is being tried not only with small craft and homebased businesses, but manufacturing companies and other retailers, even individual sellers on eBay.

I've received many reports from individual sellers who were either victimized by such people, or avoided the scam when they found [my series of articles on this topic](#).

According to one article I found, Christian retailers are frequently hit with scams requesting large quantity or high dollar-volume orders that invite sellers to participate in transferring funds into their U.S. bank accounts. Some even involve sending checks to prepay for goods. Another scam involves requests for used Bibles.

Whether you're doing business on the Web or merely Web surfing, you simply MUST develop a suspicious nature and not automatically trust everyone, especially someone from Nigeria or Ghana. Several sites on the Web have addressed this problem, so I am linking you to a couple of those sites here:

- [Fraud and Scam News](#) – for the latest on Email Scams, Phishing and Internet Fraud
- [FraudAid.com](#) – to learn how to verify the authenticity of a regular check, cashier's check or money order. This site includes a wealth of information about Nigerian scams and how to protect yourself from financial loss.
- [Federal Trade Commission \(FTC\)](#). Visit this site and search for "Nigerian scams" to turn up many pages on this topic.

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Selling to Resistant Buyers

by Barbara Brabec

What should you do when you've created something you think is wonderful, but no one wants to buy it? The first thing to try is another marketing outlet because different buyers frequent different types of outlets. Many buyers have learned that something that won't sell at a crafts fair one day may sell the next day at another show or in a shop outlet.

Five Things to Try When Sales are Sluggish

When a product isn't selling you have three other choices: (1) stop trying to sell it; (2) change it; or (3) make something else. And here are four ways you can change a product to make it more appealing to buyers:

1. Change Your Prices. The price you place on a product has a great deal to do with whether it will sell or not. Before you even think of lowering the price of a hard-to-sell product, try first to change it in some way to make buyers feel it is worth more to them.

2. Change Materials. The type and quality of the materials you use in your work automatically determines your market and the prices you can charge for it. Some materials are ordinary or plain, while others are unusual or luxurious. When you elect to work with common materials, buyers may expect your prices to be common as well. When you use luxurious or exotic materials, however, you automatically attract more affluent buyers. For example, if you make furniture or wooden accessories, you can either use a common wood like pine and price it for the general public, or use uncommon or exotic woods that will appeal to buyers with bigger pocketbooks.

3. Change Colors or Designs. Even when you are using the right materials for a product, it may not sell if your colors or designs are wrong for the times. Stay aware of what's hot and what's not where colors are concerned, and strive always for more originality in your designs.

4. Change Product Name or Function. What you call your products has a great deal to do with whether they will sell or not, so try calling them something other than what most people might call them. Consider jewelry, for example. Give a name to all your pendants, earrings and designer pins, and remember that the quality of your metal findings will determine the price you can ask for jewelry. People will always pay more for gold-plated or sterling silver jewelry. Price, material, color, design and a product's name and function all work together where sales are concerned. Apply the above logic to your craftwork and see what happens.

5. Make Something Else. Sometimes the only logical solution to sluggish sales is to make something else. Whatever your art or craft, if you're not selling at a profit after a certain length of time, it may be that you're simply in a rut on the wrong road to sales success. Let this be your signal to stop and think about new roads you might explore. As any successful seller will tell you, changing directions in midstream is all part of the fun of selling what you make. Instead of waiting for a pot of gold that may never appear, make some changes.

You've heard it before, but remember that you cannot expect different results if you keep doing the same thing. Creative ideas will come if you will make the effort to stretch your imagination. To do this, pay attention to what others are doing. Read. Network. Experiment. Turn left instead of right. Ask "what if?" and "why not?" *Dare to be different.*

Reprinted from *Artisan Crafts*, a quarterly magazine published by Barbara and Harry Brabec in 1971-1976.

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Moving Into Wholesaling: Valuable Perspective from Three Pros

by Barbara Brabec

Many craftspeople think they cannot wholesale because of pricing problems while others worry about their inability to fill orders if response from buyers is greater than anticipated. Will they have to hire outside help, and if so, will they lose artistic control of their products? Once they decide to wholesale, should they start by selling directly to shops or do a major wholesale craft show?

Some craftspeople begin selling with the idea that they will eventually wholesale their work while others simply "fall into wholesaling" when a retailer approaches them at a crafts fair and asks if they can sell wholesale. What wholesaling does for many craft show sellers is give them income in the months of no craft shows, especially the period between January to May. If wholesaling to the first few customers proves profitable, many sellers then expand by doing the [Rosen shows](#) in one city or another.

“Wholesaling is where it’s at, financially speaking,” says calligrapher [Michael Noyes](#). “The benefit to wholesaling is that you multiply the sales force. I used to wonder why a craftsman would pay twice the booth fee simply for the privilege of selling at half price. The answer is simple: At a retail show, selling of one’s product is happening in one location by only one or two people. However, by selling wholesale, each additional sale means your product will be sold by an additional sales staff in an additional location.”

[Emily Pearlman](#) has been wholesaling her pottery since 1987, having sold at retail craft fairs for seven years before that. Her involvement in a co-op gallery brought her to the attention of her first wholesale buyers, shop owners who were sales reps as well. “They helped me develop my line, and I’ve never regretted making the switch,” she says. “I love having just about everything sold every time I open the kiln. Retail shows were getting to be a drag. If I made blue mugs, people wanted green. If I brought pitchers, they wanted platters. And they were always trying to get me to lower prices or give a discount because they bought two of something.”

Some professionals whose first love is designing may decide to focus on designing and marketing while leaving much of the final production work to employees. This is the route taken by [Dodie Eisenhauer](#) of Village Design. “After selling at craft fairs for awhile, I broke into wholesaling by taking my line of screen wire products to a wholesale gift show in Dallas,” she says. “I came home with \$4,000 worth of orders for my angels, baskets, bows, flowers and ornaments—a lot of business for someone who had previously sold only through craft fairs.” On her website, which accepts wholesale orders only, Dodie keeps her accounts informed of where she will be exhibiting next. In addition, her products are available online through [WholesaleCrafts.com](#), where qualified wholesale buyers set up an account so they can buy from registered sellers.

By studying the web sites of the above sellers (all of whom are featured in Barbara’s *Make It Profitable* book), you can gain a fast education on how to present yourself to wholesale buyers. (Don’t even THINK about entering a trade show until you’re comfortable selling to a few wholesale shops.)

Without question, wholesaling requires a more professional attitude, a greater appreciation for the worth of your products, and a businesslike approach to marketing. You may have to hire employees, take workshops to learn more about how to manage and market your business, make out-of-town sales trips, exhibit at trade shows and so on. It is at this point that hobby sellers are separated from the professionals, where many either back away or go forward in a totally new direction.

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Barbara Brabec

VISIT BARBARA BRABEC'S WORLD for a wealth of articles and resources on many topics related to home-business startup, management and marketing. Check the Table of Contents for each of Barbara's [home-business books](#) to see which ones might be most helpful to you. All of them include advice from Barbara as well as from many successful business owners and industry pros in her network.

Excerpts from Barbara's crafts books will also be found on [The Author's Den](#) website in the [Crafts/Hobbies department](#).

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