

An artistic workspace on a wooden table. A metal ruler is placed diagonally across the table. To the left of the ruler are two pencils, one orange and one green. In the foreground, a palette with various colors of paint is visible, including red, green, yellow, and brown. A paintbrush with a green handle is also present. The background shows a wooden surface with some paint splatters.

# Where to Sell Art Online

by Carolyn Graham Edlund

# Where to Sell Art Online

Want to increase your art sales by selling online? Here's what you need to know.



Shopping these days often takes place online, and that includes shopping for art and handmade work. If you want to create an additional stream of income, or even make online sales your primary source of income, you need to know where you can successfully sell what you make. When you understand the options, you'll be able to make a more informed decision.

# Where to Sell Art Online

Artsy Shark has published the biggest directory of places to sell art or handmade work online in the world, and it's completely free to use. This resource guide is a good starting point to understand what's available. Here's the link:

## 250+ Places Artists Can Sell Online

What is the reality, and the future of online art sales? The Hiscox Report, an extensive survey of the global art market, took a close look at the efficacy of selling art online. Their report is useful in understanding the trend towards e-commerce and the motivations that customers have. Here are some of their findings:

- Annual online art sales will increase to \$6.3 billion by 2019.
- 67% of online art buyers have made more than one purchase.
- The number of online art auctions and marketplaces has seen triple-digit growth already.
- 71% of buyers said they were comfortable buying art "sight unseen" by viewing an online image only. This crosses all age groups.

The Hiscox report also found that buyers really liked the convenience and flexibility of buying art online. Shopping at 3 a.m. in your pajamas is a real convenience, as is doing a search for the exact type of art you want, and finding it right away.

Shopping online for art can improve on the experience of walking into a brick and mortar gallery that may or may not have what you want. And, you can avoid the intimidation factor of being cornered by a salesperson, or finding out that you cannot afford anything in the gallery. Online shopping is particularly helpful for the first-time art buyer who tends to be younger. The Hiscox Report found that online portals were an important "entry point" for people who are making their first art purchase.

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So, as an artist or maker who wants to jump into online sales, what are your choices?

*Basically, you can choose to participate on a third-party website which offers art for sale, or you can use your own art website to sell your work.* You can certainly do both if you choose.

A variety of third-party websites exist, with different business models. Let's take a look at them:

## Third party websites for selling art

**Gallery Sites.** Looking the most like a traditional art gallery, these sites offer original art and/or reproductions for sale. They may have a "print on demand" component (see below.) Quite often they will have a bio of the artist with a gallery page showing their collection of work priced for sale, with a shopping cart available. Many times they are selective and will not accept all submissions, or they may be invitational in nature. A monthly fee or commission structure is often the method of payment to these providers. A brick and mortar gallery might have this type of site as their online presence to share the work of the artists they represent.

**Marketplaces.** These sites generally are open to anyone who would like to list their art or handmade work for sale. Etsy is the best-known, although there are other 800 lb. gorillas like Amazon and Ebay that fit this model. Some sites specialize in crafts rather than fine art, or may be focused on a particular medium. They often have a template in place to create an online shop that allows you to showcase your work and share details with shoppers. You may pay a monthly charge, listing fees, merchant services fees or a commission on sales, depending on the site.

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***Print on Demand Sites.*** Print on demand is a business model derived from variable image printing technology that makes “one-off” items simple and affordable to create. A computer program directs the printing process, using a different image on each product that is made. Print on demand providers make up a large segment of online vendors who help artists sell. They maintain the site, take orders, produce printed products and ship them out. The artist usually receives a small percentage of each sale in the form of a royalty, as this is a *licensing agreement* with the print on demand provider. Or, the artist may receive a flat fee per product, and be able to choose the retail price themselves. Print on demand can place art images on products such as greeting cards, art prints, tote bags, cell phone cases, mugs, clothing, and much more.

***Auction Sites.*** This model uses time-sensitivity to create a sense of urgency. Art is listed for a limited time and bids are received during that period. There is often an opening bid price that ensures the artist gets a minimum amount for their work. These tend to be commission-based, with the provider taking a set percentage of the final sale price.

***Commission sites.*** Interested in creating custom made work for clients? Art commission websites present an artist’s portfolio and invite customers to commission them for special projects such as personalized portraits, one-of-a-kind furniture, jewelry, etc. These sites may use a system where the artist bids on a given project, or where potential clients contact the artist directly. Fees to the artist may be a commission, or a monthly membership fee.

***Referral Sites.*** These sites present artists and their works to the public, but do not make the sale. A link to the artist’s website is included on their profile page. Interested parties can follow the link and do business with the artists individually. These sites are sometimes free to join, or there may be a fee involved.

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*To the Trade.* Do you sell your work wholesale? Do you want to license your art? Are you interested in connecting with interior designers or corporate clients? The purpose of these trade-related third-party sites is to connect artists with customers in these markets. As trade shows decline in attendance, online portals for the trade are growing in importance. These sites usually have a monthly or annual fee involved, and often have a password-protected area for trade members to view your collection.

*Social Media Sales.* Art sales can be made directly on social media platforms (such as on a Facebook page or in groups) or by using providers who offer services that make it possible to sell using your social media pages. Social media is also a primary marketing resource that provides a gateway to making sales on your own art website or on a third-party site.

*Shop Providers.* Sites like Shopify and similar providers offer a template model where you can upload images of your art or handmade work onto their platform. Your site appears to visitors as a “stand alone” website rather than part of a marketplace. These sites provide a shopping cart for checkout, and often have tools for selling and marketing suggestions. They usually charge on a monthly basis plus a merchant services fee. Many artists use a site of this type as a “store” page for their own separate website – or it can act as the artist's site in itself.

*Other models.* Aside from these main business models, you can find third party sites that can help you rent your art, sell your art via subscriptions, or find gigs as a photographer, illustrator or other talent. Some providers have a hybrid model that offers more than one function, or different ways to sell. There are always new concepts cropping up with creative ideas on how to help artists sell their work.

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## Pros and Cons of third-party providers

*What are main reasons that artists use third-party providers to sell their work online?*

- These existing websites are known, and already have traffic. They market and promote their sites, and have gained the trust of shoppers, which means less work for you.
- It can be very easy to simply upload images of your art or handmade work and create a store using their template. Sometimes, a shop can be created literally within minutes.
- Third-party providers typically offer a shopping cart solution. That means you don't have to worry about getting merchant services, or complying with the laws and regulations that govern them, as this is already handled.
- Third-party sites can be inexpensive or even free, depending on how they earn their income. This can provide the easiest way for you as an artist to acquire an online presence, and learn if it could be productive.
- If the provider offers print on demand, this can expand your offering immensely. They will offer new formats to sell your art, with no investment on your part. And if you want to sell reproductions or products that feature your images yourself, you can order from the print on demand provider and take this stock to retail fairs or events to sell at a markup.

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*What are some of the drawbacks of third-party providers?*

- You don't have control. If the provider decides you have broken their rules, they can shut you down. The site belongs to them, and you may have no recourse.
- You don't have a way to gather email addresses of interested prospects and customers. Your email list is one of the most valuable assets that your small business has. If your art sales are made on someone else's site, then they gain the benefit of gathering the email list – which will not be shared with you.
- Quite often, you have limited ability to brand your shop on a third-party website. Since you must work within their template or parameters, you have to live with their choice in presenting your work.
- Third-party sites often have links to other shops or artwork on the same page as yours. That means customers that you attracted can easily click away to shop on someone else's page.
- You don't have the choice of functionality on the third-party site. If you are looking for a feature they don't offer, you are out of luck.

## Your own art website

I always recommend that artists aspire to have their own art website, even if they also participate on third-party sales platforms. Although many artists will start out with an Etsy shop or a Facebook page, having your own site says a lot about how seriously you take your art business. It allows you the ability to present and brand your work as you please. It helps you gain authority, and be found in online searches. Most professional artists have their own sites, because it gives them the control they need as entrepreneurs.



# Where to Sell Art Online

Fortunately, you don't have to feel overwhelmed by the prospect of creating your own website, because it is easier than ever to create one. And one major reason behind that is *there are plenty of third-party providers who actually help you create your own site!*

There are different ways to go about starting a website as an artist. You could have a webmaster develop a custom site from scratch. You could use Word Press, which is open source and free (and offers plenty of themes to customize the look of your site) to create your own.

Or, you could use one of the providers in our directory of [250+ Places Artists Can Sell Online](#) that offer art websites with a custom look and the functionality you want, and that *use your own domain name*, too. These providers usually provide selling tools, analytics and more. Often they will charge a monthly fee.

You will have hosting fees and most likely get an invoice from your webmaster unless you build it yourself. It will cost you something to have an individual artist website, but it establishes an online headquarters for your art business that you will share with the world.

As shown in the Hiscox Report findings, online shopping is growing by leaps and bounds. Are you taking advantage of this opportunity?

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