

# THE ART OF SELF-PROMOTION

THE ABILITY TO MARKET ONE'S WORK IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A HOBBY AND A CAREER

BY **BARNEY DAVEY**

**F**or many artists, the idea of self-promotion is something to dread, comparable to public speaking on the list of tasks they'd rather avoid. Many artists fear that

too much self-promotion could cause them to lose credibility as a serious artist. Those artists couldn't be more wrong.

An artist's success is directly related to actively getting his

or her work to the market via direct selling, advertising, sales promotions, direct marketing, Websites, blogs and publicity. There are no rules about using *all* of these options, but failing to use enough of them is reason to fail. Here are a few facts about the all-important task of selling yourself.

**FACT: WITHOUT MARKETING AND PROMOTION, AN ARTIST HAS A PLEASANT HOBBY**

While fine art can be most compelling, with undeniable natural beauty and mystique, it does not sell itself. Without effective marketing efforts to shine a

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light on its attributes and availability, art just collects dust. Families of deceased artists who left an impressive oeuvre of fine art behind have contacted me for help to posthumously market the work, which is the wrong time in most cases. Had the artist self-promoted during his or her lifetime, things could have been different.

### **FACT: SELF-PROMOTION IS A LEARNED SKILL**

Most artists I know are either expressive personalities who seek attention or introverts who shy away from it. Though it may seem as if extroverts have the advantage when it comes to self-promotion, there are countless examples of reclusive personalities who have had highly successful careers in the public eye. The late King of Late Night, Johnny Carson, is a perfect example. He was a private person who eschewed the limelight when he was not commandeering the desk on “The Tonight Show.” Viewers would never have guessed the private Johnny from watching his smooth, suave, on-screen demeanor as host.

Human nature dictates that we are not all equally blessed in the same ways. Self-promotion does come easier for some artists than others, but if you are willing, you can learn to fine-tune your skills. Practice will sharpen your ability to present a self-confident image.

Work on engaging others more often, practice talking confidently about your work and let others see your spirit and determination. These attributes will energize your business. When combined with your unique art, they’ll also give you a professional edge and a surefire recipe for success.

### **FACT: SELF-PROMOTION AND SELF-BELIEF ARE LINKED TRAITS**

Self-belief is a powerful trait that can help propel your career; it is the characteristic that powers you when others rate you against all odds. If you possess self-belief, it will help you be authentic and straightforward in your self-marketing efforts. And that, sprinkled with expertise, will take you far.

Self-belief is the determination to get back up when you have been knocked down. Stories of the multitude of failures endured by great thinkers like Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Edison demonstrate the power of staying the course despite the odds.

### **FACT: SELF-PROMOTION AND SUCCESS GO HAND-IN-HAND**

When self-promotion genuinely comes from a place of confidence and competence, people will respond to it. We may root for the underdog, but we buy from the winners. Do we think less of Muhammad Ali because he proclaimed, “I am the greatest?” Do we despise the Rolling Stones, who strut to the title of “World’s Greatest Rock n’ Roll Band?” When Jack Nicholson won the Golden Globe for *As Good As It Gets*, he laughed that it was a license for 10 more years of bad behavior on his part—and we laughed with him.

You probably won’t publicly declare yourself “the world’s greatest artist” anytime soon, but that shouldn’t stop you from trying to be just that—or from proving your talent to others. If you unaffectedly exhibit self-aware swagger as a visual artist, it will pay off for you. Take clues from others where you find them. That is what you do as an artist anyway;

absorb and follow styles and techniques and interpret them in your own, unique way. Proudly use what you learn to grow and go your own way.

### **FACT: CONFIDENCE IS SEXY**

Confidence comes easier to some than others. But, as with painting, you can learn to master techniques that once seemed impossible to you. You can teach yourself to project confidence. Don’t let them see you sweat. Work at overcoming insecurities. Put yourself in awkward positions. Learn to talk passionately about your art. Speak authoritatively about your influences and how art makes you feel. If these suggestions sound too demanding, then take baby steps, and practice, practice, practice.

Here are some tasks that fall under the umbrella of “art marketing” that will help you in your self-promotional efforts:

**Comment often on the blogs of interior designers, gallery owners or other influential folks who can help your career.** Make your comments thoughtful and relevant to the original post, not a commercial for you. Or send personal notes congratulating those same people on their recent achievements and milestones. This will raise awareness of you and your work.

**Make friends with a local media person who covers society, entertainment or even politics.** Don’t try to pitch yourself. Approach him or her in a more helpful way, such as sending useful story ideas not related to you. If you do, the residual action is bound to be useful and effective.

**Do something outrageous.** Make an art car. Paint a massive outdoor



mural. Grab a large piece of paper and ask your friends and family to help brainstorm as many ideas as possible. There are bound to be some great ideas in the mix that might have never occurred to you otherwise.

**Start an art event for charity.** All you need is an idea, a few flyers and a little gumption. Find a charity you believe in and propose some ways to work together. That's how Ron Burns became The Humane Society's official artist.

**Print your art large on some unusual substrate, such as metal or wood.** Paint something twice as large or twice as small as you have ever done before. Create a complete collection related to your city, region or state. Then use as many methods as you can think of to promote what you have done.

**Seek help in high places.** Pinpoint someone who, if they took an interest in your work, could elevate your career and current status. This could be a museum curator, gallery director, interior designer, magazine editor or the head of your local arts association.

**Collaborate with fellow artists.** There is nothing preventing you from working with other visual artists, performing artists, poets or musicians. Learn to be inspired by someone and explore ways to communicate that vision with new projects and new vistas for your art marketing efforts.

**Write articles on entertainment, design, travel, dining, wine collecting, playing poker or anything else that interests you.** Or write about a profound art experience. Make sure it is clear you are an artist with a Website and/or a blog. Submit an entire article for the exclusive use of a media outlet that could help generate interest in your work.

**Pay it forward.** Encourage other artists. The good karma that will come from it will be worth the effort.

**Network.** Get involved in your community. Become part of the local chamber of commerce or other association where potential collectors might be members. Many chambers have social memberships, too. Volunteer at a local charity. Visit every picture framer within a 50-mile radius and ask each one how you might be able to work together.

**Believe in yourself.** If you don't believe in yourself, how can others?

**Be driven.** No one can demand success for you more than you. Do not rest until you have the success you need. You are the master of your ship; it will go where you steer it. **ABN**

Barney Davey is the author of *How to Profit from the Art Print Market*, a best-selling title in Amazon.com's "Business of Art" category. He also publishes the highly regarded Art PrintIssues.com, a business blog for visual artists.

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