



ARE YOU READY TO EXPORT - Video Summary

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Tip Seven:

Build A Community Around Your Work

The single most important thing I've done for my business and for my work as a craftsperson, is build a community and a conversation around my work. This community is made up of customers, designers, publications, other craftspeople...most of whom don't live in the same town, province or even country that I do.

Communications...conversations over long distances helps my business, my creativity and on some days, my sanity, thrive.

It starts with a hub. The place I want people to go to find me and my work. A website, an Etsy shop, a Facebook page... wherever you choose to promote your work and your studio.

In my case, I started with a blog where I wrote about my design process, my creative process and a little bit about everyday life. When I started to dye yarn, I sold it through my blog using a very primitive, but wildly effective "email me and I will invoice you" system. Etsy was never as effective. That system that was my primary source of sales until I built a website last year.

Why did it work? I used other social media platforms to drive traffic to my blog. Posting photos and news about my business to a Facebook page. Tweeting during my studio days about what I was working on and engaging other designers and craftspeople for collaboration. Using Ravelry, a specialized social site specific to the knitting community to build discussions about my work, colour, how people use my yarn, etc., spreading word of mouth like wildfire. And more recently, posting photos to Instagram of designs in progress and studio processes.

All of these tools are the pieces of how I communicate with my customers, collaborate with designers and other craftspeople, and promote other artisans. Time set aside every day or, when things are extremely busy, every week, to respond to messages and emails, comments and tweets...to recognize that doing so is creating a conversation around my work and engaging people with it. That each person I converse with will potentially tell another about what I do.

These conversations spill over into live shows and events, with “real world” results. Many of my followers from social media, Ravelry, and customers who regularly purchase from my website, also show up when I do crafts shows and fairs, trunk shows at small shops and most importantly, they drive 2-7 hours to attend my annual Studio Open House every August.

Over 80% of my customers are outside of Canada. This is a base built solely using social media and responding to every person who has contacted me about my work.

From my own experience, I know you should:

1. Choose a “home base” for your work (website, FB page, Etsy shop)
2. Choose other social media tools to help drive traffic to your home base (twitter, Pinterest, Facebook, Instagram, email). Choose tools you’ll use and actively engage in.
3. Set aside regular time to post. Daily, weekly...it’s up to you, but know that the more regularly you post, the easier it is to develop a following.
4. Respond every time someone responds to you. Start the conversation.
5. Find ways to engage your online followers with your work offline – shows, exhibits, shops that sell your work, and so on.
6. Keep it up for at least 6 months, regularly looking at what works and what doesn’t.