

101 TIPS

THAT DON'T INCLUDE PRICING

for
Art Materials
Retailers



Tips from
the trenches
shared by
NAMTA members

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Good Business Tips

TIP 1.

Owners and Managers should be present at the store and keep consistent hours.

TIP 2.

Stay opened as advertised. There is nothing worse than arriving and finding a retailer's door shut at a time that they say they would be open.

TIP 3.

When you are asked, "How's Business?" – Always respond with, "Great!" Always promote a positive perception of your store in your community.

TIP 4.

Give your customers the impression that you enjoy what you do.

TIP 5.

Make sure you set up a database with your customers' birthdays, email addresses, and mailing information.

TIP 6.

Do business with people and companies that appreciate your business.

TIP 7.

Give back to your community with donations and volunteer work.

TIP 8.

Ingratiate yourself and your business into the community. Participate in events put on by local schools and local art associations. Consider offering discounts to groups like art teachers, art students, and members of your local art associations. It will make them feel recognized and they'll refer other members of their group to your store. Donate gift certificates to these groups, when asked. If you're near an art school or University, get to know the Art Professors and teachers, and have their supply lists on hand, and communicate with them by email regularly about what products they would like to see in your store. Consider hosting a before-hours or after-hours events for teachers and offer something free if they bring their supply lists. You can use products for prizes, and incorporate short product demonstrations and free make-and-take workshops.

TIP 9.

Team up with other businesses that are attracting consumers.

TIP 10.

Attend tradeshows to stay informed and on top of the latest trends.

TIP 11.

Stay educated about your products. Use your products, read about them, and ask your customers for feedback. Listen to your customers' comments - they'll share with you what works. Consider sending a *survey* by email to your customer database to find out what they want and what they're thinking.

TIP 12.

Communicate with a supplier if their product, packaging, support materials, or sales staff, do not meet your expectations. Don't settle for mediocrity, because your customers won't.

TIP 13.

Your suppliers are a great resource for advise and help, use them. Don't hesitate to ask them.

TIP 14.

Don't price gouge.

TIP 15.

Be honest in everything you do. The best honesty is when no one is looking and you still do what is right.

TIP 16.

Shop around and compare prices for your credit card processing. You could be paying hundreds of dollars too much!

TIP 17.

Invest in a good POS system, and use it to its full potential. Research your options and be careful not to over-invest in a system that is more than you need.

TIP 18.

Be careful about signing any contracts for services or items, like doormats or bathroom supplies.

TIP 19.

If there is an existing store in the town that you are planning to compete with, find out what they do well and do it better. Find out where they are lacking and fill that gap.

TIP 20.

You can benefit greatly from a mentor. Never pass up the opportunity to listen to a peer or an elder who is willing to pass on their wisdom and experiences.

TIP 21.

Every brick and mortar store needs a web presence today, whether it's just an information website about your store, or a place that your customers can buy things. You need a highly efficient person or company to design and manage your website, as your website might be the first representation of your store that is seen by a customer. Your web person should be adept with all aspects of social media like Facebook and Twitter. You need someone who will work with you to constantly monitor and update your web pages.

Tips for Demonstrations and Workshops

TIP 22.

Make sure you advertise your in-store events through your blog or newsletter, Facebook, and with window or in-store signage.

TIP 23.

Advertise that space for your workshop or demo is limited. Consider charging a \$10 fee for the demonstration, but also let them know they will receive \$10 off any products being demonstrated - good for that day only.

TIP 24.

Offer Drop-In Make and Takes and Workshops, either for free or for a small price. They bring customers in and are great for kids. Drive traffic with numerous test platforms of products - like brushes with water on a test paper to evaluate brush strokes. Have samples of work from previous workshops on display, as well as information and signage about upcoming workshops.

TIP 25.

Invite a class to your store for a before-hours or after-hours Q&A or product demo. Having the event when the store is closed allows you to focus on answering in-depth questions and gives students an opportunity to familiarize themselves with your store.

TIP 26.

Provide an area in your store where your customers can view Instructional videos, or You Tube videos with tips and techniques from the manufacturers. These are very useful to show on weekends when traffic is heavy.

TIP 27.

When you offer demonstrations, workshops, and classes, you make your brick and mortar business a community that offers *an experience* and establishes a *destination* for your customers. This keeps you competitive with the online community experience offered by online retailers, and if done right, the hands-on experience you offer can give you an edge.

TIP 28.

Hands on product knowledge through in-store demonstrations by staff and suppliers can be a lot of work. You need one or two dedicated people in charge of setting a demo calendar, getting good demonstrators, and creating special offers. You will see the benefits of having organized and consistently offered demonstrations and classes within a years time.

TIP 29.

It is important to have an entertaining and knowledgeable Presenter for your demonstration who can engage your audience, is familiar with your store, and can have fun with customers and staff. Your Independent and Supplier Reps are usually the most knowledgeable. Make clear to your presenter that you do not want him/her to disparage other brands and products. Make sure the Presenter leaves time for customers' questions and a chance for customers to play with the product.

TIP 30.

Bring demo participants back to the store after the event by doing Drawings. Hold the drawing after the event so you can call winners to return to your store and pick up their prize. You can also give demo participants a gift certificate that they can use at a specified later date.

TIP 31.

Set up a *Try Me* table in your store with a new product on it. Post a sign by the *Try Me Product* asking your customers to review the product on a Blog Posting that you set up. Randomly select one of the reviews at the end of the reviewing period as a winner of an In-store gift certificate. Everyone likes to give their opinions and you will keep your customers actively engaged in trying new products.

Tips about Customer Service

TIP 32.

Always have the option available for your shoppers to receive one-on-one customer service. For some of your customers, this is the main reason they come to your store.

TIP 33.

Keep customer service and satisfaction on the top of your priority list. Remind your staff daily how important it is. Be known for your customer service. Your staff should show an interest in what your customer is doing with their purchase and suggest that the customer comes back to the store to show or tell how their *project* turned out.

TIP 34.

Take care of unhappy customers. If they have a problem with merchandise or service, don't make them wait to see what you're going to do. Sometimes you have to follow principals over policy. This is your opportunity to win their trust and confidence in you.

TIP 35.

Encourage your staff to remember regular customers' names and buying preferences. It is surprising what a bond can be created with this simple gesture that demonstrates engagement and genuine interest. A customer who feels they have an identity in the store is very likely to come back.

TIP 36.

Approach your customers in the same manner you would expect if you were the shopper. If your customer has a *comfortable* shopping experience in your store they will come back, and your personal consideration to them will keep you competitive with online art stores.

TIP 37.

Be patient with your customers. The time you spend with a customer can help increase the size of the sale.

TIP 38.

Be friendly to all customers who come to your store, both young and old. Young shoppers who receive the same customer service as everyone else will remember you were nice to them. Customers of all ages will be less apt to steal from you, or damage merchandise by opening packages, if they like you.

TIP 39.

Whether you are a brick and mortar retail store that also has an online shopping option, or an online retailer, be sure your online customers receive the same friendly and helpful customer service that a retail store customer would receive.

TIP 40.

Your customers are artists – buy local art work and display it in your store.

TIP 41.

Reward your customers. Think about implementing a *Rewards Program*. Have Customer Appreciation Days with snacks, email special discount offers to your top spenders, send birthday coupons, and give out samples of new products with their purchase. Even having cookies or candy at the check out counter can go a long way. Always remember to thank your customer for the sale.

TIP 42.

Consider getting a furry store pet like a dog or cat, or fostering for your local shelter. Along with adding a special attraction to your store, pets attract college students, senior citizens, and parents of small children.

TIP 43.

Have some *samples* on the shelves, or be willing to open color products so customers can actually see the colors.

TIP 44.

Be sure your customer knows what products you have that they might need. If a customer is in your store buying brushes, you might ask, “Did you see our new brush washers?” Or, “Did you see our huge selection of brush soaps and cleaners?” You can make sure your customer doesn’t forget anything they came in for, and possibly increase the size of the sale.

Employee Tips

TIP 45.

Compliment your staff often. Acknowledge a job well done.

TIP 46.

For a new employee’s first week, create a scavenger hunt list for them to work through. The essence should be learning the tools for whom to ask and where to look. Product questions can be found with Google or in a suppliers catalog. Ask questions like who owns this store just for fun.

TIP 47.

Ask your Suppliers and Reps to provide educational training and hands on product knowledge workshops designed specifically for your staff. Manufacturers want your staff educated about their products and will often provide samples for them to explore. Try to include your staff in your In-Store Demos as an opportunity so they can get hands-on-training with a product expert. This is one way to assure sales long after the event is over.

TIP 48.

Keep a Staff Communication Binder. Any staff member can create a memo and place it in the binder for all other staff members to read. Once they read the memo, they initial it. This helps to keep all staff members up-to-date on what's going on and what's coming up. You can also publish a weekly employee update that details product and scheduling information that everyone on staff needs to know.

TIP 49.

Reward long-term employees with classes in the community. It's a nice bonus for the staff person and a great way to get a representative from your store out in the community.

TIP 50.

Provide your Suppliers and Reps with an up-to-date list of all key contacts at your retail store(s) to ensure that the flow of information is going to the right people.

TIP 51.

One of your most valued employees is your right hand person. You can't be in the shop every hour you're open. They need to be there when you're not. You don't have eyes in the back of your head. They cover your back. Their most important traits are empathy, openness and honesty - empathy to understand what's going on with customers and other employees, openness to be willing to tell you, and honesty to give you the unvarnished truth. Sometimes, the truth could be about your own performance or that of a family member.

TIP 52.

The Accountant or Accounting Firm you choose for your company is very important. For the independent retailer, the ideal person would be someone who is local and well connected to your community, and is a sole proprietor or partner in a small firm, because they are doing what you are doing. You need someone who is knowledgeable in Accounting Software and can set you up with the basic systems to keep score in this game of business. Make sure you like the software as much as the accountant, because you are getting married to both.

TIP 53.

When you are bringing in new items, be sure all of your employees know you have it. They are not likely to sell a product they don't know you have.

TIP 54.

Never stop training staff. Retail can have a high employee turnover, so what was discussed three months ago may be brand new to some of the staff.

TIP 55.

When hiring, consider the employee's personality, customer service skills, and sales aptitude before their artistic experience. A smart employee with a good attitude will be enthusiastic and enjoy learning about artist's products, and will be able to pick up a lot of information from their interaction with your customers.

Tips about Your Inventory

TIP 56.

Have a well stocked inventory - if you don't, your customer might go elsewhere. The best way to keep customers is to have everything that they need on their list. Keep your statistics so you know what you sell the most of and always restock that first.

TIP 57.

Just because you think that a product is the neatest thing since sliced bread doesn't make it so.

TIP 58.

Pay attention to inventory management. Knowing how many days are left before running out of fast moving items, and keeping adequate safety stock, can add thousands of dollars to a store's annual profits.

TIP 59.

Don't have too much back stock; money sitting in the back room isn't good.

TIP 60.

Get rid of dead stock. Track products that have not sold for 6 months to a year, and put them on sale to sell them faster.

TIP 61.

Ask your suppliers and manufacturers to provide data to support brand movement, shelf turn, and other information that will help insure you place product that will sell. If no data is available, or if the product is less known, find out what the manufacturer will do to support the brand in your store (demos, guaranteed sales/consignment agreement, staff training, promotional calendar for one year, etc). Always ask for extended terms. If you have good shelf movement and the right terms you will never need to borrow money. You can't pay for deeply discounted inventory with no money, but you can sell out even poorly discounted inventory before the bill comes due - if the terms are long and the product is decent.

TIP 62.

Be willing to order items you don't stock in your store. If someone places a special order, get two. If one person wants something then chances are someone else will want it too.

TIP 63.

Make sure staff knows how to substitute products if sold out of something. You can almost always make a sale especially if it is paints or supports.

TIP 64.

Purchase products that provide gross profit dollars, not just profit margins. A 40% margin on a \$50 sale is much better than a 60% margin on a \$30 sale. People love a good value, but probably won't return to your store if the products aren't good.

TIP 65.

If you are a very small store, in a very small town, make sure you carry all the products your local shoppers want to prevent them from going online or to another store.

Tips on Store Location

TIP 66.

Essentials to consider about the location of your store are proximity to colleges and universities, retirement communities, easy access, and parking.

TIP 67.

Considering the market you cater to, and how important it is to be in a high traffic, high rent retail environment? You might be able reduce your building overhead by locating in a non-traditional retail space.

Marketing Tips

TIP 68.

Make sure you host one heck of a coming out party for your Grand Opening. Bring in manufacturers, have food, an outdoor or indoor painting event, music, prizes etc. Make sure you have a sign up list to get all e-mail addresses.

TIP 69.

Don't expect business to just come to you. Have a marketing plan, and follow it. Review and revise it often. Follow your plan.

TIP 70.

On your Facebook page, you can announce demo and workshop schedules, new products you're carrying, and sales. Tell all your customers to *like* you on Facebook. Encourage them to write about products they've purchased from you – they can help you do your advertising with their comments.

TIP 71.

Keep your website fresh. Update the front page on a regular basis with information about the current sales and events taking place in your store. Make sure you have an *artsy* look to front page that will attract artists.

TIP 72.

Create an e-Newsletter to email to your customer database. It should include all current workshop and demo schedules and sales that you have going on at the time. Do a customer 'highlight' article. Ask your Reps to contribute product information articles for your customers to read about.

TIP 73.

Have weekly or monthly specials. Use all your social media options and flyers to advertise.

TIP 74.

Advertise your customer loyalty/discount programs as *the more you buy, the more rewards you receive*. This keeps them coming back to you.

TIP 75.

Gift cards are a great way for friends and family to purchase art supplies for the artist in their life. While many people do not know what the artist needs, a gift card provides the funds for them to pick up the specific art products they need/want.

TIP 76.

Brands convey credibility. Communicate the brand names you carry, taking advantage of the time and money companies spend to advertise and shape perceptions of their products.

TIP 77.

Put catchy, amusing, interesting signs in the windows to entice people to *give art a try*.

TIP 78.

Brand your store. Have a great logo. Have stickers made with your logo on it to give out to your customers. Sell T-shirts with your logo on it. Give away free items with purchases, like candy, sketching pencils, magnets, or erasers that have your logo on them. Put *Available At* labels on vendor-supplied product brochures and samples to make sure the marketing materials you give

out are also marketing you. If your vendors have a find-a-retailer option on their website, make sure you're on it.

TIP 79.

Having a gallery in you art store can help build relationships with art professors and teachers. You're showing you support the Arts, and they'll send their students to your store.

TIP 80.

Have your business cards at your check out counter and encourage your customers to take a few. Make sure your website address and email address are on the cards.

TIP 81.

Plan events that reach out to the mass market, like drawing pet portraits or making simple handprint paintings with youngsters for Mother's/Father's Day.

TIP 82.

Do an occassional buy-one-get-one-free sale on a specified product.

TIP 83.

Choose your advertising venues very carefully. Do a little research and ask other store owners in your area who have spent money on local advertising like radio and newspaper, to see if they thought it was worth it.

TIP 84.

Check with your suppliers whenever catalog, website or promotional materials are being produced or changed, to ensure information and photos are accurate.

TIP 85.

Host a wine and cheese customer appreciation night. Or, host an art market for your customers to show and sell their art work in your store.

TIP 86.

Uncover all of the promotional discounts, incentives, rebates, etc. available to you from your suppliers and use them to help promote those products.

TIP 87.

Promote by the season. Having a sale on a seasonal item will draw in customers by what they're looking for.

TIP 88.

Try some new, innovative items right as they come out. Those that don't work - just close them out. But the winners will make you good money at full margin, and keep customers coming back.

TIP 89.

Slide advertisements for your store, shown before a movie at the local theater, can bring in good results.

Tips on Merchandising and Store Layout

TIP 90.

Take an objective look at your street presence – a weak presence can prevent customers from even getting close to your front door. Studies show that the average shopper strolls past a storefront in about eight seconds. The average motorist passes a store in less than a second.

TIP 91.

The store should be well lit, clear of clutter, clean, and smell good. A well organized store makes it easy to shop. Use signs grouping products by techniques and usage (paints, brushes, etc.) Walk into your business and behave as if you just bought the company that day. What changes would you make or what would you do differently? Then try to see it how a customer sees it. Are your windows bland? Could your signs use help? Do you have products people want?

TIP 92.

If products on display do not offer a positive and interesting presentation, replace them or redesign the display. Sales are lost every day due to poor presentations or display of products. Present the products and brands in such a way that is exciting to the artist. Create a candy store, create a story within your store... let the artist try the product, squeeze the tube out and play with what is inside. For every one tube or sheet of paper that is unsaleable, you will sell dozens down the road with a happy customer.

TIP 93.

A lot of money can be made at the checkout counter by locating impulse items that customers always need or want. Consider trying a line queue for checkout that can merchandise as many impulse items as possible for people to peruse while waiting. Keep rotating in new items until you find the right mix and then continue to make changes to keep it fresh.

TIP 94.

Today's consumers are conditioned to find special value and new and fresh merchandise on the stores endcaps. Create an annual schedule to seasonally change endcaps and create a file with new ideas, products and themes. Actively reach out to suppliers for endcap ideas. Consider having cross merchandised assortments to make it easy for customers.

TIP 95.

Determine your store's hot spots and use them for new products and special promotions.

TIP 96.

Cross merchandise - put books with product, papers with medium.

TIP 97.

Try moving slower turning items to a different part of store. Sometimes just moving a clunker can make all the difference in making it into a winner.

TIP 98.

Put fixtures on wheels.

TIP 99.

If you have a restroom for customer use, make sure it features art created using products that you sell.

TIP 100.

Have an updated creative sandwich board sign and paint or decorate your windows for the seasons.

TIP 101.

Have a *sale* table, with frequently rotating items and/or feature signage that includes *Staff Picks* whether they are for art books, brushes, markers, whatever.

TIP 102.

For small stores, create your own holiday sets out of regular stock items to avoid over stocks after the holidays. Purchase a great clear case and assort your favorite supplies to make your *staff approved art set* for the holidays.

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