

Turning Your Sewing Into Marketable Merchandise

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Turning Your Sewing Into Marketable Merchandise

Make, buy and sell needlecraft products such as pillows, crocheted or knitted items, quilts, sweaters and bedspreads. There is a huge market for these items -- and even larger number of people who make them. The trouble is that the qualifications for creating these beautiful items (patience, TLC, close attention and years of practice) are quite different from what it often takes to successfully market them!

Many people have a great deal of difficulty selling their needle handiwork. Even when they do, they often don't even get back the cost of the materials. To make money in this area you must FIND and then ASSAULT the market!

When you sell only to friends and neighbors, the "market" quickly becomes saturated and only lowering your prices even more seems to stimulate sales. Unfortunately, human nature is such that most people will pay a decent price only for something made across town by someone they don't know.

Some people view an item made by someone they know (other than family) as "home made" -- a substitute for the real "store bought" thing. But when they buy an item that was crafted by a total stranger, it is "handmade" -- something exquisite (Ah, human nature!).

This explanation does not make much sense, but it unfortunately rings true in too many situations. Even so, it does NOT mean there isn't a good market for YOUR hand made products.

With a little imagination, your items can be marketed tastefully, or better still, SHOWCASED. Compare a homemade quilt hanging on a clothesline beside Grandma Brown's house to a HANDMADE QUILT (same quality) featured in a store window with a pleasing background and a couple of spotlights to show off the beautiful color patterns and intricate stitching!

Think of a clever name; have your own labels made; take some good color pictures of your product, then prepare a brochure or "flyer" (one sheet ad) showing it in its most favorable light.

Draw attention to its detail, fine work, durability and describe how it will become a HANDED DOWN HEIRLOOM in the buyer's family.

Put light colors on dark backgrounds (and vice versa) for contrast in your ads; print (calligraphy would be even better) little cards to "announce" the product in its setting. Tell about the fine materials used and the meticulous work involved -- show your products as the valuable, hand made treasures they are!

Show only a few products (even one) at a time to avoid a clustered or oversupplied appearance, which tends to cheapen the effect, whether the medium is a store window or a brochure.

Use as much skill and planning to present your products as do to create them! How about little tags or folders with something like Aunt Martha's Hand Crafted Pillow Covers, "each one created with loving patience and care?" Doesn't that sound more interesting than "Do you want to buy some pillow covers I made?"

You can advertise your products in the newspaper, magazines, or through bulletin boards and clubs. You can offer finished goods, or take orders for them to be made in a choice of sizes and colors.

One way to advertise inexpensively is to offer a sample of your work as a prize in a community drawing or contest, or for a charity auction (just make sure there are not several other similar items -- too much competition ruins the effect for everyone).

Another technique is to rent a window in a vacant store or one that will lease space or accept a commission on sales made as a result of the display.

Check on fairs and shows on subjects where renting a booth might be an excellent way of meeting potential customers. The "trick" here is to have a "free drawing." People that stop by your booth can register by filling out a small form and keeping the numbered stub. The "price" you realize for whatever you give away is a list of names and addresses of people who were interested in your products.

Now, you can send them brochures and "special offers"! A stall at a flea market may or may not be advisable, depending on the clientele (some are great for auto parts, but no good at all for hand made tablecloths).

Call on stores in your area that might handle products like yours -- ask them to buy yours, or at least take them on consignment (if they do and they sell, switch them to outright purchases later).

If you have or can produce a good quantity of your products, contact a mail order house to see about selling to them, or paying them a commission on sales they make for you.

Regardless of which sales system works out best for you, once you have established a satisfactory "outlet", immediately start making plans to buy other (non-competitive) products of equal quality (or take them on consignment), attach your label and add

them to your "line."

You can specify exact products, color combinations quality -- what it takes to qualify for your label -- which is necessary to maintain your reputation and enables other products to be sold through you.

If you are considering mail order sales, place a few "test ads" in smaller publications to learn which type of ad works best for your product.

You need to learn the best wording as well as the best potential market, so keep careful track of which ads are answered by whom (use a box number suffix, suite or department number).

Spend a little time in the library to find magazines that would be a good place for your advertisements, and in others that advertise supplies you need (trade magazines).

When writing to any commercial supplier, always use letterhead paper. The easiest way to do this is to name yourself (use the same name on your product labels).

Order at least a minimum set of letterhead paper and matching envelopes for contacting suppliers.

In this business, as well as any other, records are extremely important. A person who can create quality handmade items is one who should have no trouble keeping neat and accurate records! In the beginning, a simple single entry ledger might be best (unless you are experienced in this area) -- because it will serve as a sort of "diary" as well as business record.

BUSINESS SOURCES

GOODFELLOW, Box 4520, Berkeley, CA 94704. Catalog of toys and handmade home merchandise. Good place to advertise your products. Write for details.

ANNIE'S KNITTING PATTERNS. Box 398, Chestertown, NY 12817. Knitting pattern book, design graphs. Buys and sells.

JAN KNITS Box 315, Ingamar, MT 59039. Knitted sweater kits; garment kits. Buys and sells.

SHELBURNE SPINNERS, North Avenue Extension, Burlington, VT 05401. Knitting kits, Handspun yarn. Buys and sells.

KITS, Box 182, Madison Lake, MN 56063. Knitting kits. Buys and sells.

DAN NEWMAN CO. 57 Lakeview Ave., Clifton, NJ 07011. Logos and name tags.

ENJOY MACRAME NEWSLETTER, 3817 N Vermillion, Danville, IL 61832.
Newsletter for macrame enthusiasts.

HAND DANCER NEEDLEPOINT DESIGN, Box 480, Northville, NY 12123.
Needlepoint kits, buys and sells.

HOOK AND NEEDLE. 31 Broadway, Rockport, MA 01966. Needlepoint
kits, buys and sells.

HANDWORKS, Box 545, Smithtown, NY 11787. Needlepoint canvasses.
Buys and sells.

JAN'S NEEDLEWORKS, Box 689, Old Bethpage, NY 11804. Needle mug
kits; needlework footstool kit; buys and sells.

NEEDLEWORK PORTRAITS, Box 9, Green Farms, CT 06436. Needlepoint
portrait kits - from photographs. Buys and sells.

NEEDLEWORK TIMES, Box 87263, Chicago, IL 60680. Newspaper for
needlework enthusiasts.

NATIONAL QUILTING ASSN, Box 62, Greenbelt, MD 20770. Publishes
PATCHWORK PATTERN, magazine for quilting enthusiasts.

THE TREADLE WORKS, 118 Westridge Drive, Portola Valley, CA 94205.
Amish design quilting kits.

HARRIS PUBLICATIONS, INC. 79 Madison Ave., NY 10016. Publishes
QUILT magazine.

COVERED BRIDGE FABRIC WORKS, Box 884, Flagstaff, AZ 88022. Good
Feelings quilting kits. Buys and sells.

HEMLOCK SERVICES, 1441 Atlantic, Kansas City, MO 64116.
Embroidered quilt designs. Buys and sells.

QUILTS AND OTHER COMFORTS, Box 394, Wheatridge, CO 80033. Quilt
kits, pillow kits, quilt patterns and supplies. Buys and sells.

WORK DESIGN, 8916 York Rd., Charlotte, NC 28224. Latch hook rug
kits. Buys and sell.

CRAFTSMAN STUDIO. North Street, Kennebunkport, ME 04046. Rug
hooking equipment, hooked rug designs. Buys and sells.

SEW BUSINESS 2100 N Central Rd., Ft Lee, NJ 07024. Monthly
publications: ART NEEDLEWORK and QUILT QUARTERLY \$15 yr. each.

JANA ASSOCIATES, 49 Longview Rd., Staten Island, NY 10304.
Closeouts: beads, doll eyes, felt pieces, etc.

CREATIVE PRODUCTS, Box 584, Lake Forest, IL 60046. Free subscription to businesses (write on letterhead). Good place to look for sewing product information.

NEEDLE & THREAD MAGAZINE, 4949 Byers, Ft Worth, TX 76107. Also publishes NEEDLECRAFT FOR TODAY.

HOUSE OF WHITE BIRCHES, Box 337, Seabrook, NH 03874. Publishes STITCH N' SEW and WOMEN'S CIRCLE - as the National Friendly Homemakers Club. Both quarterly -\$6 yr.

C.M. ALMY & SON, INC. 37 Purchase St., Rye, NY 10580. Yarns, even weave cloth, ecclesiastical supplies. Buys and sells.

LAURA'S CREATIVE STITCHERY, Box 291, Bountiful, UT 84014. Pillow kits, quilting kits, patterns. Buys and sells.

ROMNI WOOLS & FIBERS, LTD., 3779 W. 10th Ave., Vancouver, BC, Canada. V6R 2G5. Spinning wheels, carding equipment, weaving looms; Buys and sells.

DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC. 31 East 2nd St., Mineola, NY 11051. Discount books, clip art, stencils, etc.

QUILL CORPORATION, 100 Schelter Rd., Lincolnshire, IL 60917-4700, 312/634-4800. Office supplies.

NEBS, 500 Main St., Groton, MA 04171, 800/225-6380. Office supplies.

SWEDCO, Box 29, Mooresville, NC 28115. 3 line rubber stamps - \$3; business cards - \$13 per thousand.

ZPS, Box 581, Libertyville, IL 60048-2556. Business cards (raised print - \$11.50 per K) and letterhead stationery. Will print your copy ready logo or design, even whole card.

WALTER DRAKE, 4119 Drake Bldg., Colorado Springs, CO 80940. Short run business cards, stationery, etc. Good quality but no choice of style or color.