

Chapter 6

You've got 2 seconds! Marketing and Sales

"Hell, there are no rules here - we're trying to accomplish something."

—Thomas A. Edison

"The door of opportunity won't open unless you do some serious pushing."

—Anonymous

Ready for your first show? Let's—hold on a minute! What exactly are you going to do when someone walks into your booth? Are people going to walk into your booth? Think you can talk them into buying a \$500 art-do-hickey? Who are you and why should they? Would you walk into an outdoor festival and drop \$1000 on a gipsy artist's lap for a sculpture on any given weekend? Know someone that would? Fact is, if you build it they will come...and look at it, but getting them to *buy* something at any price requires yet more work on your part.

I will approach this first from the salesmanship, then the marketing angles; yes, I know the title of the chapter says marketing first and then sales, it just rings better that way. They are different concepts, both absolutely essential to the consistent success of any artist. Woah! Did you see that word? CONSISTENT? Yep, I saw it, that's the key to succeeding in this crazy business, building some kind of consistency in sales over the long run, not just having a good show now and then. Here we go.

"The theory of compressed air"

Bear with me, this is only a theory, but I have seen it with my own eyes so many times that I am close to absolute proof, declaring it a physical certainty along the lines of the law of gravity and centrifugal force. I am sitting at my booth, dutifully demonstrating the art of the woodcut by carving on a piece of cherry wood. Children

flock to me, as they are exempt from the theory of compressed air, and I explain to them how to do woodcuts (if they only had teeny-tiny credit cards in their tiny pockets...sigh...I would be a rich woman today). Sales come and sales go all morning but my booth is now empty despite a healthy crowd just outside.

Those empty “time bubbles” usually signify it is time for a break, and so I head toward the row of portable restrooms...unknowingly followed by a stream of compressed air! I don’t notice this right away, but were I to look over my shoulder at this precise moment, I would see my booth fill with people. Not just passing by, these people will look carefully at my art, browse through my bins and read every sign. I’ve snuck up and watched them do it. In fact, I have challenged the theory and entered my booth at this moment, hopeful for a sale to one of these obviously very interested parties...only to have my stream of compressed air push them away just as I enter the booth and greet them heartily.

Is this possible? I test the theory again and again and it works! I leave, they come in as if sucked by the vacuum I just created, I come back, they leave as if pushed by an unknown force...Eureka! I’ve discovered a new physical law! Wait a minute... In all seriousness, salesmanship doesn’t just happen. Many artists sit in the back of their booth and let folks browse at leisure, then greet them politely and strike some sort of a conversation with the prospective customer. Some are more insistent than others, some simply wait until the customer is ready, yet others push harder and make an open offer. Salesmanship is a matter of style. I have read many books and articles on salesmanship and rather cut off my right arm than employ some of their tactics, even if I could possibly pull them off. I have improved over the years, mostly by reading and practicing and educating myself a little and carefully watching those sales pros pull off sale after sale. Among all the tactics and tricks, I found my own way, one that suits my personality and I feel more or less comfortable with. Salesmanship is as personal as your art, and if you aren’t comfortable with your own sales tactics, failure is imminent no matter how successful the tactic.

But as usual in this business, there are some things everyone can do to maximize their sales success. Some of these I have seen and some I have done. Everyone will find their own style in nabbing those sales, but the thing that does not work is doing nothing and expecting the customer to grab your stuff off the wall and pull out their wallet. *That*, I guarantee, does not happen...too often. So it’s up to you again.

The Theory of Compressed Air does show us that there is a fine mix of unknown elements and some ethereal components to making a sale. But there are also some known elements and controllable components and those are the ones that we need to learn and sharpen and hone carefully and constantly.