



Connect with Art Audiences

When you're promoting yourself, as you must, good communication skills are not a luxury. They are essential to your marketing efforts. They're fundamental for helping to distinguish you from other artists. Can you imagine buying a car from a dealer who couldn't tell you why his car was better than the others on the market? Likewise, answer this: Why should a collector purchase your art instead of someone else's?

Think about how you present yourself. Is it working? When you talk to others, especially non-artists or potential collectors, are you getting the response you want? Are they asking to see more of your work? If not, you need a new approach.

Presenting yourself in your best light is not necessarily anything you can do off the top of your head. Because it's your business, and because emotions are usually such a big part of selling one's art, you have to take time to think about it, write it out, rehearse it, and practice it on others. You need to be able to articulate your work orally and in writing. You can't fake it! The more you practice, the more words you will have to pick and choose from when you need them.

You only get one chance to make a first impression. When you put something in print, it is there forever. When you post an article containing sloppy sentences on your website, it is not easily forgotten by readers. Get it right from the start.

You must do everything possible to distinguish yourself from the plethora of artists in today's competitive art market.

Good communication:

- Captures the attention and imagination of readers and listeners.
- Gives viewers clues to your art and what it's about. It's an easy way to connect with people.
- Makes you more credible by demonstrating that you know what you're talking about.

- Gives you the power to define yourself, rather than waiting for someone else to do it for you. They might talk and write about your art in a way you hadn't intended . . . maybe in a way you don't even like. Coming up with your own language that defines who you are and what you're about means you're in charge of your career.

Remember that you're trying to connect with generations of people who have had little or no art education. Though they might know how to consume visual images, very few people know how to analyze them for deeper, more personal meaning. You can't blame them, but you can help them. You can teach people how to look at and appreciate your work. Art viewers, especially new art viewers, are often intimidated by the unknown. It's up to you to break down that barrier.

You need good language skills to connect to art audiences. Have you ever heard of someone trying to sell something without words? Even concepts and ideas need words to describe them. Once you've articulated it as best you can, you'll use words for the following:

- Conversation
- Website text
- Press releases
- Newsletters
- Brochures
- Letters
- Grant applications
- Phone skills
- Interviews
- Public speaking

Do I really need to tell you how critical these are for your marketing efforts?

Start here . . .

What do you want people to say when they look at your art? Notice I didn't ask what are they already saying. I don't really care about that. I asked, "What do you want them to say?"

Are they saying it?

You have more control over your viewers' reactions than you might think. The trouble is that you're conditioned to accept any feedback as fact. You begin to believe it yourself. You start getting frustrated because it's not what you want to hear. Now, you're on the defensive. You must respond to the person with the ball.

Wouldn't it be better if you always had the ball? Wouldn't it be better if your viewers had responded in the first place exactly as you had intended? The truth is, you have it within you to control these situations, but you have to play offense. You can't afford to be on the defensive or to be cleaning up messes from the sidelines all of the time.

Remind yourself once again that you, and nobody else, are in charge of your career.

If you aren't connecting with audiences as you would like, assess the situation:

- What can I say differently?
- What should I add?
- What should I omit?
- Does my appearance and body language (smile, eye contact, gestures) work for or against me?
- Do I emit confidence?

Football teams do this every week after a game. They talk about what went wrong, they watch tapes of their performances over and over again, and then they change the playbook. They want to win and do everything possible to improve their plan before the next game. They're seeking a more desirable outcome.

After you've assessed your situation, change your own playbook. Your artwork is the spark, but you can't let it down. You have to back it up--even enhance it--with spoken and written words. Try not to get too used to the words you use. There's almost always room for improvement. Communicating is a never-ending process.

Look at every situation as an opportunity—an opportunity to learn, to grow, and to improve your communication.

Think of a time that someone responded to your art in a way you hadn't intended.

What could you have done to elicit a more favorable response? It isn't enough to think it, you have to burn it in your memory. Write down the situation and how you will handle it differently in the future. Then, practice speaking with a voice recorder. Put the words together differently to achieve a more favorable outcome.

Here are some other changes and additions you might consider:

1. **Rethink the titles of your work.** Perhaps they could be more descriptive. Or even less descriptive. Are they pointing to what you want people to see?
2. **Improve your artist statement.** Don't let it sit on a shelf and gather dust. Don't be embarrassed by it. It should be getting better and better--along with your work. See my e-book *The Relatively Pain-Free Artist Statement* and how you might get help with your statement:
<http://www.artbizcoach.com/books/statement.shtml>
3. **Add short, explanatory text on the labels of your artwork in an exhibit or on your website.**
4. **Give an artist talk at your opening.** There's nothing like hearing it straight from the horse's mouth. It's an opportunity you can't afford to let pass you by.

Whatever you do, don't throw away or ignore all of the power you have to promote your work the way you want it to be seen and appreciated by others. Embrace that power and use it as best you can to connect with art audiences.

If you're interested in exploring this subject further, check out the online class "Promote Your Art with Confidence": <http://www.artbizcoach.com/classes/promote.shtml>