

Five super-simple tips for selling online

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1. SPACE

Make the most of your space. On Etsy, you get a banner, an avatar, a row of three "featured" items displayed at the top of your store, and up to five images per listing. Use everything! Make sure you've filled out your location, shop announcement and profile; all these things give the buyer a sense of who you are and what your shop represents.

2. PHOTOS

Good photography. This is probably the most important thing about selling online. Invest in a digital camera with a good macro lens, a tripod or a light tent if you're photographing jewelry. You don't have to spend a ton of money-- light tents are pretty easy to make out of a cardboard box, paper and lamps. (see here for a DIY tutorial

<http://www.instructables.com/id/EKTSDWUR5HEP286OV2/>)

Think about creating a look and feel for your shop. Using similar backgrounds or a similar style for all your photos creates continuity and holds the shop together. Use natural light when you can, and photograph everything from multiple angles. If texture or color is the focus of the item, make sure it comes across in the photographs. Don't count on your descriptions to make up for poor image quality!

If you get more than one thumbnail (on Etsy you are allowed five per listing), use the most interesting and well-compositioned as your initial image, even if it doesn't show the item in its entirety. You want people to be interested in the photo enough to click further.

3. BUYERS

Understand your venue from a buyer's perspective. The easiest way to learn this is to pretend (or real) shopping! Browse the site and take note of how items are presented. Do you find yourself wondering what the lining of a particular bag looks like? Are you wondering what a seller's shipping policy is? Is the sweater an itchy wool or a soft acrylic? Not answering your buyers' questions will lose them. When we're familiar with the items ourselves, it's hard to remember that someone else needs more info. The listings don't have to be long, but giving proper details helps buyers.

4. COMMUNITY

Join your community. Write or ask questions in the Forums, join a street team, participate in swaps, contests, group promotions. Connections are another form of exposure. On Etsy it is CRUCIAL to post in, or at least read, the Forums. Often the best advice you can get on the site is itself is right there, from experienced sellers.

Keep in mind that your behavior is always reflecting on your shop. It goes without saying that you should always act courteously towards everyone (even jerks who don't know what they're talking about) especially in public Forums, especially on the web. Respond promptly to emails and other messages (I am really terrible at this myself), and keep good lines of communication open with your buyers.

5. FINDING IT

Check your titles and tags. These are 2 key ways people can search for your products. Make sure your titles state basic product identifiers (soap, shirt, necklace) and make sure your tags include a variety of info (color, use, type of product). Keep your shop fresh and updated. On Etsy its important to list new items frequently to stay on top of the searches. You can't just list a dozen items, sit back and wait for the sales to come. If something isn't working, try something else-- photograph it differently, rearrange the order of items, experiment and keep things dynamic.

Plus GET OUT THERE! (ADVERTISING)

I grabbed this from the Etsy wiki, its a list of advertising ideas. Some of them are cheekier than others and not everything works for everyone, or every store:

1. Join forums and put your Etsy store URL in your signature, if the forum rules allow it.
2. Find people to link to your Etsy store, and do the same for them in return.
3. Put your Etsy URL in your e-mail signature
4. Advertise in free bulletin boards
5. Do business card swaps with other Etsy sellers.
6. Vistaprint.com - free business cards and give them away like crazy.
7. Give free samples & business cards to friends & family - even if you're shy about promoting yourself, your mom will likely brag you up!
8. Craft shows, farmers markets, etc. are a great way to show your stuff & hand out cards & brochures.
9. Talk about Etsy at craft groups (such as Stitch 'n' Bitch gatherings) Even if these people join up as sellers, we all know that sellers also buy! (Sometimes we buy more than we sell!)
10. Make bookmarks with your Etsy URL on them and give them to libraries and schools.
11. Ask shops, libraries, and any business with windows to have your advert on their window.
12. Give presents that you've make and accidentally give your business card with it ;)
13. When someone needs your name, address or phone number give 'em your business card that has all your details as well as your Etsy store URL!
14. Always wear items that you've made and have your business cards on hand to give to people who comment on your stuff.
15. Make up coupons for your store and leave them everywhere (people are more likely to visit your shop knowing that there's a discount, etc).

and I would add: use Flickr, Myspace and other online venues as well.

In the end, you are responsible for promoting your shop, and you can't count on "foot traffic" the way you would at a brick and mortar store. Read up, watch what others are doing, share ideas and try new things all the time. That's everything important, I think.