

Art Storefronts Presents

# The Journey: Learning How to Sell Art Online

The journey we took to learn how to sell art online, the problem in the industry we've fixed, and how our unique combination of software, education, and community is leading artists down a path to creative and financial success.



# Can I ask you a question?

Are you trying to sell art online?

Have you tried to sell art online before?

Are you thinking about selling art online in the future?

Whether past, present or future, you likely fall into one of three groups:

1. Despite trying, you have never sold anything from your own website
2. You have sold a few pieces here and there, but nothing substantial and certainly nothing consistent
3. You are questioning how to sell art online, and if art even sells online at all

Or perhaps you've only tried the marketplace route, and:

- You're on Etsy and make a few sales but nothing significant
- You gave Fine Art America a shot and got no traction
- You are looking into other art marketplaces and hoping they will work

In terms of your website, you've likely had a website with Zenfolio, Smugmug, Photoshelter, FASO, WordPress, Squarespace, or some other "portfolio" website provider.



Well, this is the story for countless artists wondering how to sell art online. And unfortunately, despite all market data pointing to the contrary, many come away from their first (or second, or third) online venture believing art “just doesn’t sell online”.

Before we go any further, let’s go over the research we conducted to get here.

## Our Market Research



We have been calling and interacting with artists, photographers and art galleries for the past two years. Looking at their websites, getting into their sales, breaking down the data.

We have interviewed tens of thousands in every niche imaginable across the entire US, Canada, and overseas.

Each week we interact with more. And, each week the same conclusions are reached:

*Nobody — and we mean NOBODY – had any “success” selling from their own websites.*

Nobody?

What about this artist, or that artist, or this or gallery? They are killing it online.

Sure, there are outliers. Jordan could dunk from the free throw line, Zuckerberg became a billionaire working in his pajamas, J.K. Rowling wrote Harry Potter in a coffee shop.

These situations are just not the norm. Not even close. They are outliers and

there are not many of them.

As for the rest....



We have spoken to artists that sell well over 100k in offline sales yearly, artists that have over 500k fans on Facebook, and artists doing tremendously well that don't even have websites (who have only tried selling through marketplace websites).

None of them are making any significant progress selling online, and this is a pretty big problem that we felt needed to be addressed.

We wondered...Why was nobody — including very successful artists and photographers — able to make consistent sales from their own websites?

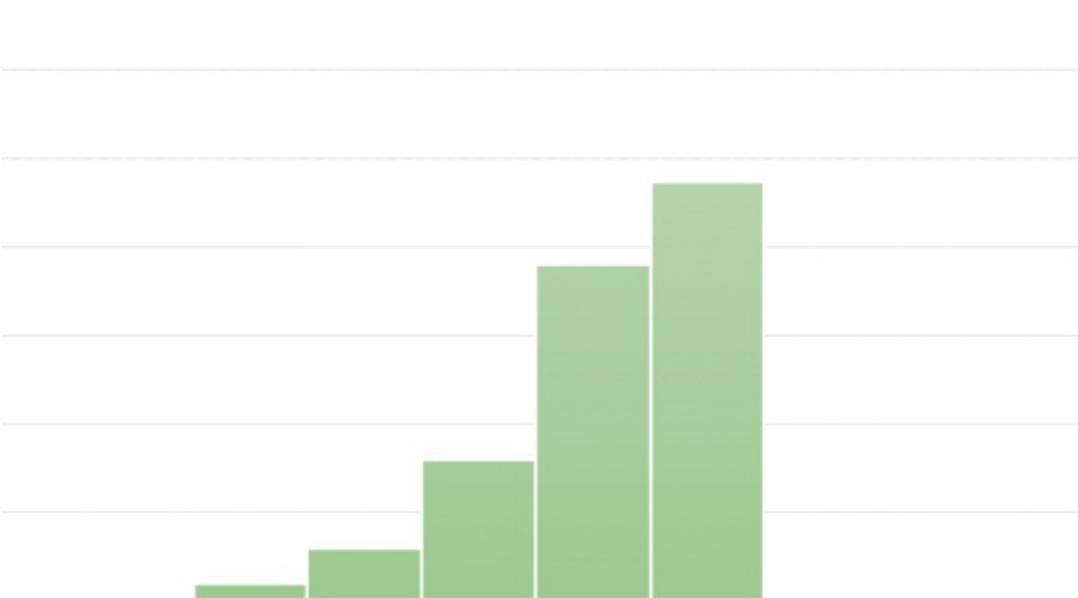
We feel we can stand here today and confidently say we have solved this problem and have customers and most importantly the data to argue we have.

Yet, this won't help you or anyone else who aspires to have a successful art business, unless you understand the why and the how.



Something we learned in this process is that you still have a high chance of going down the wrong path, until you educate yourself about both the problem and the solution.

## The Industry “Problem”



We’ve all witnessed the evolution of commerce in the digital age, and the art market is a part of that.

Our executives and stakeholders, who have many, many years of experience within the art & photo space, saw and experienced a problem everywhere:

*Art wasn’t just available for sale online, it was booming.*

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And there was market research to back it all up.

In 2013 the BBC announced [in this article](#) that more art was now sold online than in galleries.

The value of the online art market was \$1 billion in 2013, on track for \$2.64 billion in 2015 ([via Hiscox Report](#)). Then, in 2015, they revised the projections due to growth exceeding their expectations, projecting it to be worth \$6.3 billion in 2019. Great! The online market is exploding. But it's also cannibalizing offline sales.

This meant that those well-positioned to succeed online would increasingly benefit from this industry disruption, while those poorly positioned would increasingly struggle.

So the question we asked ourselves is, how can we help position everyone to succeed?

We started by investigating where exactly all the art was being sold online.



A large portion was being sold by large art retailers such as Art.com, SaatchiArt, uGallery, GreatBigCanvas, to name a few.

After doing a heavy review of their websites, we made a key discovery.

We discovered that the buying experience being provided by these leading online retailers were vastly different when compared to the standard websites utilized by artists and photographers.

For example, the top online art retailers displayed live previews on different media types, they provided in-room visualization tools, framing tools, easy sharing tools, and much, much more (If you want to see a comprehensive list, read [The Top 20 Critical Features to Sell Art Online](#)).

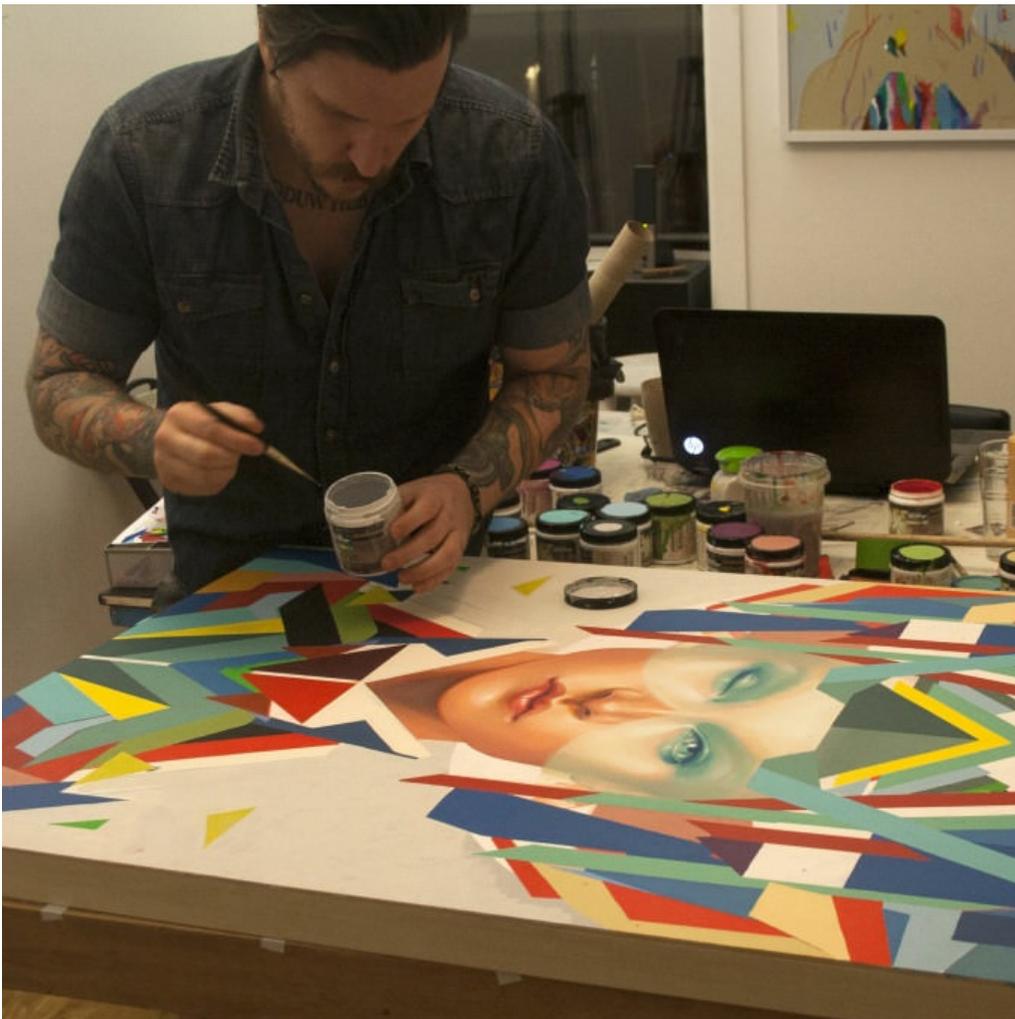
Overall it was a very interactive, engaging, and informative buying experience, all thoughtfully designed to remove “buyer friction” and convert a casual visitor into a buyer.

Art just happens to be a product with inherently high buyer friction.

*So these companies each invested millions to develop their own technology in order to remove it.*

Every action they took was completely logical – they tested, looked at the data and improved. They copied each others learnings. They all started selling more and more.

But this is not what the artist and photographer websites were doing. Not even close.



The typical artist and photographer websites provided a buying experience that was confusing and clunky at best.

An experience that looks like it was designed for everything BUT converting visitors into buyers. It was hard to find things, it took many clicks to add simple products to the cart, there were no visualization tools, and so forth.

As such, it is not surprising that sales performance on these websites was a major problem. These websites really only served as a glorified business card where people could view images.

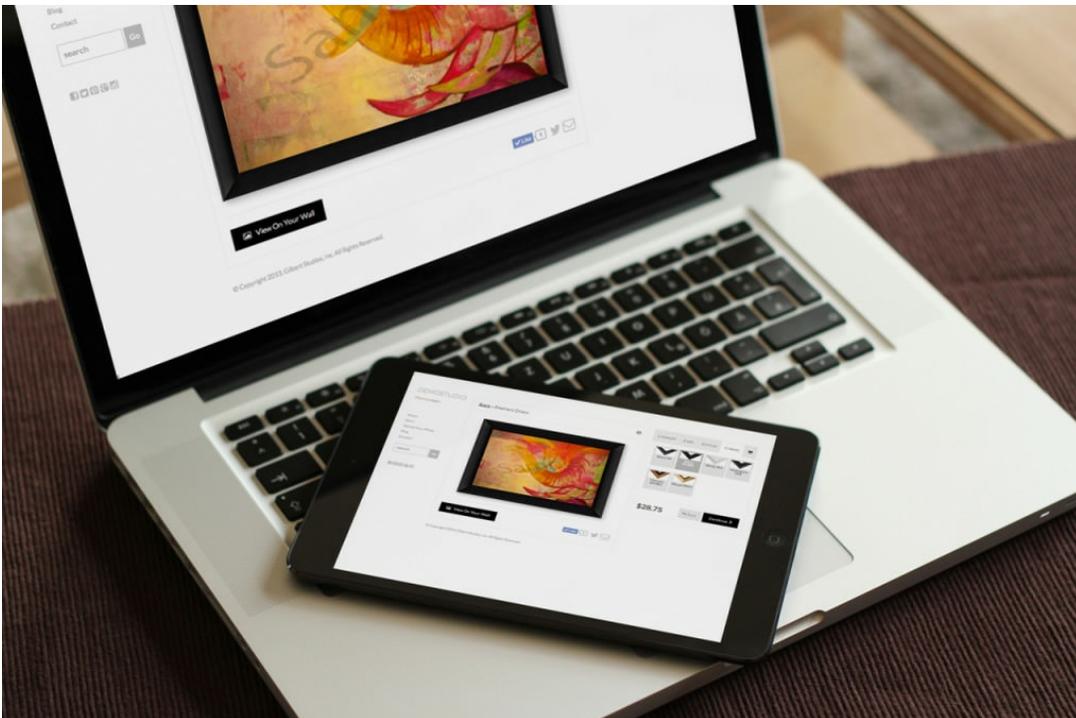
It became clear that artists and photographers needed to provide a buying experience that was on par with the leading retailers if they ever expected to start making consistent sales.

One that was designed from the ground up to remove buyer friction, and with the intention of converting visitors into buyers. With such a widespread lack of success, they simply could not continue as they were and expect a better result.

But at the same time, it would be impossible for any artist or photographer to develop this technology on their own and still earn a return on their investment.

In order to solve this problem for all artists and photographers, an organization needed to step forward, make the investment, put in the time, and build something that would be available to them all.

## Our Mission + How We Got Here



So our mission became to build an eCommerce platform with this feature-rich, interactive buying experience that artists and photographers could use in order to compete on the same level, right on their own websites.

So that if a potential buyer landed on one of the leading art websites, and then subsequently landed on one of our customer's websites, there would not be a decline in the buying experience nor an increase in buyer friction. The experience would instead be comparable, or better yet, enhanced.



Art Storefronts was established in 2013 in order to solve the specific problem of getting professional artists and photographers to start making consistent sales directly from their own websites.

## Assembling a Double-Threat Team



Knowing that a solution required serious experience in (1) art/photo marketing and (2) eCommerce software, we assembled a robust team of experts in both fields.

We couldn't just be a software company that strictly provided a website – those companies already failed at solving the problem.

*The industry didn't need another website provider.*

It needed someone to actually solve a key problem.

And we also couldn't just be a marketing company, because our core product was itself software (eCommerce websites). We needed both as core competencies. Specifically, we needed marketing experts to guide the software experts and build a comprehensive product that would solve the problem.

So this was our approach, and it was a different approach than every other company before us.

And so this double-threat team went to work.

## The Initial Launch

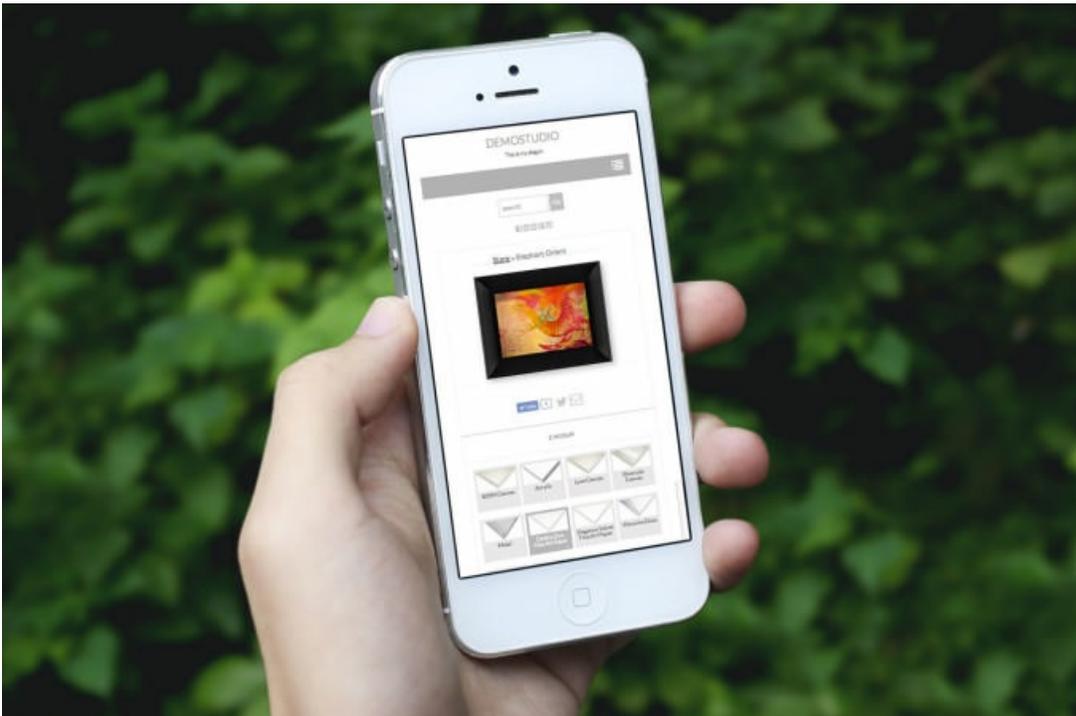


We completed our software and officially launched it in November 2014.

Needless to say, after only a short period of time, some of the results that came in were epic.

We had artists and photographers who previously sold next to nothing online on their own websites, who transitioned their site over to Art Storefronts, and immediately began selling thousands in their first month. Photographers like [Mike Winsor began making sales daily](#). Artists like [Bill Stidham](#) sold over \$7,000 in his first month!

*It became clear pretty quickly that we had something special.*



Before we go any further, we need to inject some objectivity to what we just said.

You see, it isn't that these artists "magically" or mysteriously just started selling out of nowhere once they switched to our platform. The difference in performance is something you can scientifically measure. The reason they started selling is because their old website delivered an extremely low (or a ~ 0%) conversion rate, while our website delivered an extremely high conversion rate.

A "Customer Conversion Rate" ("CCR") is the percentage of customers who buy, divided by the total number of visitors to a site. Simple. Art Storefronts delivered a whoppingly higher conversion rate (We outlined how in [this post](#) and continue to add additional conversion-boosting features monthly).

But, as we said earlier, this is an article about truths, and so we have to be honest. The truth is, it wasn't all smiles and high fives yet. This was because while some artists and photographers saw amazing results, there were others who did not. In fact, they saw crap results.



So while we'd love to tell you the problem was solved, and that we saved the industry, and all you have to do is just buy our product...doing so would be dishonest and misleading. This is why we keep urging you to read on.

Like anything in life, there are no silver bullets. No shortcuts.

If you want to know what really created success so that you, too, can create your own success, please read on.

While we certainly made some groundbreaking gains, it was clear that we were only part of the way towards solving our problem.

How could there be such a dichotomy when everyone was using the exact same software and the exact same tools?

Let's look at it another way:

- (Group 1) Great Artist + Best Software = Success

- (Group 2) Great Artist + Best Software = Fail

This doesn't make sense!

As you can see, these equations contradict each other. We therefore realized that something else was happening on a deeper level, and we needed to find out what it was.

## More Work to Do



So, we tasked our marketing team with the responsibility of figuring out what was going on.

They put on their guru marketing hats and began a massive data collection. They dove into analytics, they interviewed customers, and spent countless hours trying to find reasons for the differences between the more successful and the less.

After a significant amount of time gathering and analyzing data, our marketing team was able to identify some key characteristics that distinguished each group.

### The more successful artists:

- Had already identified a target audience that was emotionally connected to their subject matter (as we've laid out in "[The Winning Business Model for Artists](#)")
- Had already identified how and where they could "get in front of", or market to, this audience

- Had a target audience that was already visiting their website (i.e. they had “traffic”)

These artists used an array of common marketing tactics that allowed them to expand their target audiences, and they properly setup their site to convert art sales:

- They offered trust signals on their website, such as 100% satisfaction guarantees, clear return policies, displaying a phone number, professional logo and not plain text, and more. (More on that in “[Anatomy of a Successful Artist’s Homepage](#)” and “[How to Build a Trustworthy Art Store](#)”)
- They had a simple navigation structure, with organization by subject matter, and made it easy for visitors to quickly find what they wanted.



### The less successful artists:

- Lacked clarity as to who their target audience really was and were uninformed about how to formulate and execute an overall business strategy that would attract, maintain, and expand their target audience.
- Did little marketing, didn’t realize how much time they should be spending on marketing, and were completely uninformed of the successful tactics that other artists were commonly using. They largely wasted time doing things that we already knew would not work.
- Had very little traffic, or no traffic at all, as seen in their web analytics.

Of those who had traffic, they were completely unaware of industry best practices, and therefore made key setup mistakes that significantly reduced conversion rates. To name a few:

- They lacked trust signals – no professional logo, no phone number, no clear return policy, no satisfaction guarantee, etc.
- They doctored up the high-converting designs we provide by default with new colors and arrangements that ruined the appeal.
- They had complicated navigation structures (sometimes 2 or 3 rows of navigation to read) and no organization by subject matter. As such, once you reached the site, it was very difficult to find what you wanted.

With this data, we were able to conclude that an artist or photographer could have the best converting software in the world – software that is on par with the leading retailers who are selling billions – and that would still not be enough to make them successful.

This was the problem with Group 2 mentioned above (Great Artist + Best Software = Fail)



The key piece missing from Group 2 was the information and knowhow to start, build, and grow an online art business based on proven techniques and practices.

If we add that key piece that into our Group 2 equation, it starts making sense again:

- (Group 1) Great Artist + Best Software + Utilizes Best Practices= Success!
- (Group 2) Great Artist + Best Software + Education → Utilizes Best Practices = Success!

The information and knowhow as to how to start, build, and grow an online art

business based on *best practices that were already working for other pros* was critical.

It would serve as an “educational bridge” that would teach the less successful how to become more successful. It would also teach the already successful how to become even more successful. And overall, it would keep everyone on a guided path towards a more successful future, all depending on how much effort they put into it.

## The Education Component



The day we discovered this, Art Storefronts became more than just an eCommerce website provider.

In order to complete our mission, and completely solve the problem we set out to solve, we realized we needed to add another key component to our offering – Education.

So we hired more people and doubled-down on our efforts.

We started working on a robust step-by-step “Success Plan” that everyone in Group 2 could follow.

The screenshot shows a progress bar at the top with four phases: Phase 1: Launching, Phase 2: Sales & Marketing, Phase 3: The Finer Details, and Phase 4: Growth. Below the progress bar, the text reads "Progress" and "You've completed 0 out of 11 steps." A checklist follows with four items: "Make a Commitment to Complete this Success Plan", "Start Leveraging our Private Forum", "Site Setup", and "Install Google Analytics". The "Install Google Analytics" item is highlighted in a darker grey. Below the checklist, there is a checkbox labeled "Completed?", the text "Average Time to Complete: 20-30 minutes", and a link "How to Install Google Analytics" followed by a paragraph of text.

## The Art Storefronts Success Plan

*This allowed Group 2 to maximize time efficiency, empowering them to focus only on things that were already proven to work.*

And even more importantly, a plan that would prevent them from wasting time and years of their life doing things that have already proven to fail. As we said earlier, there is nothing worse than wasting years of time on ineffective strategies when in reality all you want is the maximum amount of time to create more art.

More importantly, this Success Plan would be dynamic and always up-to-date. Meaning, when new success stories emerged based on new best practices, the entire community would be updated so that they too could implement the best practices.

We also began releasing Success Content through our blog.

The Success Content contains some of the latest and greatest case studies and strategies as a supportive element to the Success Plan. Case studies such as [How our Lead Capture Tool dramatically increased email opt-ins](#) for Mike Winsor. Or another on [Optimizing SEO on an Artist Website](#) that dramatically increased traffic and sales.



**Add to Cart**

Overall, the Education component would serve a key role in making sure everyone learned the best practices that were already working. In addition, it would provide guidance on how to execute on these strategies within our software.

Our software would be continually updated and enhanced to execute on all of these strategies. For example, when we ran that successful case study on how to increase email opt-ins, we then built that lead capture tool feature into the software for everyone to use and announced it to all [as seen here](#). This way, everyone in our community is updated about what strategy worked, why it worked, and how to implement it.

## The Results After Implementing the Education Component

Shortly after launching our Success Plan, we began seeing great results within Group 2.

Those who completed the Success Plan educated themselves and began using our software and their new knowledge in ways they never did before. As a result, they started reaching success levels never seen before. The enthusiasm reached an all-time high.

The Education component was clearly working. Awesome!

Yet we still weren't quite ready to pour the champagne yet. There was still a

lingering void left to fill.

Despite all the gains from the Educational component, our customers were still needing more help. This is because by nature, each art business is just a little different from others, and each encounters its own unique needs and challenges. And so as every artist and photographer began executing on the Success Plan as well as the continual Success Content, questions would arise, such as:

- “Great advice! But given the nuances of my business, should I do it this way, or that way?”
- “Has anyone been in this situation before?”
- “Is there a best practice for the specific situation I am encountering? It’s not covered in your article!”

Instead of acting, we discovered that many artists and photographers who had lingering unanswered questions ended up not acting on certain areas of the Success Plan. Well, you can’t be successful without executing on the Success Plan!

Knowing this was a problem that many more would encounter, we knew we needed a way to get these additional questions answered.

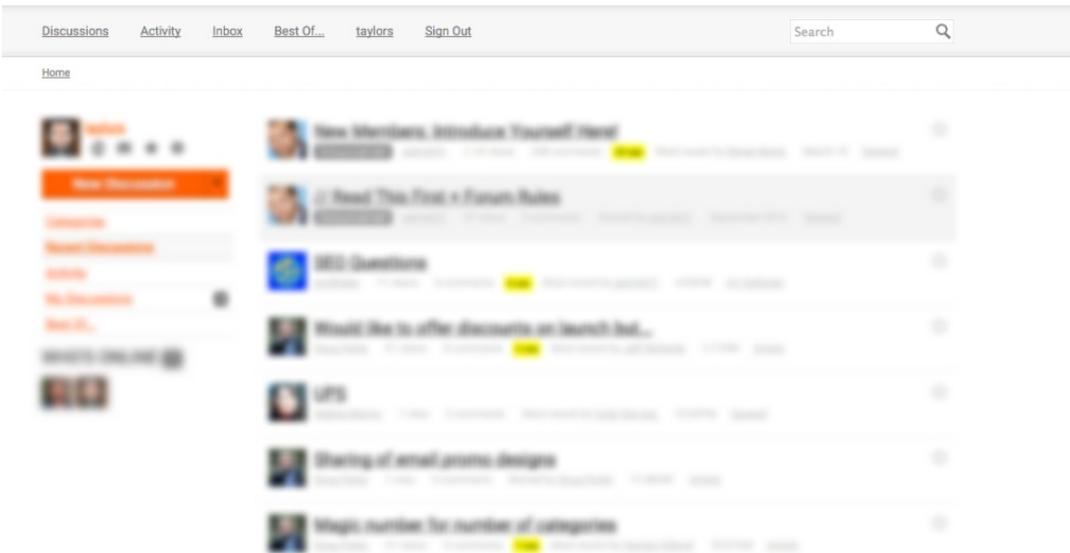
## The Community Component



It became clear that we needed to add a community component that would foster communication between everyone and provide a supportive backbone for all.

So we launched our Member Forum – not for technical support, but for ongoing high-level art marketing and business discussion.

An exclusive venue not available for public viewing where our customers could discuss and collaborate on the Success Plan and Success Content and get the extra guidance they needed.



But in addition to that, we hired several industry experts to participate in the forum and provide additional high-level coaching.

Widely recognized experts such as [Cory Huff](#), [Carolyn Edlund](#), [Kimberly Houston](#), and [Renee Besta](#) are now active participants and have made fantastic contributions which are available to see all over the forum.

As such, we can proudly say today that the Forum has become much more than what we originally envisioned. Customers are getting help on a wide variety of industry topics, which has added an entirely new level of value to our members.

It's the final key that unlocked the successful model for Art eCommerce.

Where others are focused entirely on software, we discovered it to be only one of the legs of a three-legged stool



Software + Education + Community = The Solution

With the combination of Software, Education, and Community in place, and after a long and arduous journey, we can now say that the original problem we set out to fix has been solved.

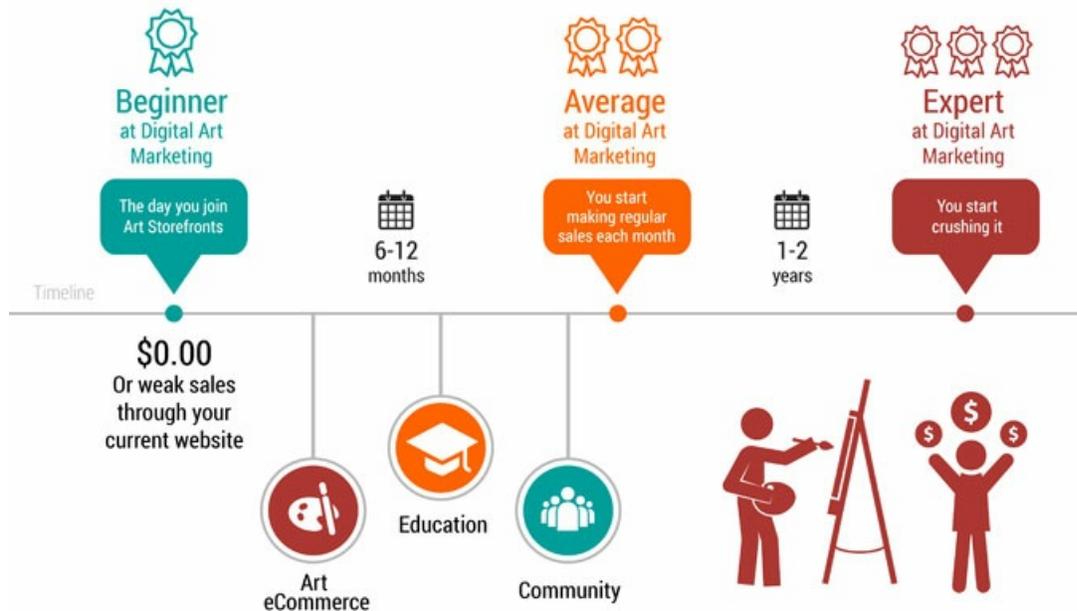


Artists and photographers are now selling directly from their websites, many in very high volumes, some even surpassing *six figures in their first year*. Others are making their first online sales and are on the path to building a successful art business in the future. Even more importantly, everyone is soaking up the education, on their own time, and are also learning how they can leverage the community.

Some are quicker to find success than others, but everyone is now on a guided path towards success.

# How It Works

Through Art eCommerce, Education & Community, we equip you to get consistent monthly sales on your own website.



So far as we know, we are the only place on the planet where artists are actually making sales directly from their own websites. We are also the only company that has setup an ecosystem completely dedicated to everything selling art, where artists and photographers get the guidance and support structure they need to reach increasing levels of success. Regardless of whether they are dedicated full time to selling art, or just wanting to add another revenue stream.

Well, that's the journey we took to master how to sell art online.

Regardless of where you are on your Art Business journey, we hope that learning about our journey will help light your path.

Our mission is to spread this knowledge and empower artists everywhere to succeed. If our story is something you think someone else in the art industry will benefit from, please pass it along.

The truth is, there is no better time than now — and it has never been easier than it is now — for artists to take advantage of the online space, immediately connect with their target customers who have an emotional connection with their subject matter, and sell art to them directly.

In short, it's going to be very exciting to watch more artists and photographers leverage what we have built and how it ultimately changes the industry in 5-10 years

# Interested in learning more?

Get in touch with us for a demo.

We'll show you all of these features and more in action, and talk about how you can utilize them to sell more art online than ever.

[REQUEST A DEMO](#)