

AMP 013: The “Does My Art Suck” Test - Part 1



Show Notes

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Welcome to the Art Marketing Podcast. Today we're going to be talking about religion, politics and the does-my-art-suck test. Well, not the first two but the third one we are, the does-my-art-suck test. Top three. What is it, why it's

important and why we think some of you need to take it, and how you can do that.

That's a little spicy, little spicy. Feels like I've just pulled the pin on a grenade and rolled it under your front door. Run and take cover. But I think if you permit me to set things up it will be a good episode. I'm actually really fired up about it because it's completely foundational to everything that we're trying to do with this podcast.

We attempt to be on this podcast, at least so far, incredibly feedback driven. Our business is software for artists and a nice little side benefit to that is you end up talking to artists all day. We've been doing this for years now, phone calls, emails, live chats, comments on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, everywhere.

I've mentioned this before, not just artists but you get to see artists at every stage of the game. Never attempted to sell their work, thinking about it, attempted to sell their work, didn't work out, have sold offline but never online or selling offline but not online. Every combination in between, doing really well in both, trying to expand, trying to level up. You spend enough time doing that, you start getting an idea of the market that's out there, the various different personalities, we call it agendas, of artists start to emerge. Let me address a few of those.

If you like doing art just for the sake of doing art, love that, that's me with photography. Love taking photos, enjoy it, get creative outlet there. Not attempting to sell them any time soon, no plans to do that. Awesome, respect these types. The all, "All art should be given away for free." All good, we love free. Who doesn't love free? Again, respect to you guys.

The, "I don't sell any of my art and never will. It has a soul and selling it will kill it."

Bit dramatic but again respect. Then there's the, "Art does not sell online or offline because ... Some of my favorites are Chinese who are flooding the market with cheap art. Millennials have no money, you have to be dead first for art to sell. Everybody is stealing your art on the internet and printing it out at home and hanging it on their walls." I love that one. Facebook and Instagram have stolen your free reach, the market is saturated. The list goes on and on. Totally cool if that's your theory and if that's what you feel.

Just got a text message here, let me read this. It says, "The results are the results, you can blame anything you want but please start and stop with yourself." Interesting, text message from Gary V. I didn't say it, he did, don't blame me. Look, I want to address the rest of you, all the rest of you. What I see our job is, the job of this podcast, and yes, the job of art storefronts, is if you're an artist that wants to sell your art online, to try and generate consistent monthly sales, potentially be able to support yourself full time as an artist or if you're already in that stage and you want to improve sales and level up your game, that's why we exist.

You're the ones that we want to empower. What the heck do I mean by that? You're Daniel-san and we want to be Miyagi. You're Luke Skywalker we want to be Yoda. You're Edmund Hillary and we want to be Tenzing Norgay. I think there's two ways to do that. We could try to attempt to help you get better at your actual craft or art, hashtag not our department.

Or, we can help you get better running the business side of the equation. That's where we want to come in. The big area there is where artists struggle, where artists need the most help. We feel like we can really help you guys there. Our business is software and attempting to sell it we've learned a few things. The does-my-art-suck test has really just emerged from these learnings.

I think it comes from a couple of places. It comes from folks that call us up, they inquire about getting a website. It also applies to some folks that have come onto the platform, bought our software, followed all of our marketing advice to the letter and they probably haven't even sold a damn thing if they've even sold one thing.

I'd mentioned this concept before of artists are startups.

Even that, I'm talking about the does-my-art-suck test, even the artists are startups concept is a bit controversial. I got some emails afterwards saying like, "Wow, you just [inaudible 00:04:25] another grenade." But I really think there's a tremendous amount of validity in thinking that way. If you're making art and all of that entails, yes it's your creative expression, yes it's creativity and your baby, yes it transcends capitalism and comes from a pure place. I get that but you're also trying to sell it, which means capitalism, which means business.

In business there are rules. You need to get your product to market, see if the market wants it before you go investing too much time in it. The idea being, you've got to save yourself a bunch of the headache and effort if the market doesn't want it. In startup parlance, we're talking about startups, it's called an MVP, the Minimum Viable Product. The quick version, quick is kind of the wrong way, the quick version you can make, go and get validation on it and ensure

you're on the right track before investing a bunch of money, time, energy and effort if nobody's going to want it.

Let's switch gears with an analogy. If you're starting a restaurant, that's your goal, that's your dream, that's your desire, it's probably a good idea to have some strangers over to your house a couple different times, cook for them, see if they love that food and they want to come back. Probably a good idea to do that before you go and take a lease on a space, invest hundreds of thousands of dollars in equipment and call up your graphic designer buddy to get going on the menus. It's that concept of, you're a startup, you need to test your product on the market. That's where this does-my-art-suck test came from.

I'm a marketer, I made a flashy headline but the snazzy headline aside, this is true. Out there is a market, if you're looking to sell your art in it you're going to have to validate that your art is something the market wants. With the tough love here, the market has no emotion, it just tells the truth. It is what it is. It's zeros and ones.

Before we get into the test, let's talk about exactly who this applies to. As a business we've seen an incredibly strong correlation with those that have come onboard to Art Storefronts and been incredibly successful. They've pretty much all had success offline before they decided to make the big step online, or before they got rid of their portfolio business card website and got a true e-commerce art gallery experience. The correlation is too strong to ignore.

Do you absolutely have to sell art offline before you come online? Is that gospel? No, it's not gospel. Of course there's outliers but as a blanket statement, we

found it to be a pretty doggone big blanket and accurate blanket. If you want to sell your art online and be successful, you really do first need to sell offline. Not just offline either, and this is one of the key tenets of this test, but offline to strangers. What do I mean? I mean to folks not named mom, dad, boyfriend, girlfriend or best friend. These people are your family, they would lay down on oncoming traffic for you, they don't count.

Let me ask you, have you done that? Let me get even more specific, I'm not saying people compliment you all the time on how great your work is or that people talk about how they want to buy it from or how people tell you all the time how talented an artist you are, how incredible you are. You very well may be. I mean specifically, have people pulled cold hard cash, plastic, Paypal'd you, Venmo'd you, pulled Bitcoin out of their digital wallets and given it to you for your art? Has there been a transaction? The transaction part, the exchange of currency is the validation that you need. It's the most essential part of this equation.

If the answer to the question is yes, you've done that offline to strangers, there was a transaction, more times than once, then I'd say you passed this test. There's still parts of it that apply to you, so don't tune out. I'm going to get to that in a second. But if you've not passed that test, that is your first job and that's the test that you need to take, our argument, before you even contemplate getting online in a very serious and meaningful way.

How do you do it? Let's say, "Okay, Patrick, I'm bought in. I like what you're saying here. I'm willing to take the test. Shoot over the Scantronic, I have my number two pencil, let's do this." Here's how you do it, it can be an art fair, a craft show, a

doctor's office, a restaurant, a sidewalk in a busy part of town, a mall. The venue does not matter. The requirements are foot traffic and strangers, that's literally it.

Your job is to take your art in whatever format it takes, get it setup at one of these venues, put on some sunscreen, display your babies, have some conversations with strangers and attempt to sell your art. Real conversations, real people, real attempts at selling it. You have to try and make some sales and see what happens. You can't just do it once either, rinse and repeat until you really feel like you've got some validation, you've sold some art work.

Our argument is that you need to do all of this before you invest in a big online launch. Let me tell you a little story, a little ditty about Jack and Diane. For the sake of my story let's say they're twins with equal artistic ability. Jack likes flower let's say. He spends a year painting flowers. It turns out Diane likes flowers too. She paints flowers for a month then takes her flower paintings to the market. She sells a few of them. Diane also likes the beach though and fish and boats and sunsets. She takes all of those to the market as well.

At month six, Diane realizes something. At month six while Jack is painting flowers, still painting flowers, Diane realizes something. Turns out, she has sold and not sold some art already. One particular type of art did best. She found that paintings of white sand beaches, toes in the water, butt in the sand, not a worry in the world, cold beer in my hand, that art actually sells insanely well. What? Yeah, turns out everybody wants a Corona commercial on their walls, who knew? Well, in this case Corona and Diane, right?

What about Jack? He has an amazing collection of flower art that looks fantastic on all the walls in his house. Nobody bought it. He's invested a year of his time, created some amazing art, but none financially richer for it.

All right, so let's talk takeaways. Number one, if you've not taken the test, then do it. Don't get too invested in a particular style project or never even take a seat at the table and get in the game. Take the test, give it a shot, it'll be amazing what you'll learn, and it's just a great way to roll.

What if you've already passed the test? I said that it still applies to you, and here's kind of how I think of it, and I think it applies to us too running a business. In reality, you're constantly taking the test. For instance, there's this artist I follow. He's amazing. He just did a huge new gallery show. I have to imagine that before he did that gallery show, he showed that new particular series that he did to a whole bunch of people, got a whole bunch of validation, before he went and created that new show. I think no matter where you are in your journey, you're testing all the time. It's just a great way to go.

Now, today's episode was really big picture and conceptual, and the way we're looking at it is, it was part one. Part two, we want to be your Sherpa. We want to be [inaudible 00:01:03]. We're going to go hardcore tactical. How to go about this? What are the best strategies? What are ways you can cheat on the test? Not cheat, but are ways that you could study, the smartest ways you could study to best pass this test, and some great, great, tactics, so fire it up. Hope you listen to that. It'll come right after this one.

Now, let me pivot into some fan love. Fan love? What?! Yeah, you would be surprised to know that we are up to 13 reviews on iTunes right now. Thirteen

reviews. Getting big time you guys. All five stars. We've got a review from an artist that calls himself Sloppy G. Sloppy G says, "For the past two days, I've stood behind the easel binge listening to every episode, some of them twice. Fantastic content. I have a page full of notes that I scribbled on a pad. I feel smarter and wiser about how to better market my creations. I also appreciate the show notes and links included." Sloppy G, thank you for that. You're my boy. [inaudible 00:01:58] feedback. That is awesome. Thank you so much.

If you are enjoying the show, be like Sloppy, leave us a review. Five stars. We'd love it. We hope to see you soon for Part 2 of the, "Does My Art Suck?", test. On that note, thanks. Have a great day.