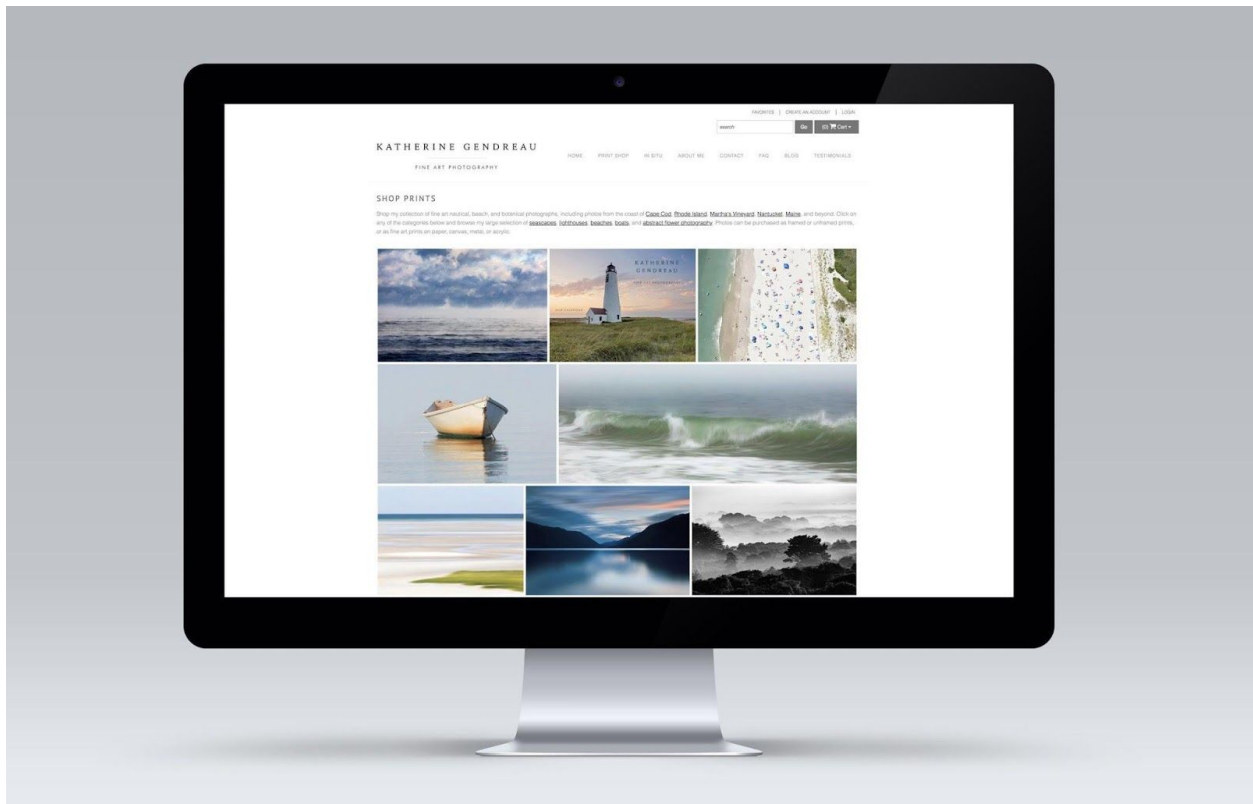


AMP 024: Do Artists Still Need Websites?



Show Notes

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Transcribe

Coming up on the Art Marketing Podcast, we're talking about attention, to website or not, and Facebook, and Instagram, and hashtags, and eBay, and Etsy, and algorithm changes, basically, all the changes.

How do you start your mornings off at work? For me, it's quite literally I get to the computer, I get things booted up. I'm sipping my coffee, and I go straight to Facebook and reading the comments. Now, why would I do that? There's lots of reasons, actually. The more engagement a post has, the better it's reached, more attention, cheaper. The more engagement a post has, the cheaper it is as an ad unit. The feedback you get from Facebook comments is insanely valuable, and whoever is closest to their customer wins. We tend to have a lot of them, too, so there's legitimate feedback there to get.

You respond to enough of these comments, I've mentioned this on the podcast quite a few times, I think, and you start to get a pretty accurate read of what's going out there in the market, people's wants, needs, pains points, fears, desires, et cetera. Again, themes emerge, and so two recurring themes I kind of want to just take the opportunity to attempt to obliterate today. They're really two sides of the same coin, sort of dovetailing, if you will.

Part of me going on this rant today is a little bit selfish, admittedly. I need a catch-all podcast that I could throw in the comments, to address these things, and then the other part is that, given the frequency that I see in these comments, I think this actually genuinely will help a bunch of you out there are listening, so my hope is that, in doing so, in addressing this, you'll be encouraged to take action as well as I want to give you a framework that you can use to deal with the changes out there.

Now, I want to explain that, and so let me unpack it. It all starts with attention. Underpinning absolutely everything, right now, for all of us that are attempting to sell things online and off, is attention. Right now, in 2018 and pretty much until further notice, the coin of the realm is attention. It does not matter if you're selling art, services, software, or Alexa voice skills, right? In every circumstance, before you can make a sale, you need the attention of buyers to get it.

That fact, coupled with the times we live in ... and I don't care whether it's short attention span theater, or mobile devices, the fact that they're everywhere, or that there's 500,000 options competing for the attention in every vertical imaginable. It makes things both exciting and terrifying at the same time, right? Terrifying in the sense that, for everybody, and I mean just about everybody, many of the sources of attention that they've relied on for years are just not working as well as they used to.

A great, perfect, current example of this, let's talk about the award shows. Let's talk Hollywood even. Did you see the results of the last two award shows? Specifically, I'm talking about the Oscars and the Screen Actors Guild Awards, the SAG Awards. The SAG Awards this year were down 12%, and the Oscars was the lowest-rated Oscars in history. Now, everybody wants to jump in with an opinion of why that's happening, and obviously, the most prominent one, the elephant in the room was like, well, okay, these Hollywood actors are constantly going into politics. It alienates half the country. That's why their ratings are down.

I'm not inclined to fall into that trap. I think it's harder and harder and harder for everyone out there to get attention. It's just there's too many different options. There's too much fragmentation. There's too many other competing things out there with other screens and that have hyper-relevant content. I think these old models, thinking you can rely on these old models, the Oscars, and just put the show together and everyone's going to tune in, that's over. That party's over. That's just not going to be as successful as it once was, so I believe the old models are dying, right?

If you're an artist or a photographer out there, there are tons of parallels, right? Tons and tons and tons. Those on the show circuit, right? Somebody commented about how it's not just performing like it was. The golden days are over. What about the marketplace sites? Unless you appear at the top of the results, you're just going to get lost in a sea of options, right? There's just so many different stories we hear about. The old things are not working as well as they used to. That's part's terrifying. I'll give you that.

The exciting part, though, is a couple of things. One, everything is niching down like crazy, right? Before, you could have been a photographer that is killing it with California beach photography. Now there are 50 photographers that are killing it with active communities arranged around every niche imaginable. I mean there's aerial California beach photography. There's California big wave beach photography. There's California small wave macro photography. You ever see those? I love those little macro lenses down in the tiny waves, and you see the little barrels. Amazing. Newport Beach photography, right? There's just a million different little fragmented niches out there, and some of these have really large and loyal fan bases such that it can support a good-sized business, a six-figure to multi-six-figure-a-year business, which is an amazing, super exciting thing. That's not the way that it used to be.

Also exciting is that, with the emergence of all these new platforms, all the social platforms, all of the various different venues in which attention's gathering in this digital age, it really levels the playing field. If you get there early, you learn how to storytell and build followers there, you can be really successful at generating attention for your art, your

photography, your business. I mean how many artists have absolutely crushed Instagram and built huge businesses on the back of that?

I think the important part in all of that, without going too far down that rabbit hole is, right now and in going forward, he and/or she who has the attention wins. That is just a fact, so step one is realizing that important fact, and step two is working towards building more of it day in and day out. It's not a light switch. You don't get to flip it on. You start working at it diligently. You keep your head down, and you get there.

I alluded to two themes early on and two sides of the same coin, so I want to start with side one of the coin, which I'm effectively calling to website or not, meaning, as an artist, attempting to sell your work, right now in 2018 and for the foreseeable future, should you have your own website? Let me just come out and stop you right there. "Yeah, Patrick, sure, I know what you're going to say. You sell websites. Of course you're going to say an artist needs a website." I am, and you do. That does not, however, mean you need to go and get the website from us. I realize there's a lot of other providers out there. Pick one and run with it if you don't like us, you don't like me. That's fine. It does not invalidate the larger point, though.

Let me quote verbatim from a Facebook comment to make the larger point that I want to make here. I am not going to use this person's name, but I am going to read it, and I quote, "My concern as an artist selling anything has always been the platform and the algorithms that are limited and/or exploited, whether it be by simple selling or promoting platforms like eBay, Etsy, Society6, Facebook, Instagram, and online art galleries, et cetera, et cetera. You're at the mercy of sifting of newer listed items' content and the opening of more store fronts. Hashtags, keywords, and a post followed by thousands of similar posts isn't going to keep you fresh and on top. It's been explained forever. The only entity that benefits is the platform doing the hosting, as they are the only true [inaudible 00:07:31] in a search engine. The most invaluable advice I hear over and over again is to start your own website. My problem with that, at this stage anyway, is the cost after the initial promo is over. This seems a cursed situation either way. What can your platform do that these others can't in regards to algorithms?"

I love that comment. What a great comment. It's a phenomenal comment. It really hammers both of my themes and does even more, so let me unpack it. You could feel his frustration in that comment, right? He's had a presence selling art in either all or some of these different spots, and it feels like he's had the rug pulled out on him. That's what it feels like to me. He then goes on to solve his own problem. He knows he needs his own website.

The line here is you do not build a castle on rented land. You need to own it. Most listening to this podcast, I would venture, have either rented a home or perhaps currently renting a home or an apartment, so let me ask you something, and let's just stay on the home. Do you go out and spend \$50,000 on a backyard makeover? I'm talking a new hot tub, wet bar, built-in Green Egg smoker, you're going to crush it on the grill, pizza oven perhaps, and a keggerator, cold beers? No, you don't. Why? Because you don't own it, and you can't take it with you. You are renting that place.

You need to own your own website. You need to own your own email list. You need to own your own customer info, your own attention. It's no different than owning a home is. You have to have the deed in your hand. Nobody can take it from you. Nobody can set the terms. Nobody can change the rules. In your house, you are the king, king in the castle. So too is the case when you own your own website. It's no different.

Now, this is great. The commenter even goes on, which is so funny, so here, let me pick it up, and I quote, this is where it goes on, "It's kind of like every self-help book pitch out there. Everyone claims they've cracked the code, but when you read it, it's just basic common sense. What separates you guys from the rest?" Right? He's like, "Okay, okay." He's coming to us, Art Storefront, and he goes, "Oh, you guys have cracked the code. How do you crack the code? Explain to me how you crack the code?"

Let me answer this once and for all. There is no code. There's nothing to crack. There never has been a code. If you own your own website and you are building your own attention, emails, customers, fans, people that you can communicate to on your own whim, you know where they live, you know what their email address is. Potentially, you have their phone number. If you do that, and you continually show up to work every day and continue to do things that fosters that growth, that attention that you own, the emails you own, the customers you own, that's the code, and it's not really a code. You just do that. You stay at it, and it shifts to a game of pressure over time.

You're all going to be artists for life. You're all going to be selling art 30 years from now, maybe even 40, maybe even 50, 60 for some of you, 70 for some of you, so start building attention you own, and it's just pressure over time. It's showing up for work every single solitary day. You do that, and you're going to win. It's that simple. There is no silver bullet. There is no easy money. There's no shortcut. There's no code to crack. Own it, not rent it, and start building it. You do that, it's pressure over time.

Side two of the coin, okay, and I said it dovetails, and partially, some of this is excerpted from his comment but many others, and that's the changes, so let's go back to the comment. He's ranting about how his business is being affected by the online marketplaces no longer working, and then it's his reach on platforms, and then it's keywords, and then it's hashtags. Then he's after the third-party marketplaces, changing digital landscapes, the rapidly evolving digital tech, right? Now, variations of this abound so much it is just an absolutely serious, serious thing.

I mean a couple of months ago on Facebook it was the decision, essentially, to take away 100% of the business pages reached, bye-bye, gone. Now, for those not in the know, if you were a Facebook business page, and you had been building followers, and fans, and likes, and comments, and shares for years, now those people just don't even see what you post anymore. It's over. Now the only way that they could see your post is they have to pay for it.

Saw this on Instagram recently. I mean people were going absolutely crazy when ... not recently, but I guess right when they released the Instagram ads products. Going in, reading comments, as I do, to our Instagram ads, and people are just like, "How dare you put this ad in my feed?" Like, "We built Instagram." I mean I think this one guy said like, "We built Instagram. It was us, and I don't know why you're putting these ads in my feed. You're messing with my likes and followers." Right? It doesn't matter if it's Instagram, or if it's Facebook, or what it is. There's this pattern that emerges every single, solitary time. Now that I put it on your mind, you can recognize it. The status quo has somehow changed. Sales, reach, technology, whatever, this is the pattern.

I don't like that change. I'm going to read rants about that change, and then I'm going to start making some rants myself about it. I'm going to go get emotional and likely say angry things. Not only am I angry about the change, but I'm going to either use it as an excuse to stop doing what I'm doing on that particular platform, venue, or whatever, or ... now this is the part that is really common, I'm going to use it as an excuse to never get started in the first place. That's all aligned against you. Everybody is out to hose you. Facebook stole your reach. They took your reach, so, "Why would I market over there, right? Why would I market over there? I heard from Steve that it's all messed up and does not work anymore, so I'm not going to market over there."

Variations abound, whether it was the original commenter railing against the marketplaces and hashtags, or folks on Instagram that were ready to riot about the ads, or the folks on Fine Art America that used to sell and now their art is not being discovered at all and they're not selling, or Facebook taking you reach both in the past and recently, or what about the arts shows not producing like they used to? What about the political S-storm that is brewing right now?

Right when I record this, 10:21 a.m. on 3/23, March 23, 2018, you cannot open a paper, a magazine, the interwebs, anywhere, where you see Facebook is just getting absolutely obliterated by this political thing, this scandal that they're wrapped up in. I mean I saw a tweet earlier today, which I thought was hilarious. Facebook bought this company called WhatsApp for over a billion. That founder of WhatsApp came out today and said, "It's time to delete Facebook." Apparently, he's not thankful for that big purchase from good old Zucks. He's getting the hashtag trending. The hashtag is trending, delete Facebook, right?

Another variation, most recently, a brand-new social network came out. It's called Vero. I saw a bunch of folks posting in our forum about it. I saw it rise to the top of the apps download charts. I went and checked it out myself because that's what you got to do as a marketer, but that thing's fizzling out right now. People ran towards that as a way to like, "I'm going to get back for Facebook trying to take my reach." Facebook has plans to start charging business pages for using Messenger in the near future. Not ideal. I've seen comments like that, so I'm not going to get started on Messenger, right? But it's just rabble, rabble, rabble, rabble, right?

Ready for some good news in all of this? I'm here to tell you the good news, that you can stop worrying about all of that. What? What, you say? Yep. You ever watch that show, I'm going to shift gears here for a second, called West Wing? I used to love that TV show. Aaron Sorkin is the writer on it, and a really good writer, but in that show, there's an anecdote about a guy that falls down into a hole. The hole is deep, and he can't get out of the hole. He's down in the deep, dark hole, and a doctor walks by. He's like, "Doctor, doctor, help. I'm stuck down in this hole. Can you help me? Can you help me?" The doctor walks up to the hole, writes a prescription, throws the prescription down in the hole, and keeps walking. Doesn't help him out at all, right?

Then a priest comes walking by, and he's like, "Father, father. Can you help me get out of this hole? Padre, can you help me get out of this hole, please?" The preacher bows his head, says a quick prayer, and keeps walking, so that doesn't help him out at all. Then, the next thing you know, his buddy comes walking by. He's like, "Help, help. Can you help get me out of this hole?" His buddy falls right down in the hole with him, and he's like, "Oh, you moron. I've been stuck in this hole forever, and I can't get out. I've been screaming for help, and nobody's been able to help me. Now we're both stuck." His buddy replies, "Yeah, but I've been down here before, and I know the way out." Love that story, probably botched it a little bit.

I have a framework that will allow you, both now and going forward, to completely sidestep all of these emotional landmines, all these emotional traps that everyone just gets stuck in, so here is the framework, okay? There's two prerequisites for this thing to work. Number one, in order to be able to really utilize this framework, you have to have learned the lesson the hard way at least once, seen change happen and had it negatively affect you. Good news is that's pretty much everybody. The lesson learned the hard way is the far more salient lesson, right? Number two, in order for this to work, you need to own your own website, emails, customers, et cetera. We covered this. Those two in place, you're good to go.

You have those two in place, you're going to realize that change is inevitable. No matter who you are, where you are, change is a part of life. You can't always control it. Sometimes it's good. Sometimes it's bad. All of these changes are to venues that you do not control and you do not own. The followers, the fan, the reach, the sales, they're not yours. You're renting them. That is not your site, your customer, or your contact. It's just not. You don't own them until you do.

Just like you can't control whether or not that sandwich shop down on the corner that has the incredible Reubens is going out of business, you can't control everything. You just can't. These businesses can reserve the right to change their minds whenever they feel like, and that's okay. That's just the way that it works. Things are going to change, and they're going to negatively impact you. When this change happens, does it sometimes suck? Absolutely it does, but you're faced with an opportunity. You're faced with a decision. You can either dwell on it and go back to the rabble, rabble, rabble mode, or you can decouple yourself emotionally and use the framework.

The framework, the good news about it is it all starts and stops with attention. Remember, attention is the game. It's the coin of the realm. Attention, in this case, has the power to set you free. You've got to learn to check your emotion at the door, all of it. The only thing you're worried about when this change comes ... It's coming, and it's going to continue to come. The only thing that matters is whether or not the access to that attention provides ROI and if it's cheaper than market rates are out there for attention.

What do I mean market rates? Think about what the alternative are, digitally or offline, for that matter. Let's just use Facebook as an example. You can either continue to market on Facebook, potentially pay for ads on Facebook. What does it cost for you to do that? What does it cost in contrast to the alternatives, to Google ads, Twitter ads, Pinterest ads, let's say radio slots, or billboards, or sidewalk shows, or magazine ads? All of the above are ways of paying for attention, for eyeballs. In almost all cases, it's going to take you both money and time to go and get that attention. Is Facebook still cheaper than those results there? Let

me read this. When everyone else is zigging, you zag, okay? When everyone else is zigging, you zag.

Everybody wants to get so panicked, and so worked up, and have the pity parties, and freak out, and Facebook's going out of business, and Instagram's stealing this, da, da, da, da, da. None of that matters. In through the nose, out through the mouth, and you objectively look at it, "My business needs attention to keep growing. Is the attention cheaper here than it is in the rest of the market?" When everyone else zigs, you zag. When everyone else is saying, "OMG, OMG, the world is ending. Instagram just stopped showing my organic post to everybody ..." That's happening. It's probably going to happen more and more. "I spent years building my followers there. I thought they were mine," full-blown panic, pity starts in. Those are your friends. That used to be you. They're all zigging. You zag. You take a look at Instagram. You ask yourself does Instagram still provide ROI? It does. Does it still provide cheap access below the market rate for attention? Then keep calm and carry on. Keep calm and carry on. That is you zagging when everyone else is zigging, which is great.

Now, a bonus point to all of this, a final theme, if you will ... Oh, that's annoying. Sorry, guys. I got a new phone, didn't realize ... A final thing, and I'm talking to you this time. Yes, you. You thought I forgot about you, didn't you? What about those that are sitting pretty right now? Whatever you're doing is working. There's no change for you. You're saying to yourself, "Why would I need a website or to own my own customers when things are going so fantastic for me?" Perhaps it's shows, or third-party marketplaces, or a social network that's kicking butt. Whatever it may be, whatever the case is, you're doing well. You're selling. Things are going fantastic for you, right? You're saying to yourself, "None of this applies to me. I can tell you that. I'm doing great right now." You bellow out with some haughty pride, right?

Couple of things. First, and these are literally the comments I get all the time. They see a Facebook ad and say, "I'm in a gallery, or on Etsy, or on Saatchi, whatever, and I'm kicking butt, so I don't need one of your websites, so ha." I always answer, but I think this is an important answer to understand. I'm just popular today. Daggone phone, I don't even know how to DND this thing. It's not a zero-sum game. If you're kicking butt in any other venue, that is fantastic. Double down on it. Apply the same framework. If it's working, hammer it, by all means. You can't lose as long as you're winning, but at the same time, always be working on a site and customers that you own and that you retain. It should never be in lieu of but in addition to. It's not a zero-sum game. You should always, no matter how well these other things are working for you, be concurrently building your castle on land you own.

Second, second, hugely important point. If you're kicking butt in one of these other places right now, this is you, number one, congratulations. Number two, you ever sell Almost Famous? Love that movie. The Jimmy Fallon character, let me quote, "You got to take what you can while you can when you can, and you got to do it right now." He goes on with the epic joke, "If you think Mick Jagger is going to be dancing around on stage at 50, you're seriously mistaken." Right? Ha-ha, love that joke. He goes on with, "I didn't invent the rainy day, gentlemen. I just own the biggest umbrella." I'm here to tell you a rainy day can and will come, that much is a certain. How you own the best umbrella is, number one, by being thankful for your success, and then actively working to move those customers and followers to your castle, to something you own. Now, more on that in a second.

Not only that, not only that, but you need to be taking some of those profits off the table and investing a small amount of them, and I'm talking about both money and time, in diversifying your success to other venues. If you don't have a website that you own, start there. That's the diversification you need. If you do have a website you own, then start playing with Messenger Box, right? Go experiment and spend some small amount of time, 5%, 7%, 3.5%, 10% and under for sure, trying some new venues and trying to get some early traction in those venues.

Let me sum things up. The game is attention, okay? You need to build your castle on land you own. When everybody else is in panic mode, you are going to stay cool as a cucumber, and you're going to ask yourself whether or not it provides ROI and is access to chief attention. Is it? Then keep calm and carry on. Relish the fact that, while others are panicking, you're winning, #winning, not just the Charlie Sheen kind of way, but really winning.

Now, I realize, as a follow-up to this episode and perhaps multiple follow-ups to this episode, we need to discuss how best to leverage the sources of attention. I'm saying not only how we constantly and intentionally extract followers from the rented land to the owned land column, that's an important first technique, but also how best to spread your risk, how you hedge yourself, how you provide some diversification like the stock portfolio, that's a great analogy, by moving followers around from one platform to the another. That episode is coming, and I'm fired up to record it. In fact, I better do so myself right now.

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