

Information Sheet: How do I sell my work?

If you are a visual artist or a designer/maker interested in selling your work, there are various ways to go about it. You need to be realistic about your prices, research your market thoroughly and find the best arenas for the type and style of work which you produce. There is probably not much point asking for the opinion of friends and family, who are likely to be perhaps unhelpfully flattering or gentle, so seek the advice of a professional, such as a gallery manager, professional curator or other artists. [Art Connections](#) run portfolio advice sessions regularly across North Yorkshire, which provide honest, expert and impartial advice in a supportive environment.

Think about *why* you want to sell your work. Professionals, obviously, are seeking to make a living from their art but amateurs may also need to sell in order to buy materials to allow the creation of new work.

There are different opportunities for sales and it is important that you seek out those which are the most appropriate for you, your work and your future aspirations:

Approaching galleries:

There are some golden rules for approaching galleries which mean you don't waste your own time or that of the gallery owner:

- Research galleries thoroughly so that you approach only those which are appropriate for your work. If possible visit galleries and have a good look at the "house style". Look at what the gallery is currently showing as well as the style of the building itself. Look at the kind of visitor/customer it has – would they buy your work? Look at the range of prices – does your work fit in? Look at the space – can you picture your work in situ?
- When you have researched a list of galleries to approach you should prepare high-quality images showing your work and include a list of dimensions, prices and details of the work. You should also send your cv and artist statement. In your covering email (or letter if you are sending hard copy) set out clearly what you are requesting, why you think the gallery is right for your work, and when your work is available
- When preparing your images or making a CD ensure that the colour reproduction is correct and that the images are of a sufficiently high quality. Provide small thumbnails (usually jpegs) as well as higher resolution images – c.600ppi. These could be jpegs or tifs but you should be aware that jpegs will show as a darker version of your work
- It can be tempting to send images representative of lots of different styles and themes, in the hope that one will appeal, but this can merely look incoherent. Having visited the gallery (or researched it thoroughly online) you should have a clear sense of what work would fit well, so your aim is to send images which demonstrate a body of clearly relevant work
- Some galleries may have a prepared sheet giving guidance on how they would like to receive preliminary material – it is always worthwhile finding this out before making contact
- Remember that your first approach says everything about your professionalism and sets the scene for the relationship you seek to have with the gallery
- If a gallery invites you to bring in work listen carefully to what they say – if they want 5 small pieces do not bring 8 large ones
- *Always* make an appointment if you wish to discuss your own work!
- If a gallery is unable to accept your work ask if they are able to give feedback as to why – it may be that your work is not suitable for the space they have in mind, or does not sit well with the exhibition as a whole, but there may also be feedback from which you can learn, for example, about how you present your work
- Try to keep abreast of new galleries which may open and look at listings so you always know who is showing what. Try to visit as many exhibitions as you can
- Be realistic about your price and be clear about the difference between artist price (what you receive for the work) and sale price (which is what the buyer pays). The difference between the two could be as much as 100%. Most galleries will have a standard commission rate which they apply, but others have a more flexible approach – this tends to be true of the non-commercial galleries. When you cost your work be realistic about framing costs etc.
- If galleries give you advice on framing or presentation of your work then *listen* to it!

- Try to be open-minded about the feedback you receive

Open Studios:

[North Yorkshire Open Studios](#) are run across the county by Art Connections. This well-supported event showcases the work of over a hundred professional artists and makers living and working across the county of North Yorkshire and it is particularly useful for those who have limited opportunities to sell. It runs for two weekends in June.

A catalogue of participating artists is produced and art lovers are encouraged to visit as many studios as they can during the event. If you are interested in participating you should bear in mind:

- The application process is competitive
- You need a suitable space which members of the public can visit - the intention is that potential buyers can see where you work
- Your work needs to fit into an entire body of work created by the event – some artists may find this harder to accommodate
- You will need public liability insurance and you will need to carry out a risk assessment for your workspace
- You will need to work hard on your own publicity
- There is some administration attached to the event which is one of the terms of the funding

There is also a separate [York Open Studios](#).

Groups, or clusters, of artists have been very successful in working together to create their own Open Studios event. This is hard work but can be very rewarding. It works best when there are a good number of studios which visitors can enjoy in a small geographic area (such as a town, village or group of villages). Contact the Creative Economy Officer if you would like support.

Setting up your own exhibition:

You may decide that the best way to show and sell your work is by setting up and running your own exhibition – perhaps in a village hall, for example. If you do decide to plan an exhibition there are lots of things to take into account so you should read the “Planning An Event” information sheet as well as the one on insurance. You’ll need to consider:

- Venue
- Boards/stands/plinths
- Lighting
- Stewarding/security
- Budget/costs (including transporting works to the venue)
- Insurance
- Timing
- Prices
- Cost of framing and wrapping
- Catalogue or information sheets
- Refreshments
- Publicity

You may like to think about working with another artist or a group of artists to share the costs and make it easier for the exhibition to be staffed at all times.

This may sound like a good alternative but think it through carefully before you make a commitment – work out how much work you need to sell in order to break even and decide how much of a loss you can sustain. Bear in mind that this is quite a big piece of organisation, which will take you away from producing your work and force you into lots of administration.

Do get in touch with the Creative Economy Officer who may be able to offer you support and advice.

Pricing your work:

Pricing your work is quite complex, because many issues must be taken into account. It may seem an obvious point to make but a piece of work is worth only what a buyer is prepared to pay for it. It is just as important not to under-price as not to over-price, so it may take a little while to get your pricing range completely correct.

There is no magic formula for pricing, but it is most important to remember that the artist price is only relevant if selling through a gallery. An artist should *never* undercut the price of a work by removing gallery commission when selling work directly.

A few things to remember:

- it's rarely as simple as applying a formula (e.g. hourly rate x no. of hours + cost of materials and presentation)
- if you undercharge you will not only be at risk of making a loss on framing etc. but you may also end up feeling resentful
- try not to create a system which is too subjective e.g. charging more for your favourites
- research into pricing can be very helpful
- work in different media can command different prices
- it's entirely up to you if you would like to negotiate with buyers (e.g. discount for two sales etc.) but never feel that you need to apologise for, or explain, the cost of your work