

Art Gallery Management – The Value Proposition

There can be a lot of reasons that made you decide to run a gallery but whatever they are, making a profit is essential if you want to remain in business. A professional art gallery is like any other business; you need to run and organize it in a way that will make a profit. This article discusses how to keep buying clients walking through the door in ever increasing numbers and methods to minimize the time you spend doing it. More buying clients = more profit!

When you setup your gallery, factors to consider include location, type of art, who your primary clients might be and how you keep in contact with them.

You need to get your artists and art that you will sell organized. You can't have a successful gallery without recognized artists and works of art that you can promote and sell.

Often new galleries will start by setting up their website. It is important to establish your site early to take advantage of Google and other search engines to draw potential clients to your gallery but be aware of the options and pitfalls – see our separate article on establishing a website.

A major effort will be advertising in local media (newspapers, tourist guides, etc.) and in art related publications and gallery guides to let potential clients and artists know you are open for business. Once you have potential clients coming through the door it is very important to capture each client's name and contact information, the art type and/or artists they are interested in along other information such as are they looking for art for their corporate collection or are they an art consultant buying for a client. Are they someone who is buying a gift? When is their partner's birthday and when is their wedding anniversary?

Once you have gathered this information, you need to **organize** it so that it can be used to make future sales. For example, the next time you receive art from an artist in which clients and potential clients have expressed an interest in you could email them with pictures of the art that is available. You might even offer them a pre-opening preview – the more red dots on the wall the better!

Targeted phone calls and mailings are one of the best ways to **promote your artists** and their art to your clients. Frequently keeping in touch with information targeted to your client's specific interests is important.

What is the best method of maintaining this growing list of clients and their interests? You can do all of this manually but you can make better use of your time if you choose a program specifically designed for the job. There are contact management programs that allow you to track your clients. Inventory can be tracked using a spreadsheet such Excel and you can do your invoicing with an accounting program. With three programs in use, it will mean entering each client at least three times with no automatic tracking of sales and available inventory since these programs do not talk to each other.

Consider one of the specialty solutions available that are designed from the ground-up to track your clients, inventory (including images), do invoicing and keep track of how much

each client has purchased or rented, how much you owe your artists, etc. Any program you consider should integrate all of your information so that you enter your data only once and use it for all of the functions. Historical information (purchases by each client, provenance for each inventory item, etc.) should be readily available. Reports analyzing your sales by geographic area, art types, and artist will help target advertising dollars for the best return. Sales by sales person and time of day a sale is made will help to identify who made the sale and when to staff the gallery. This can significantly contribute to profitability.

Keep in mind that these solutions are meant to appeal to a wide range of art galleries so don't expect any of them to do it all your way.

As with any solution that performs a lot of functions, learning it will take a bit of time. Work with a vendor who has helped a lot of galleries implement the solution and will provide you with step by step help on getting going. An experienced vendor will better be able to answer your questions. You could have a program written for you but if you want fully integrated features, be prepared to pay significantly more than what you would pay for an 'off-the-shelf' program and be prepared to work out the bugs before it is fully functional.

Have a look at the websites to see what is available – search for 'Art Gallery Management Software' – and see which products might best suit your needs. Some solutions operate from a web-based server which allows you to access your data from multiple gallery locations or art fairs. Support is normally included and backups are done for you, all for a monthly fee. If you have ever forgotten to backup and had a computer failure you will understand how important this is. Web based programs should run on a Mac without emulator software.

Finally talk to at least two current users of your preferred solutions and take advantage of any free trial offered. This will give you a good understanding of the solution to determine if it will work for you and it will let you evaluate the available help and the claims made. It will also help you evaluate features, their practicality and their ease of use.

Setting up a gallery is not an easy undertaking and you will receive all kinds of advice. Be careful to think about the advice and spend the necessary time to do it right.

GallerySoft is designed to suit Fine Art Galleries, runs on either a Mac or PC, offers no-charge email or phone support, backups your data daily and runs on our secure Server accessible anywhere you have access to the Internet.