Living the art life with your own website!
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Do you have your own website now? Who's it with? Who set it up? Is it performing the way you want it to?

You're an artist here at Stella's Art Gallery, selling your artwork, teaching classes – right? Then you're a professional artist and you're a small business owner. In today's internet driven world, a small business needs a website to survive and grow. Did you know that's how Stella's Art Gallery started? Yep, with a website and now look what that small business has become. Do you want to start Living an Art Life independent, on your own terms with your own website? I'm glad you're here!

Similar to your living situation, you can either own or rent your website. When you own your website, you have complete control over it but you have to know how to create the files and what to do with them. This is what most of us shy away from because we'd probably need a professional's help. There are companies that use drag-n-drop technology to help you easily create your site and they'll support you when you need help. The biggest downfall to renting is if you leave that company you lose the files that make up your site causing you to start new with the next company. There are many companies that do this like Wix, Weebly, and many more. They're all similar. Today, I'm going to demo creating a website on Weebly. Although there is a Q&A at the end, if something I say isn't clear, please ask at that time because other probably have the same question.

If you're new to websites, there's a bit of vocabulary involved. Here's a start:

Domain – what you type in to get to your website, the URL, you can purchase for 1, 2, 5 or 10 yrs
Hosting – company who stores the files that make up your website are kept
Pages – each page on your website is considered one page, some packages limit how many you can have

Storage – the files that make up your website are stored for you and take up space on their computers. Some companies limit how much storage you can have for free, then they start charging you.
Header – the top of your website page
Footer – the bottom of your website page
Site Search –like a google search, but it searches your site only
SEO – Search Engine Optimization, you can search Google, Yahoo, etc. for information and websites
Form Builder – Some companies limit how many fields you can use in a form, like a contact form.
Reporting Statistics – traffic, sales, social interaction, etc.
Ecommerce – selling from your website.

Using any of the Website Builder sites to create your website will be more cost effective than hiring a developer and designer to build your site from scratch.

Look at other artist's websites making note of what features you like so you have a shopping list ready to help you select which Website Builder to go with.

Some features to consider are: eCommerce, Email Marketing, Domain, Email address, Video and Webinars, Mobil app, support options, Maps, Slideshows, forms, blog, social media links, gallery page and Themes.

Reasons Why An Artist Should Have A Website

A Website Creates a Sense of Professionalism
A website is a great place to keep contact information, create a portfolio of your work, as well as to have a place to sell your work without the need of a middleman and for customers to ask questions. Having an online platform will enhance the perception of professionalism regarding your art.

Another benefit of your own website is having control over your marketing. You don't have to rely solely on third-party services from Facebook, Instagram or Etsy who control the presentation of your listing and who sees it.

When the customer views your work on your website, they can see the images full screen instead of small thumbnails. Let your art do the selling!

A website is your home base, the hub of your small business. Everything should drive customers to your website. Instagram, Facebook, Etsy, etc – all of them should have a sampling of your work/classes and the website has it all. Information, portfolio, contact info, sales, blog, and more. Post a teaser pic of your latest painting on Instagram and link it to your site for more info. Create an event for your class on FB and link it to your website. Make your website a destination for your small business, your business home. Invite your customers to your online home. Once your customers are there, Invite them to Opt-In to your email list, then you can notify them via email when there is a sale, a new blog post, etc. You can create an exclusive sale for just your website customers and reward them for being loyal followers.

Marketing should be personalized, specific, meaningful, value filled. I think it's important to build a meaningful relationship with my customers not "market" to them.

Your website makes it possible for someone to give you their email address, give you permission to contact them in a format they will actually see, read and interact with.

SEO - Search Engine Optimization

Back in 1999 I actually built websites professionally, like from HTML code! It was my creative outlet at the time...lol There were many companies like Google and they all have a different algorithm for their SEO. Lycos, WebCrawler, AltaVista, Excite, Yahoo, Dogpile, Bing, Ask Jeeves, How many of these do you remember? What are you using today? Google was just coming on the scene at that time and we were learning about their search engine. People were already saying that SEO was dead. Over. Done with. Today, SEO is bigger than ever. It didn't die, it has changed over and over again. It's all proprietary information, so we don't know the exact recipe to succeed with any given search engine but we know enough to get a leg up on our competitors.

Blog

Another topic that has changed through the years. If you approach a blog like a one-way conversation where you post things that are interesting to you but has no value to others, it's unlikely that you'll interest anyone to read many more posts. Blog posts need to be useful and interesting. Think about what you have to offer people, how to make their lives better – what are they looking to your for? You're blog is actually about your customers not you. You many say "I don't have time to blog!" Trust me, I get that. Blogging is a lot of work, and sometimes that means you're writing instead of painting. Coming up with interesting things to write is not easy sometimes. I try to write a blog post once a month. If I get ahead had have two ideas on one month, I schedule the 2nd one for the following month, so I'm ahead…lol I use ideas that come up in my classes, things people ask me about. Some of my blogs are "How-To", some are informational, etc. Hopefully, they are of value to some of my customers.

Email List

It takes time to build up your email list, so start now and I do mean now. Compile a list of your customers – name, address, phone, and email. If someone takes a class gather their info. If someone buys your artwork, gather their info. Their purchase, albeit a class or artwork, is not a one-time purchase. They like you, they like your style and they would like more one day in the future, so stay in touch with them. You do need their permission though… You can't turn Pro without an Email List. With a website, gathering their info is effortless. Drive them from the purchase of a class or artwork right to your website where they Opt-In and now they are part of your website family.

Do's and Don't's

Keep your website fast, simple, easy and organized. Navigation and content must be clear, concise, and straightforward in order to keep customers on the site once they get there. First-time visitors to any artist website should know as quickly as possible where they are, who the artist is, what their art looks like, what it's about, why it's worth spending time on

this site, and how to move around the site in order to get wherever they want to go. Sites that lack these basics won't be able to hold visitors long enough to look around at your artwork and class offerings.

Some artist think that websites are outdated, no longer necessary. That having an Instagram page, Facebook page, Etsy page or some other social media presence is all you need, the truth is you have no control over your content on social media sites. They can change their rules at any time, remove posts they deem inappropriate, change their search algorithms, spam your customers with advertising, become outdated, limit you with rules, completely change direction, temporarily suspend your account, or at worst, kick you off altogether.

Regardless of how fabulous you think social media is or how large your following is on any site, YOUR WEBSITE IS THE ONLY PLACE ONLINE WHERE YOU HAVE REAL CONTROL. You and only you decide what to post, when to post it, how long it stays there, how to organize it, when to change it, or where to put it. Social media is great and it has it's place but always remember, having your own website is a sure presence that you'll never lose. This is list of what to do and what not to do to assure yourself maximum visibility, attention, and an effective web presence online…

Get your own domain name and avoid free web hosting services. Free web hosting is never free and it's always feeble. "Free" websites torture visitors with distracting advertisements and other flashing text or graphics. Sometimes, half of the screen is your site and the other half looks like a circus because it's controlled by the host site. No art or class will look appealing like that. Free sites do not give a professional appearance, they do the opposite! They give the impression that you can't afford your own website. Please know that a basic website with your own domain name is actually inexpensive.

After your build your website, check it's appearance and functionality on Internet Explorer, Google Chrome, Firefox and Safari – desktop and mobile. You can build a website that looks great on your one browser but on another browser it's all a jumble or completely nonfunctional! Yes, this has happened to me… Test your site on all major browsers, desktop and mobile before going public.

Monthly update your website and blog. Schedule a time on your calendar once a month to create a blog post and update your site. Keeping your social media pages current can be done at the same time. Use scheduling for your posting, so they come out on the right days at the right time throughout the month. People will continue to visit your website, and a site that's got old classes or artwork that's sold and not current gives the impression either nothing much is happening with you, that you've abandoned your art career completely or that they're not that serious about being a professional artist. People who visit your site should to find out what's happening now.

Link your website to all of your social media pages (and vice versa) so that visitors can move freely between them. That begins with the name – make them all the same. I'm JodiBaldacci on FB, Instagram, Gmail, - everywhere I have an account. When you post on social media, link to specific images or pages on your website. Using social media is a great way to drive traffic to your website. Driving traffic to your website gives you control the show exactly what and how you want. Use social media to get the word out about your art and present yourself on a personal level, engage with your audience, and offer a glimpse, a teaser if you will into the artist behind the art. The more people can connect with you as a person, the more they'll connect with your art. Give them a sense of who you are, what you stand for, what matters to you, and what your Art Life is all about – that'll hook them like a fish and they'll click over to your website to find out more.

Keep your website easy to navigate. Make sure every page on your website is linked back to major pages like your homepage, gallery or portfolio, bio, resume, and contact and purchasing information. Avoid dead-ends.

Keep your main menu options to a minimum. You don't want that new customer to get overwhelmed with choices before they even start clicking. The most important main menu categories are:
1. Your Gallery or Portfolio link (with dropdown options to individual series or bodies of work as necessary).
2. Your Artist Statement or "About the Art" link.
3. Your Bio or "About the Artist" link.
4. A link to your Resume or CV.

5. Purchase or Buy link containing complete ordering, shipping and payment information for potential buyers.
6. Your Contact Information.

Text explanations of your art are important, but keep the wording minimal. That includes your statement, bio, descriptions of bodies of work or mediums or techniques, etc. Being brief with words gets people into your artwork and classes to see what they came for as quickly as possible because that's why they're came here – right? You'll lose overwhelm customers every time. Be quick, concise with your introductions and descriptions. 150-300 words can get monotonous. If you can't say it in a couple of sentences or paragraphs, ask a friend to help edit it down. If you want to provide detailed information, link to a different page that's specific to that detailed information, so the truly interested person can read more, but the person who just wants an overview can move on.

Organize your art into groupings. Again, keep is concise. If they want more of that group, they can click and get more. Something for everyone often backfires into nothing for anyone. Think about medium or color or series, etc. When you do this grouping concept, you can accompany each with its own introduction and explanation. Keep that short too… Briefly welcome them to that grouping advising them of the purpose of this grouping will deepen their understanding and experience of what they're about to see. Also keep in mind that search engines cannot search images unless you add a description with words to each picture. SEO reads words they do not see pictures. Providing textual explanations of your groups, series, and individual pieces, increases the chances that images will come up in online searches, and be seen. So make sure every image is searchable!

Use informative page-specific title lines. The title line consists of keywords that accurately describe a page's content, kind of like a news story headline tells what you're about to read. The title line, usually appears at or near the top of your browser window just outside the page, usually on index tabs or tab bars, not in the content of the page itself. It's one of the most important lines on a webpage and often the line that appears in the results of someone's search. Each title line on each individual page of your website and on each individual image if your site is designed to be unique, and a specific description of the contents on that page. Each page should have a different appearance to the search engines, which provides more

opportunities at keyword matches, and that translates to more opportunities for your website to appear in search results, which will render more visitors to your website. It's all in the words you choose to use.

Keep image sizes reasonable and don't put too many images on a single page. Have you ever opened a page where one picture loaded, and the rest were small little boxes? If you waited 15 minutes, they all might load but who's going to do that? Your site has a max of 5 seconds to grab or loose the customer. Large detailed images of your art may look great as they download with high-speed connections, but remember that many people still have slower connections. Use images no larger than 100K-250K, preferably smaller. Photoshop and other image editing programs like IrfanView have formatting options to reduce image sizes without significantly compromising their quality. Pick one and learn how to use it.

Avoid plug-ins, special effects, audio, complex visuals, and similar gimmicks unless there is a super good reason. They take longer to load; some require special software and they can lock up the customer's computer or phone. As an artist, the fancy stuff counterproductive to your customer's purpose. The customer came to your site to see your art and get information on your class offerings quickly

Provide suitable contact information. The more you tell people about yourself such as your cell phone number, email address or other details like your studio address, the more accessible you appear. If you're perceived hard to communicate with, they're not likely to engage. By showing them who you are, what part of the country you live in, etc. you appear more relatable. You can use contact forms that can be filled out and submitted. If you use these, state that the email will come to you personally and that you will return their email. This way it's more personal because they know where this form with their info goes and who gets it – less corporate feeling. Make sure you reply in a timely manner, even if it's to say that you got their communication and are looking into things, that you're out of town, etc…
I use a Google phone number so I'm not actually giving out my real cell phone number. You can use it just like your cell phone – text, talk, etc.. I use the gallery address so no one has my home address. I appear accessible, while feeling safe. Customers who buy art or sign up for classes appreciate a sense of knowing the artist. Don't be a stranger; anonymity is not a selling point.

Price your art and classes the same on your website as they are offered in the gallery. The Stella's Art Gallery is representing your art, so if something is seen at the gallery by a customer, then sells from your website to that customer, the gallery has earned the agreed upon commission. If you put something on sale on your site and it's in the gallery, it should be marked accordingly in the gallery.

Price your artwork when you put it up on your website and not on the social media. Use the FB, Instagram posts to hook the person and drive them to your website to see the price and purchase. If someone asks the price, provide the link to that specific page on your website instead of stating the price. Generally, customers are reluctant to ask pricing and may wonder why you're not being transparent about it. Customers might be concerned that the art may be more than they can afford. Be upfront with your pricing.

Provide clear concise instructions on how to buy. When you post on social media state your payment methods options. The more professional you appear; the more comfortable people feel about buying from you.

Offer a variety of price ranges. By offering your classes and artwork at a variety of price points gives your fans of all socioeconomic statuses a chance to own an original piece of art or learn how to do art no matter what their budgets or how familiar they are with you. Please give everyone who likes your art enough to want to own it will be able to afford something.

Don't mix art that's already sold with art that's for sale. If you want to display sold works of art on your site consider that potential customer will experience the fear of missing out and that your best artwork is already gong leaving them with what's left. Ever been to the end of sale and picked through the leftovers? Yea, that... You can still show sold works if you want, but put them under a separate category in your "Gallery" or "Portfolio" link titled "Select Past Works" or something similar. Here you show the best of the best. Art that's won prizes or has been exhibited at established juried shows; art that's in private, corporate or institutional collections; art that's been featured in reviews or pictured on websites or blogs or in hard-copy publications, and so on. Showing past works in this way acts as sort of a pictorial resume and speaks to your experience, success and credibility as an artist.

Don't show every work of art you've ever created. Remember, keep your website fast, simple, easy and organized. Nobody needs to see experimental pieces that didn't quite work, one-offs that you don't intend to follow up on with additional related works, older pieces that have little or no bearing on what you're doing now, and so on. Too much art and too much variety is confusing to potential customers because they can't get a sense of who you are, what your art represents. Customers rarely buy from artists they can't understand or relate to. Keep it simple; keep it current; keep it related.

In closing, one of the best ways for you to get the word out about your art is through your website. Make sure yours is working for you and that anyone anywhere who lands on it, albeit on purpose or by accident, whether they know you or not, can get up to speed about who you are, what you're offering them, and be able to click on over to your galleries as quickly and effortlessly as possible. A welcoming website pays dividends in all kinds of ways.

Do you need help with your site? Would you like more traffic? Do you wonder whether it can be better than it is now? I do website consults with artists all the time. I'm always available to go over yours, make specific recommendations on ways to improve it, and increase traffic and engagement with visitors. Email jodibaldacci@gmail.com or text/call 805.507.Jodi / 805.507.5634 if you have any questions or are interested in making an appointment.