

7 Tips to Better Customer Service (for craftspeople)

by

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A Monkey + Seal Guide

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Introduction

Howdy everyone! It's Rick and Eve from Monkey + Seal here in this action-oriented guide on how to step up your game in Customer Service to help out those craft fair sales. This guide is directed for those who either already sell their art at craft fairs, trunk shows, and the like, or are just getting started.

If you're just starting out selling, you might want to go pick up our free guide [The Psychology of Selling Art](#) first to get your head in the right place, and then come back to this guide to figure out an action plan to help you rock those art sales!

Good luck and we'll see you at the craft fairs!

-Rick + Eve

Tip # 1 - Say Hello!

This seems super basic, but you'd be surprised at how many art vendors seem like they don't want to be there and are shy to talk to. We always like to offer a quick, "Hi, how's it going?" and a smile to anyone checking out our table. This immediately loosens a lot of people up and just lets them know that we're friendly and approachable, but not pushy. If they have questions, we're here for them.

It also allows for a dialogue to begin. It can segue into conversations about the art, the show in general, and other common interests. At the very least, both of you have a common interest in art! This can open up cool connections with other artists, business owners, gallery curators, and new repeat customers. We're fortunate to have made a lot of great business contacts just from being friendly and talking to interested people at shows - we've even made some new friends!

It's often scary for a lot of people to go around saying hi and smiling to random strangers, but greeting people as they come to your table/booth really does make a difference. When we're looking at other vendor booths, we even find that we linger a bit longer if they say hi, because you want to find that one thing that connects the two of you. And the longer people hang around your booth, the greater the likelihood that they'll may find something they like from you.

7 Tips to Better Customer Service (for Craftspeople)

That said, don't get discouraged if people don't say hello back or just keep looking without a response. This happens often sometimes, and it's just a fact of selling. Some people are shy or are afraid that you will push sales on them, even when it's not true. Don't let it get you down, as many more people you are truly interested in your art will chat and say hello back.

Going along with greeting people is body language. We try to stay standing as often as possible (definitely tough for weekend-long shows) but if anything one of us is usually always standing up. We also try to keep from crossing our arms while talking to people, as it's a subtle, unconscious way to telling people you're not really open/happy to either be there or talking to them - both messages will scare people away.

Remember, this is your art that you are presenting to the public. Be proud. If people are interested and ask questions about it, take it as a cue and a compliment. It's a chance to talk about your art. (Remember, they are not sharks or portfolio juries or HR recruiters, but someone who is interested in art). If you have a habit of shy body language, crossing your arms, hunching your shoulders, or speaking in a soft voice, you may want to practice in front of the mirror, in the shower, or in front of trusted friends. You can even take speech or acting classes and practice centering yourself and imagine that you are meeting a friend for the first time.

Tip #2 - Making Connections

Like we mentioned above, once you've greeted people, just talking with people is the best way to make a connection. Usually people will comment on something they like, which can allow you to figure out how you can help them out.

If a customer seems really into one of Seal's environment paintings, we might offer some other pieces from the same series. By talking with people and figuring out what aspects of our paintings they like, we can direct them to another painting they might like more. To go back to our other guide, [The Psychology of Selling Art](#), if people are into your butterfly vases, show them more vases that you might not have the table space to display, or ask if they're interested in your dragonfly series.

What you're doing is tailoring the experience of shopping to each individual. By really listening to their needs and wants and own unique personality, you can make the experience fun and rewarding. Sometimes Monkey will meet other silkscreen printers through shows and will trade tips and resources with them so that they both learn something new, you might even find your next collaboration or a new studio space or a new business opportunity through these sorts of connections. It's all about that finding the right people who are interested in the same things you are.

Tip #3 - Follow the Script / Show the Value

So say that you don't get to the above point with your customer (you won't always), but you've got their attention and they're looking at your wares. You now want to let your customers know any additional information that might help them out with their purchasing decision.

In retail environments, this is known as having product knowledge. Usually, this comes with time, as in most stores there are a lot of different products, and it takes time to get to know each product line. However, you are at an advantage because you created your own work. What's unique about it? Are your scarves hand-knitted from sustainably-harvested bamboo fibers from a worker's collective in Nepal? Let people know that. Are your prints archival giclees that will last longer than your own life? Let people know that. Is that a one-of-a-kind ring forged in the depths of Mount Doom? You definitely want to let people know that.

Creating signage that informs people of your products' special features helps a bit, but we find that even when we do have signs, not everyone will read them. And it's always better to engage face to face, as customers can make a connection that they are meeting the very artists that produced the artwork that they are interested in. What is your art about? Most artists, when asked point-blank, don't even know what their art is about, so how can you tell other people? You never want to be caught with your pants down and unable to speak about your own art.

Seal sometimes gets very shy in front of people and gets tongue-tied when she talks. So it's helpful for her to come up with a short 1-sentence explanation of her artwork. So if she happened to forget or gets nervous, she can rely on her "message talk." In the nonprofit and retail sector, it's called "elevator pitches" Now if someone were to ask you, "what's your

7 Tips to Better Customer Service (for Craftspeople)

art about?” or “what’s unique about it?” What would you say? Come up with a one-or two-sentence blurb as to how awesome your art is. You should be able to respond with a quick little 5-10 second explanation. You can even practice this at home until you’ve got it down.

So what’s the point of doing this? By explaining the awesomeness of your work, you’re really explaining the value of your art. If someone asks you how where you took a certain photo, if you simply say “Japan,” you’re not really explaining the full value of the photograph. If you explain that you took it “from a 1000-year old bridge on a mountain trail on the outskirts of Mt. Nishikawa,” suddenly you’re more than a photographer, but a storyteller as well. The art will often bring people in, but it’s the story behind the art that adds the value and will sell the work.

Make sure the story you are telling about your art is true. Yes, it is the same photograph, but be proud of it. Tell people how you got there and why it is so unique. It is the way you present your story that changes people’s appreciation of your art. How much would you pay for a 8x10 print of a picture from Japan? Now, how much would you pay for a 8x10 archival silver print taken from a 1000-year old bridge spanning a mountain chasm located on the trail to Mt. Nishikawa? Which one is more appealing to you? Regardless if they’re the same photograph, we know we’d be much more likely to fall in love with the story as much as the photograph.

This brings us to perceived value. Regardless of how awesome the above photo is, and regardless of how much it should be worth, if you just describe it as a photo you took on a trip to Japan, it almost sounds like you don’t even care about the photo, and shoppers will catch on to that attitude and won’t care as well. If you care about the photo and can tell the story, the immense artistic value of your trip and that special moment that you managed to capture on film can be conveyed to your customers who will then understand

7 Tips to Better Customer Service (for Craftspeople)

the value of your work.

The reality of business is that people will pay as much as they believe something is worth, regardless of the actual cost of the item is. This is the perceived value of the item. You want to make the perceived value equal or exceed the actual price you're charging for the item. If it takes you \$200 to make a phoenix down pillow and charge that much, but people's perceived value of the item is only \$50, you have a problem. But if you tell your true, honest story about the quality of the materials and the craftsmanship and the trouble of hunting mythical birds, people can understand by your story why you charge the value that you do, you'll be more likely to make a sale.

Even if your story isn't quite as epic as hiking some remote mountain trail or hunting fictional creatures to create your art, you should definitely tell your own true story. You definitely shouldn't make one up, but you should be honest and relate your own special story to create that perceived value in your own work. Even if it's as simple as "These are hand-knitted dolls that I designed myself" that still raises the perceived value of a bunch of knit dolls that they'll see sitting on a display.

Tip #4 - Losing the Script

Now that you have your script in place that helps raise the perceived value of your product and tells your true, honest story, it's time to drop the script.

Wait, what?

Yes, drop the script. The next step in taking your customer service skills to the next level is

7 Tips to Better Customer Service (for Craftspeople)

now losing the robot-like reading of your story. Anyone can just read from a rehearsed script, but now it's about being fluid and flexible with your retelling of the story. It's about being comfortable, being yourself, and being real. By dropping the script we mean that we want you to hold onto the content of the story you've rehearsed, but we want you to not have to tell it the same way over and over again.

Ideally, you can figure out new ways to work your stories into conversations you have with your customers. Say a customer with really awesome earrings stops by. You mention how cool they are and ask her where she got them. "Oh, these? I picked them up last summer when I was in Tokyo." Bingo. That's a perfect opportunity to start talking about what a strange coincidence it was that you both were in Japan at the same time, and how you're wondering what other parts she saw, and oh, by the way you just happen to have a whole series of photographs from Japan. Why, this one here was shot from a 1000-year old bridge in Hokkaido, this one here was taken after I missed the last train in Tokyo and I got rained on.

Starting to get it? Now you have not only engaged the customer and made a cool connection, but you've also effectively dropped the script and created a new story that ties all of your Japan trip photography together to create a personalized experience for your customer. You should eventually know your products well enough that if a customer asks about one, you can weave that story into other stories, which can weave into stories the customer tells, which can weave back into stories from your other work.

If a customer deviates from the script, you should also be able to roll with it. If suddenly your traveling counterpart asks if you have any photographs of Italy and you don't, you can say "Oh, sorry, I haven't been able to cross Italy off the list yet. Any specific places you could recommend?" When she mentions how awesome the

7 Tips to Better Customer Service (for Craftspeople)

architecture of Rome is, you can always see if she's been to New York, as she might be interested in the crazy cool photos you took of the architecture in over there.

While it's necessary to have your quick little sales blurbs, often times you'll find yourself in a conversation where the way you use the blurbs most of the time doesn't really fit, so you'll need to be flexible enough to seamlessly work that into other conversations. Rolling with the punches is not something that always comes naturally; it's something that is picked up from a strong level of product knowledge and practice. Unfortunately, you can only really improve this ability by practicing, but fortunately the more you practice the easier it will get. You'll also want to have opinions about your work, as oftentimes people will ask you for your opinion. Especially if you create serial work, like comics, zines, or books, people will often ask you which one is your favorite. As always, be honest. Don't go for the most expensive book (unless it really is your favorite), but go for the one you really like the best.

Tip #5 - The Future Sale

Whether or not someone ended up making a purchase, you want to make sure that you can make it as easy as possible for them to find you later, just in case, they changed their mind and want to buy your art after all. The most straightforward way to do this is to have some business cards. Make sure people can get a hold of you. If you don't have a website yet, as long as they can email you, you can always send a Paypal invoice or offer to meet them someplace public and safe with your product, or some alternative means of getting your product to them.

Ideally, you'll have a website that you can direct them to. At the very least, you can have

7 Tips to Better Customer Service (for Craftspeople)

your wares up on [Etsy](#) (if you create a shop, tell 'em MonkeyandSeal sent you!) for very, very cheap with very, very basic technical skills. Basically, wherever you send them to, make sure they have an easy way of buying from you.

Assuming you have a website or blog or Etsy shop or some place for them to buy from, now you should make it a standard business practice to have business cards easily accessible for your customers. We prefer to have some at the front of our table(s), as well as a stash of them with us so we can quickly hand them directly to our customers.

You want to make sure that people have the opportunity to find you at later date. Who knows, maybe they suddenly need a last minute Christmas gift for their niece who really loves handmade art! We've definitely had a lot of post-show sales, as sometimes something will come up and people will leave the craft show, but will contact us later as they really wanted a tie or a print but didn't have a chance to stop at our table on their way out. If we hadn't been passing out our contact information, people wouldn't have been able to find us later.

We also like to have a sign-up sheet for our weekly e-mail newsletter so people can know how we work and be along with us on our creative endeavors. They can follow us on our blog posts and we also like to reward our loyal friends by giving out specials, allowing an early glimpse into new paintings, and announcing upcoming shows that we'll be at.

Remember; always respect the customer and their time. Never spam. And it's always about quality NOT quantity. Here at Monkey + Seal, part of our ethics is that anyone can sign up on our mailing lists and anyone can unsubscribe at any time with no hard feelings. For us, it's about a community of people that we met who are genuinely interested in art and our adventure.

Tip #6 - Say Thanks!

Again, whether or not your customer has made a purchase or not, you definitely want to thank them for their time. After all, they didn't have to stop by and browse your stuff, but they definitely thought it was cool enough to take a glance or two or call their friend over to check it out.

Like we said before, there could be any number of circumstances that prevented your potential customer to becoming a paying customer at that moment, but don't think too much about it. It's about getting putting your work out there and representing your art. So be polite and thank them for their time. Both Monkey and Seal have been generously blessed with meeting awesome people. Some of them also gave us future commised jobs. It just goes along with being friendly and a cool person. So take it easy, be yourself and make some friends.

Tip #7 - When All Else Fails, Outsource!

So you've read through the guide. But you're still super shy and you're generally afraid of people. At this point, it's time to outsource.

Chances are, you know someone who is outgoing and likes to talk to people. See if they're free for a day and would be willing to help you out at your booth. Bonus points if they work in retail, and if they're a natural salesperson, even better. Offer to buy them lunch at the show and dinner afterwards, or pay them their hourly rate at their retail job.

7 Tips to Better Customer Service (for Craftspeople)

Even just having a friend nearby is really reassuring as well. Offer free merch or food to friends to hang out with you at your show. If you have people you're comfortable around with you, you'll be more relaxed and you'll be able to talk to people easier. Being alone at a party where you don't know anyone is much worse than being at a party where you don't know anyone but at least you have your best friend.

If you have a cool family, you can also enlist them for support as well. Partners can also be pulled in for show duty as well. Either way, find someone who you're really comfortable with and see if they'd be willing to just hang out. Maybe have them do some light lifting (depending on how willing they are) and set-up, but generally you'd be surprised at how many people are probably willing to give you a weekend or so.

But everyone's schedules get busy, and you might not have time to find someone, or everyone who's willing is busy. In that case, you could also hire someone outright. If you're in a store and you get great customer service from someone find out if they'd be interested in helping you out at a craft show. If they can sell you on something, chances are they can sell your stuff to other people too.

You could post an ad on Craigslist and interview people. Another recommendation for finding willing folk might be to join a crafting or arts community. Monkey + Seal is part of an Etsy street team, and we'd be willing to bet that we could find someone willing to help us out with our shop in exchange for helping them out with their shop. The trick is just finding someone whose schedule works with yours.

Conclusion

Those were the 7 steps that we think will help you meet people and sell your art in public. If you're really, really shy, it really helps to take public speaking courses, or acting classes, or anything that helps you get over your fear and get out there. There are a lot of resources around, especially classes at the junior college level for stuff like public speaking and intro to acting - you just have to look.

If you liked what you read, make sure to check out our [blog](#) where we talk more about the day-in's and out's of being working artists and announce new guides, new products, and workshops for artists! We'd also appreciate signing up weekly newsletter where you'll get all of the above sent to you in one tidy little package.

Thanks so much for reading and extra special thanks if you'd like to comment or spread the word via [Facebook](#) or on [twitter](#).

Cheers,
Rick +Eve
(Monkey + Seal)

PS - If you liked the guide and it's helped you out with your customer service, we have a virtual tip jar on our [Guides](#) page that would greatly appreciate any love you have to show.