

From Nothing...
to an Average of a Sale a Day Online in One Month!

Tips from my journey towards building a handmade business online...

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In this e-book I want to share the experiences and successes I have had over the last month (during March/April 2010) with my jewellery label, Epheriell (<http://Epheriell.com>).

I'm sharing this in the hope that I can inspire and help other micro-business owners. I'm not an 'expert' – I'm muddling along like everyone else. But I seem to be going in the right direction...

This is how I've gone from no sales in early March to an average of a sale a day (actually a little bit more!) as of mid-April.

This e-book was originally posted as a set of blog posts on EpheriellDesigns.com – check them out if you'd like to read the comments that the series gained!

The Backstory



Over Christmas and New Year 2009/2010, I took time off from the online world – shut my shops and did almost no blog posts – because there was lots of stuff going on in the 'outside' world.

I had just gotten married in late September when my boss told me he wanted to sell the business I was managing, so I finished my job; we moved house – in with my parents – and decided to go travelling; bought a van and converted it from an empty shell to a campervan; and I also had a big run of dental problems... in short, I was really busy and had no time (or energy) for my business. In fact, as my husband and I are going travelling around Australia this year, I had decided to give it up altogether until I got home.

My how things have changed!

Problems with the van mechanics arose once we had finished the conversion, and I suddenly found myself with a lot of time, and nothing to do, while this was getting fixed.

Anyone who knows me knows that a bored Jess is a cranky Jess, so I decided to open my shops back up, and try to sell a few things before we left on our holiday.

Well, it's now a month later, and we are about to leave. And I'm taking my business with me. I love it, and I love my blog, and I've decided to make a real go at it this year.

What I've Achieved

Okay, so now to the nitty gritty. Since I re-opened my shops, which I believe was on around the 6th of March, (Etsy, Madelit, Supermarket, and just the other day, my own store), until today (the 12th of April as I'm writing this) I have had a total of 40 sales in 33 days.

For the Etsians out there, 22 of those were on Etsy. Now, this is during a time of turmoil on Etsy where many people are claiming that their views and sales have drastically reduced due to an error with Google indexing their results.

In detail, here are my numbers for the last month:

<i>Date</i>	<i># Sales</i>	<i>Venue</i>
11-Mar	2	Etsy
12-Mar	1	Etsy
13-Mar		
14-Mar		
15-Mar	2	Etsy
16-Mar		
17-Mar		
18-Mar	1	Etsy
19-Mar	1	Etsy
20-Mar	1	Etsy
21-Mar	1	Etsy
22-Mar	1	Etsy

23-Mar		
24-Mar		
25-Mar		
26-Mar	2	Etsy
27-Mar	3	Madeit
28-Mar	1	Etsy
29-Mar	4	Madeit
30-Mar	1	Madeit
31-Mar	1	Etsy
	22	
<i>Date</i>	<i># Sales</i>	<i>Venue</i>
1-Apr	1	Supermarket

2-Apr		
3-Apr		
4-Apr	1	Madeit
5-Apr	1	Etsy
6-Apr	2	Etsy
7-Apr	2	Madeit & Etsy
8-Apr	3	Etsy and Madeit
9-Apr	1	Etsy
		Madeit and Epheriell.com
10-Apr	6	
11-Apr		
12-Apr	1	Madeit
	18	

So that's a total of 40 sales in 33 days. You can see that weekends are quieter in April (Easter weekend especially).

To be honest, I've actually amazed myself at how many sales I've made over this time. Every single time I get a sale it's a big thrill, and I clap my hands in excitement!

So, how did I do it?

I'm sorry to tell you, but the simple answer is through sheer. hard. bloody. work. For almost all of that time I have spent almost all day – from when I get up around 9-10 to when I go to bed at around 12-1 – working. However, when your work is your passion, this isn't such a difficult thing. But you'll have to put in as many hours as you can!

A majority of that time has been spent on the computer, but I have of course been making products too – both my sold products and a slew of new ones.

I have blogged, tweeted, listed, networked, flickr'd, written on forums, facebooked.... I could go on. In fact, I will, in detail!

Here is the detail of what I have done over the past month to get to where I'm at.

1. Make Stuff



If you're a handmade business person, this is your core business. If you're not making stuff, you don't have a business!

I know that I have so many ideas about new things to create. And if I don't get to create them almost every day, I tend to start getting a *leeetle* bit frustrated.

As someone trying to be noticed online, you need to be regularly making new products – so you're fresh, you've always got something new for your customers to check out – and so you've got something to talk about! I don't know about you, but if someone was constantly promoting the same old thing over and over to me, it would get really old real fast. But if I know of or follow a shop I love, I like to check out the new things they're making!

I tend to make one or two new things each day – sometimes I won't make anything. But I do keep making things *regularly* - I think that's the key. I keep photographing, editing my photos, and listing new things – preferably at least ONE thing each day. I've found it's helpful to have a backlog of items made and ready to list, so that on slow days or periods I still have something new to share. It can be REALLY hard to hold of listing it all at once, though!

On venues like Etsy and Madelt this is particularly important, as the search results are in reverse chronological order. If you don't add new products (or at least, in the case of Etsy, renew a thing or two every day or so) you get buried in the search results.

I'm pretty sure that most of my Madelt sales have come from that site's search, as I do very little promoting of that store, but am finding reasonably consistent sales. It is still small enough that my work stays in the first – or at least the first two or three – search pages for a few days. Etsy is another story – I don't really rely on getting found in the search over there very much at all.

2. Tweet Up a Storm



I *LOVE* twitter. It is by far my most successful promotional tool. However, I don't just spam my followers with links. Also, when I got back into this, I already had about 1,500 followers from last year who hadn't booted me, so I was starting with a good base. It will take time and tweeting to get to that level.

I use twitter because I enjoy it! I use TweetDeck, and have it running on my desktop all the time. Whenever I'm waiting for a page to load, or just every 5-10 minutes or so, I'll have a quick peek to see what tweeps are up to. I tweet pretty regularly when I'm on the computer.

What about? Well, I'll tweet about what I'm thinking, doing, cool sites I'm reading/looking at, funny things that happen during the day, my blog posts... I RT (re-tweet) things on twitter I like, I'll chat to the friends I've made and respond to any tweets @me... and I'll throw a promotional link in there every once in a while.

Basically, when I tweet about my work it's because it's just another thing I'm doing... for example, whenever I list a new product, I'll tweet it. If I have something special going on (sale or whatnot) I'll tweet it. When I sell and re-list something, I'll tweet it.

My twitter stream is me, distilled.

My business is a big part of who I am – and who I am is a big part of my business. I'm a big believer that I am my brand. In the handmade world – and the online world in general – people buy things because they want something unique and special – they care that they're buying from a REAL PERSON and not a faceless company.

That is also why I use my own name – @jessvanden – instead of my business name, Epheriell.

And I also believe in the importance of being genuine. I don't talk to my friends on twitter because I hope they'll buy from me. I talk to them because they're fun to talk to!! And if they buy from me, bonus.

Oh – also – set up a custom background on your twitter page. You can see mine here – [@jessvanden](#). This means that whenever someone visits your page, they can see what you're all about! I made mine in Photoshop – just opened a new image file and added the text and pics to it.

3. Facebook is your Friend



I had already set up a Facebook Page for Epheriell (<http://Facebook.com/Epheriell>) last year, so I went over there and started prettying it up a little. I added a new, more eye-catching pic as my profile photo, I started promoting it a little more, and I begun listing all my new items over there to let my fans know.

I have also instituted a monthly giveaway. Anyone who becomes my Fan and stays one is automatically entered in a draw to win a piece of jewellery each month. This month I began with a set of my stacking rings, and each month I'll choose a new product to give away.

This strategy has seen my drastically increase my fans. Sure, I've still only got around 150 fans, but the number is growing every day. I usually tweet the link to it about once a day, reminding people that they'll be in the giveaway draw if they Fan Epheriell. This gives people a reason to **stay** a fan, even if once and a while they might get sick of seeing all your new updates!!

(*Update* - I have been informed by someone that offering giveaways on FB may be a breach of their TOS. Please look into this yourself before doing a giveaway. A way around this, from what I can see of their terms, is the following. Offer a monthly giveaway based on your blog. Your terms for it can be that people go become a fan on FB, then come back and *leave a comment on your blog post* to that effect. That way, you're encouraging them to be a fan, but not running the giveaway on FB. This is what I will do beginning next month).

Remember the power of Facebook – whenever someone 'likes' or comments on a post – every one of their friends sees that on their page. This gives you a huge scope to catch more eyes and bring in more people to your business.

4. Teams and Forums



I happen to be an active member of the best Street Team on Etsy. No, it's true!

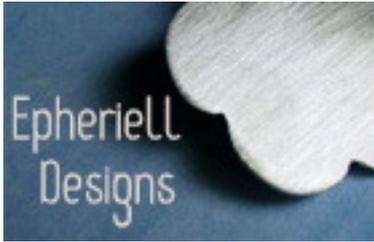
The Down Under Street Team (<http://dustteam.com>) is a collection of Australian Etsians who support, help and encourage each other. I would not be where I am without them. If you are on Etsy, I would advise that the first thing you do after setting up shop is find an active team in your niche and get involved.

How else will you learn to do business better than by learning from others in a similar situation? If you're not on Etsy... or even if you are but want to expand your scope, you need to find 'your people'. A group of people – generally a forum of some sort is the best for this – who are in the same boat as you. And, chances are, you can cross-promote each other, too!

Not only will you learn an amazing amount, but you'll sell more. Why? Because we'd all rather buy from our friends than strangers if we had the choice! I know I do 😊 So we all support each other in that way, too.

So get out there and find a group – it will be well worth the time you invest in it.

5. Blog, bloggity, blog



Now, I have to say that I have delusions of grandeur about my blog. I want to be the next Indie Fixx, Scoutie Girl, Dream Lily, Modish, or even Decor8. Yes, I know I am probably mad, but I'm also damned determined!

In my case, then, I run my blog as a stand-alone thing in and of itself. However, obviously, part of what I do is promote my jewellery. I have an ad at the top right of the page, I have a slew of my photos lower down on the page that link to my store, and I have a page at the top that tells you how to buy my work.

However, because of what I want my blog to be, I don't often post about my jewellery. Maybe one in 15-20 posts is related to my jewellery – the rest are a mixture of art, photography, handmade goodness, artisan features, biz tips, and general handmade/indie loveliness.

Only you can decide where you want to take your blog – but I believe that you do need to have one.

I know there are people out there who have been very successful in the handmade marketplace without a blog, but I feel they are in the minority. In fact, social media as a whole is vital to doing business online these days.

You want your blog to be a place people enjoy visiting, subscribe to, and mention to others!

I can only hope that this is what I have created, and will continue to create, here at Epheriell Designs – and it should be the goal you are striving for, too.

6. Advertising (free and paid)

I made the decision pretty early on in the last month to re-invest almost everything I make back into the business for the next little while. I'm fortunate enough that I don't currently *need* the money to live on... but I want to build my business to the point where one day I *can* live on the income from it.

They say you have to spend money to make money, so that's what I'm living by at the moment.

First – free advertising

If you can't afford any sort of advertising (or, like me, you're a cheapskate and try to get anything for free that you can, teehee) then there are lots of good options.

Of course, the things we've discussed above are all forms of free advertising – all you invest is your time.

Check out the following:

CraftGawker (<http://craftgawker.com>) – this site allows you to upload a photo and information about a crafty item. If accepted, it's shown on the FP of the website, and will bring lots of new visitors to your site.

Craftgawker have unfortunately just announced that they won't be taking submissions from online shopping venues any more. However, they will be taking submissions that link to blogs, etc, so they can still be used as a promotional tool – as long as you don't abuse it.

Indie Spotting (<http://myshoppingconnection.com/indiespotting>) – A nice website that showcases indie craft and design. You can submit one product a week, and again, if you're chosen your item is featured on the Front Page of their site for a period of time.

Project Wonderful (<http://projectwonderful.com>) – Most of you have probably heard of Project Wonderful by now, or at least seen their ad blocks around. This is a program where you can submit an image ad directly to blogs and sites that are related to your niche. You can get free ads – this takes a LOT of work as your bid is only active for 2 days, and you have to apply for each ad spot separately.

If you're willing to pay for some spots (starting at as little as \$0.01 per spot) you can set up a campaign that will do all the hard work for you. I haven't used it as a paid ad program – I've just put in the hard yards to actually advertise for free. You can also have PW ads on your site – and perhaps get paid for it – if you so choose.

Flickr (<http://flickr.com>) – Flickr is a photo-sharing site – similar to Photobucket and the like. The great thing about Flickr is you can join 'groups' and submit your pictures to them. I'm part of a number of jewellery groups, for example, so when I submit a photo to a group, anyone looking at the group will see my pic. It's a nice way to showcase and share photos of your work. Now, the free account is limited to a small number of photos – I have a paid account with limitless uploads... I think it costs me around \$20-something bucks a year.

Other People's Blogs – getting featured on a big blog is like gold. You will get tons of new visitors to your shop, and hopefully increase sales, too. I have done a few giveaways on other blogs, and they've always been great for me.

So, how do you get on blogs? Well, many of the popular blogs will have a 'submissions' page (I do, just look at the top nav menu). Bloggers are people too – and they have to find things to blog about! So don't be afraid to submit yourself with a nice, short, informative e-mail. Remember to make sure your shop/blog/photos are the best they can be before you do this, though!

I've been featured on a number of blogs simply because of the connections I've made... people will like my jewellery – perhaps they've bought some and they'll blog about it... or they'll link to a blog post I have done... or if I've featured them here they'll mention it on their blog.

Basically, get out there and make yourself known to folks. You'll get a lot of rejections, or just never hear back, but you've lost nothing but a minute to write a quick e-mail and hit send!

Magazines/Websites – Ditto for what I've said above. Don't be afraid to e-mail magazines or websites about your work if you feel you'd be a good fit for their target audience!

Second – paid advertising

Craftcult (<http://craftcult.com>) and the like – Craftcult is one of a number of sites that exist to help Etsy sellers in particular monitor what's going on with their shops. They – and other sites like Craftopolis and Statsy - offer advertising to Etsians at reasonable rates. I have just the other week advertised with Craftcult, and I am going to do so again. For me, the cost is reasonable for the number of views and hearts you get. I look at it as another good form of exposure for my shop.

Some argue that advertising there is a waste, because only other Etsy sellers will see my ads. Well, to be honest, at least half of my sales have been to other Etsians... and since they are people who value handmade, they are my target market!

Blogs - again, busy, popular blogs will often offer paid advertising at a good rate. I'm quite selective with this, as I don't have oodles of advertising money to throw around, but I have bought a few ads on blogs.

I choose to put ads for *my* blog on these sites, rather than my shop... because of my delusion as above, and also because of my belief that people prefer to buy from someone they know and trust. People are going to get to know me much more thoroughly through my blog and twitter than they will ever do from just visiting my shop. And it's not like they could miss the links to it on the blog, anyways!

I currently have an ad on Lushlee (<http://lushlee.com>), just to give an example.

One Final Tip

This is one thing I strongly advise everyone to do – *keep a spreadsheet* that shows your daily income, # of sales, sale venue... as well as your daily expenditures and where you spent your money.

This is something I have ALWAYS avoided in the past because, as a rule, I hate bookwork. However, I have been doing it religiously this time around (to the point where **as soon as I make a sale** I enter it in the spreadsheet). It has made a very big difference for me, because I can now track – day to day – exactly how much money I'm turning over, and how much I'm spending... and where!

Summary

Do what you love, and love what you do. This is a passion for me – if it wasn't there is *no way* I could keep up these sorts of hours.

I would definitely advise getting familiar with twitter and FB if you aren't already. If you follow me ([@jessvanden](#)) please say hello! I'd love to chat with you!

Remember it takes time to build followers and fans... but the time you invest now in building those groups of people is going to be gold a few months down the line when it's paying off for you!

Other Useful Resources

I haven't gotten here just through my friends and networks... but from reading and research too.

E-Books

Seven Tips for Etsy Success (free)

I wrote a blog post about this (<http://epherielldesigns.com/seven-tips-for-etsy-success>)... in short, you need to read it! Even if you don't sell on Etsy, there is some excellent general advice there.

This e-book covers:

1: Read, Read, Read (& Weed)

2: Find Your Product

3: How to Set Up Shop

4: Take Amazing Photographs

5: Strive for Repeat Customers

6: Promote on Etsy

7: Market Outside of Etsy

The Unconventional Guide to Art + Money (not free)

'The Unconventional Guide to Art + Money' by Chris Guillebeau and Zoë Westhof is a package that consists of an Ebook and a number of audio interviews and transcripts. Some of the artists interviewed include:

- Michael Nobbs
- Karen Walrond
- Dan Duhrkoop
- Soniei
- Hazel Dooney

They all make a full-time living with their art.

My favourite part of this guide was definitely the audio interviews – it was really fascinating, informative, and inspirational to hear how these artists have come to the point of self-representing and making a living.

Hazel Dooney is particularly amazing. She's an Aussie like me, and is making over 6 figs now... and she's only about 30!

They do focus on visual artists, but some of the interview subjects were also photographers, bloggers, a scrapbooker, and a mixed-media artist who sells jewellery as well as her art.

Anyways, you can check it out here (<http://unconventionalguides.com/cmd.php?af=1162614>) and find out more.

(I want to make it abundantly clear at this point that I'm an affiliate of this guide... what that means is that if you decide to buy it using the above link, I get a little bit of the profits as a thank you for promoting it. If that's not cool with you, just search for it in Google, and if you buy it I get nada 😊 This is actually the first digital info-product I've ever bought... and I'd buy it again).

Oh, you also get follow-up support e-mails with this.

279 Days to Overnight Success (free)

This is written by Chris Guillebeau, one of the co-authors of the book above.

It's a really inspiring read, where he talks about how he has built his online business to a very successful stage. It gave me hope – and the knowledge that it is possible!

I love Chris' blog – and this ebook – which is another reason I was willing to fork out the moulah for the above guide.

How to Build an Internet Business (free)

An awesome free ebook from one of the most successful online entrepreneurs out there, Yaro Starak. Yaro is a fellow Australian – and from Brisbane, the same city as me, too! In fact, I made my first online money working for him in the editing business he ran at the time – BetterEdit.com – back in 2004/05. He's since sold it and moved on to bigger things, but he is a great guy, and knows his stuff.

This guide covers things like persistence, networking, choosing the right business, setting up a plan – very much the 'business' side of things.

Websites

Easy Etsy (<http://www.easyetsy.com/>) – a way to find all of the Etsy related tools and tutorials with out having to search for them. Very handy. This kinda covers many of the sites I was going to mention!

... as does this one! 50 Free Sites To Promote Your Website (<http://www.createapendant.com/sitepromote.htm>) – this huge list of links from Matt Nix covers oodles of places to go...

Google Analytics – keep track of how many visits your site/shop is getting. Very, very useful. Most of you probably already use this – if you don't, you should be.

Prologger (<http://prologger.net>) – for anything and everything about blogging. Go here 😊

I'm sure there's more, but I can't think of them right now! I'll come back and add to this post as I find things.

Thank you so much for reading the series – I really hope you got something out of it that helped you!

Finally...

I had this question from a friend and fellow jewellery-seller (the lovely Angelene) on a forum earlier today regarding the advice I've given in the last few posts. I thought it was a really excellent point, and so I asked her if she was happy for me to post it here and respond. Ange works full-time, and runs another business also on top of her Etsy shop. Therefore, she's pretty time-poor – a situation that I thought might apply to a good portion of you who are reading this.

Ange asked: “Congratulations Jess! But I have to say... That's a lot of hours work for the return. Are there plans in place to reduce your working hours to increase the hourly income?”

My response was: “Ange, I think, for me, it's just a case of working my ass off now to get my name out there, and – in time – my hope is that as my customer base grows, so the hours of promotional activity I'll need to do will lessen.

I'm in the fortunate position atm to be able to put a lot of time in. I've also heard from a few successful folk that if you want to make this kind of biz work, it really has to be your life... and I'm okay with that.

For those with a full-time job and other big commitments, it would be a lot, lot harder to find the time to devote to this like I have been doing.”

I know a lot of you reading this will be in a similar position to Ange – you’ve got a full-time job, kids, another business, health issues or other problems... And that devoting the kind of crazy hours that I have been doing is not possible. I guess that all I can say is do as much as you can, when you can. And give it time! I’ve been working on Epheriell and this blog since October 2008 on and off... and I’m only just now to this point (which is still pretty early in the game!).

Just do the basics – I’d suggest chatting on twitter when you get the chance, keeping in touch with a team of people in the same boat – even just a post or two a day in a forum. Add your new products to your FB Fan Page. All I can suggest are things that have worked for me – from my personal experience. I would LOVE to hear your thoughts on what has and hasn’t worked for you in the comments below.

Most of all – keep making, keep growing, stay positive, and believe in yourself. Maybe you’re crazy to think you can build a business to support yourself and your family out of your craft... but if you are, I think you’re in damn fine company!

Good Luck!

Jessica

