



THINGS TO THINK ABOUT IF YOU ARE CONSIDERING ONLINE SALES

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This paper responds to an escalation in interest by various parties and stakeholders in developing Online Sales Platforms for Indigenous art in the new COVID-19 world. It aims to address factors art centres may want to think about when considering online selling. They are based on shared experiences by art centres and the following Indigenous peak organisations:

- Arnhem Northern and Kimberley Artists Aboriginal Corporation (ANKA)
- DESART
- Aboriginal Art Centre Hub Western Australia (AACHWA)
- Indigenous Art Centre Alliance (IACA)
- Ku Arts
- Indigenous Art Code

Arts Law Centre of Australia (Arts law) has also participated in discussions and has provided a separate Frequently Asked Questions document that forms part of this paper. It addresses a number of legal considerations associated with online selling (see Attachment).

Whether for financial or other reasons, the decision to proceed with online selling does require serious consideration. There is concern that what is seen to be an opportunity may result in opportunism if decisions are made hastily. This in turn can negatively impact the overall market for Australian Indigenous art. So, before going down the online selling road, perhaps consider other alternatives, such as selling through commercial galleries you already have a relationship with and who already have sophisticated selling platforms in place.

Points raised below are designed to help you think about the front and backend of implementing online selling. Please feel free to discuss them with representatives from your peak body who will be happy to support and guide you along the way.

a. Sales Platforms and Technology

Setting up websites with sales capacity can be a simple process with the range of web building platforms available nowadays. Consider the following:

- Is there merit in using SAM, an online artwork management system, which is used by many art centres across Australia? (Consider using a platform or website that can be integrated with SAM so as not to double handle artwork information.)¹
- How long will it take set up and configure the system you decide to proceed with?
- Will the system allow you to regularly change and update product information, including images, pricing and artists' profiles?
- Can the system process credit card payments and PayPal? (Setting up these facilities can be lengthy, involving Board signatures and IDs that may be difficult to obtain quickly.) However it is recommended by e-commerce people that payment should happen at the time of sale in order to secure the transaction.
- Can you respond to buyers within a 24-hour period?
- If you are not using online sales, will staff be available during the day to process over the phone credit card transactions? (This is important for overseas purchases and time differences.)
- Do you have a budget for continued tech support and maintenance of your website and/or sales platform?
- Do you have staff or IT support to trouble shoot issues with your system?

¹ SAM is managed by DESART and all enquiries should be made to sam@desart.com.au



b. Financial arrangements and profitability

Consider the following:

- What are the financial arrangements – who pays for what including packing, freight, framing and the commission? (Have you allowed enough to cover these costs in the purchase price?)
- If offering EFT payment facilities, what customer information do you need to include as part of the EFT process?
- Can you access your bank records to check if EFT payments have been made?
- Could more income be generated for the art centre through activities other than online selling?
- Is having a good website with images of artworks and information about artists (without online sales capability) a good alternative to encourage potential buyers to reach out and make phone or email enquiries?
- Are you only motivated to move to online selling because of COVID-19? (Consider if you want to maintain online selling post COVID.)
- Have you done the sums² and are you convinced that there is a good margin and profitability for online selling in your particular instance?

c. Terms of supply including certificates of authenticity, refunds and returns policies

Consider the following factors, especially issues of getting art works out of communities that are in COVID shut down, or from artists who have moved onto Homelands:

- What is your sales and return policy for damaged goods or incorrect processing of an order? (Is it the same for artworks and for clothing?)
- Can you accurately calculate postage and handling charges anywhere in the world (through postage, vs. couriers, vs. fine art freight companies etc.)
- Can you guarantee timely delivery of purchased goods? (The nature of remote communities can mean reliance on mail planes, barges or long drives to access postal and other services.)
- Can you track freight of purchased goods so that you can alert the buyer to the ETD or any delays?
- Can you pack artworks suitable for domestic, national and international freight? (Do you have all the packing material you need readily to hand?)
- Are you aware of freight size and weight limits that might apply? Do you have insurance of artworks in transit?
- Does the purchase price clearly identify whether it includes or excludes framing? (Framing can be a significant cost for you or the purchaser.)

d. Meeting the market and supply & demand

Sale of clothing requires additional information at the time of purchase. Make sure that you provide the following information when selling clothing on line:

- Have you selected the right items for selling online? (Do your research into price points that are achievable for online sales. Check different suppliers for market information and competitive pricing structures, and choose items that are easily packed and shipped).
- Can you provide an accurate size chart for all items of clothing (explaining sizes in inches and centimeters for male, female, children and babies)
- Do you have a full range of sizes and colours available in all styles? (If not, do not list them as being available, or note them as limited availability or back order.)

² Accurately work out your COGS including materials, packing, framing, freight, currency conversion and on the ground delivery charges



- Do you have adequate stock of works or items currently available for sale? Where are they stored and do you have access to them?
- Do you know what new works artists are making at the moment? Can they be photographed and sourced for sale during the COVID-19 shut down and travel restrictions?

e. Promotion and marketing collateral.

Even though the COVID pandemic has caused a major down turn in the Australian and international art markets, there are still interested buyers who are keen to purchase works in support of Indigenous artists at this critical time.

Sales don't just start coming when you launch an online platform. Do you have existing relationships that you could leverage at this time, including commercial galleries, public galleries and private collectors? Have you contacted gallery curators and collection coordinators to talk about works you have for sale?

You need to apply all the normal rules of marketing (product development, quality, availability, competitive pricing, seamless ordering and delivery supply chains, and guaranteed authenticity backed up with compliant Certificates of Authenticity.³)

Consider the following:

- Do you have facilities to store/ pack and frame works for sale?
- Do you have trained staff who can pack and source freight options to fill orders?
- Are staff trained in the use of SAM and or other forms of online selling and processing of payments?
- Do you have a suitable inventory control (consider stock take issues)?
- Do the artists understand the processes of online selling?
- Do you have high quality photos of items for sale that can be used online and in printed marketing collateral?
- Do you have stories about all artworks that are for sale?
- Are all artists' biographies up to date and are there good portrait images of the artists (for marketing and for Certificates of Authenticity)?
- Can you manage social media campaigns to promote new items or product lines for sale?
- Do you have a good client mailing list and how can you convert "interested buyers" into actual buyers? (Remember that commercial galleries have often built their client bases up over many, many years.)

IN SUMMARY

Online selling will not be the right opportunity or fit for every art centre. Poor management of online sales portals can end up reflecting badly on the entire sector.

The decision to launch online selling is one that is based on many factors (see above).

At the end of the day, the decision must also be based on common sense.

If all the factors do not stack up for you, don't do it. There is too much at stake to risk doing it badly – for the reputation of your artists, your art centre, and the Australian Indigenous art sector as a whole.

³ Refer to the Indigenous Art Code for an explanation of best practice Certificates of Authenticity