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## BRAND YOU

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If you've ever thought about selling your work, it's time to start thinking about your brand. Here are some things to ask yourself.

We are all brand conscious. We buy food, cars, clothing, sports equipment, or candy based on the name stamped on the package or on the product itself. Branding is all about recognition, not only of the product—be it a can of green beans or a wedding ring—but of other tangible and intangible characteristics we associate with the product, such as quality of materials and workmanship, design idea, price point, audience, cachet, dependability, and even the personality of the manufacturer. Brands live or die on their ability to deliver on those expectations consistently.

If you've ever thought about selling your work, it's time to start thinking about your brand. You don't have to make brand decisions right now, but you should be aware of how your decisions—from materials and techniques to your Facebook page to the clothes you wear—may eventually affect your brand.

**What's your product?** From food to athletic shoes to jewelry, the most basic brand question is, what product will you make? (If you make jewelry solely for your own enjoyment, it may be a difficult but necessary mental shift to start thinking of your work as a "product.") You can do this one of two ways. Like many manufacturers, you can decide what audience or market niche you see beckoning, and gear your jewelry to that market. In fact, this might be your first move if you want to sell your work, says Sherry Beck Paprocki who, with her husband, Ray Paprocki, co-authored *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Branding Yourself*. "If you're creating a product that no one wants to buy, it's hard to be a business," she says.

But unlike other manufacturers, art/craft/studio jewelers are driven more by their creative imaginations, fascination with certain materials and techniques, or the desire to “say something” with their work, than by market demand. This is also a legitimate way to determine your product.

**Who is your audience?** No matter how you determine your product, at some point you have to determine who your buyers are. “Take a look at the people who currently buy your product,” suggests Amanda Gizzi, Director of Communications for the Jewelry Information Center (JIC), or those to whom you give your jewelry as gifts. You might ask them to take a short survey to find out their age and gender; what they want and need; where, when and what they buy to fill those needs and desires; and what they like about your jewelry (price, look, materials, color). “See if there is a common denominator,” says Gizzi. “Build on that.” And don’t be afraid to try different things, she suggests, such as a Facebook poll. “Social media makes it easier to reach different parts of the world, and a new client base, then ever before,” she says.

Be prepared to re-think your market base. The work you think is ideal for an established career women might flop with them, but be surprisingly successful with women in their 20s just entering the work force. “A lot of companies are really shocked when they find out who their target market really is. It may be wildly different from what they expect,” says Gizzi.

**How is your work different?** No matter what materials and techniques you’re using, someone else is using them, too. One way to set yourself apart from other makers is to excel at whatever jewelry making technique or material you work with: found object, anticlastic forming, reticulation, granulation, etching. High quality always makes work stand out.

Second, find a way to make the work yours. Your brand should be “an authentic depiction of who you are, what skills you have developed, and what value you can bring to your work,” write the Paprockis. People usually choose art jewelry for some reason other than adornment. They are drawn by its playfulness, its spiritual quality, its storytelling, its innovation, or simply its wicked sense of humor.

While many people may work with tin, Harriette Estel Berman’s work is impossible to duplicate. Michael Boyd is not the only jewelry maker who cuts his own gem materials, but he uses his sense of color to create work that is uniquely his. When it comes to anticlastic forming, the first name that may come to mind is Michael Good.

What quality comes from your heart that will make your work immediately recognizable and make it impossible to duplicate? What do you want people to think of when they hear your name?

**How will you communicate your brand?** Keep your message simple and keep it focused on your target audience. Have an “elevator pitch” prepared, something that describes your work in a few sentences, a response you can give whenever anyone says, “What kind of work do you do?”

Be available to the media—from bloggers, to newspapers, to magazines, to radio—for interviews. Have professional photos taken of you and your work. Put together a press packet containing images (on a disk, labeled correctly), artist statement, bio, awards, shows, upcoming schedule, news clips.

And if you work under your own name, remember that *you* are your brand. Unless you develop a staff—even if you *do* develop a staff—you need to be aware of your appearance, your manners, your interactions with people.

**Is your brand identification consistent?** If there is a battle cry of branding, “Consistency!” is it. “It is important for a jewelry designer to think about what message

they are conveying to their target audience,” says Gizzi, and to make sure every part of the brand identity—from product, logo, name, font style, to blogging style—not only identifies your product, but tells the same brand story to the same target market. If your work is formal or conservative, bright primary colors in a logo, banner or brochure will send confusing messages to your audience. If your work is dark and edgy, a traditional font on your business card is not going to represent your brand well. So before committing to your support materials, such as packaging, think about how everything will reinforce the concept of your brand.

While you don’t have to do everything at once—decide on your logo, make up brochures, set up a website—it helps to get the big pieces in place at one time. Building a brand doesn’t happen overnight, says Gizzi. “It’s going to take a while for people to recognize your brand, so the more brand identifiers [logo, font style, name, colors] you can have early, the better off you’ll be in the long run.” Once you establish your identity, stay with it. “Nothing is more confusing to the customer than trying to figure out whose jewelry it is when there are different names used,” says Gizzi.

**Are you professional?** Right from the beginning, take your business seriously. “Everything that represents a business, reflects on the business,” says Paprocki. From your business cards, to your website, to your packaging, to the way you comport yourself at a show—it should all say, I’m a business person as well as an artist. I know what I’m about, and can deliver what I promise. Have your marketing materials—cards, brochures, photographs--produced professionally. Show up on time for appointments. Be able to articulate the concept behind the work. Know who your audience is.

Part of being professional is being organized. When a potential distributor approaches your booth at a show, “If you’re stuffing money in your jeans pocket, if you can’t find the right bag to put something in, or if you’re rooting around under the table

while someone waits, that looks unprofessional,” says Paprocki. Know where your calendar, your cards, your brochure and wholesale price lists, and your packaging supplies are without having to look for them. Have a system for keeping track of orders, work in progress, invoices, receipts and all the paraphernalia you’ll need to keep your business running smoothly and that the tax man will want.

**Have you paid attention to the intangibles?** Most of us base our brand loyalty on intangibles as much as on the physical aspects of the product. One of the biggest intangibles is trust, which depends on the consistent quality of the workmanship and support materials, on-time deliveries, an even temperament and a reasonable return or trade-in policy. The intangibles also include the artist’s story, that special something that brings people to your work time and again.

**Are you transparent?** Today, business, product, and personal all merge, says Paprocki. Whether or not you like it, your personal may become part of your brand. This is important for jewelry makers to remember as they often work under their own name. The moment you or your product appear on the Internet you are visible to everyone. If you start your business while working another career, it’s not only likely but probable that your employer will quickly know about your business. That might be great. You might get lots of orders from co-workers. (People love to have an emotional bond to the person they’re buying from, says Paprocki. What better emotional bond could there be than having worked with you for years?) But if your company has restrictions on moonlighting—or if you’re already in a jewelry-related field where your business might create a conflict of interest—you could have a problem. (If you’ve seen the movie *Julie/Julia*, you’ll know how this works. Julie took a day off work to prepare for a big dinner, saying she was sick. But anyone reading her blog knew what she was really doing—including her boss.)

Not only that, much of your private life is no longer private. For good or bad, information about you is on the Internet—from how much you paid for your house, to family arrests, to the really dumb YouTube video you put together. Don't be paranoid about it, says Paprocki. "You just have to be prepared to address it and not try to hide it."

So be careful what you post in the oh-so-public Internet arena. Save the ranting and snarky comments for phone calls with friends. You might want to think carefully about the personal information you release about yourself and your family.

**Does a "brand" mean getting stuck in a rut?** Establishing a brand doesn't mean you have to make the same thing over and over again. If you're working from the heart, doing work that calls you and is an expression of your ideas, your work will always evolve yet remain true to you and your brand. If you always strive to make your work better in one way or another, it will always challenge you.

As you grow your business and explore different aspects of your skills there are two ways to expand your brand. The first is called "brand extension." You create work that fits a different market but uses the same look and feel of the work you make for the jewelry market. Michael Good and Betty Helen Longhi create sculpture that reflects their design ethic and methods. Karen Krieger makes large scale frames in aluminum that involve the same etched patterning techniques she uses for silver jewelry. The connection between the larger work and the jewelry of the artists is clear.

Then there is a "line extension," when you add a completely different type of product to your mix. The only thing connecting the two lines is that you are the maker. If you're working in metals and want to also make glass beads, or you want to make one-of-a-kind precious metal work and at the same time, put out an inexpensive production line for department stores, consider setting up a separate brand for each line. Think of it like a

writer's pseudonym. Everyone now knows that the romance writer Nora Roberts writes mysteries under the name J.D. Robb. Each type of book has its own fans and markets.

**Fastest way to kill a brand?** “Not being consistent,” says Gizzi. “Making logo changes, having colors and packaging that don’t match your brand identity,” she says will put an end to your brand before it gets started.

Think carefully about your brand, from where you are now, to where you see it going in the future. This is not something you do in an hour or two, planning to tweak it as you go along. “It’s important to think long term when developing your brand,” says Gizzi. “Once your brand identity is established, it is difficult to change it.” Think about what happened when Coca-Cola tried to do that. Brand loyalists resent it mightily when a company changes its product or packaging. Jewelry makers and other artists who have wanted to switch dramatically from one style to another have met resistance from gallery owners and from consumers. If you are the kind of person who likes to try different things, think about establishing a variety of brand names for each line extension.

Branding used to be for corporate, mass-oriented consumer products, such as Kleenex, Campbell’s, General Mills, Ford. But now it’s as close as the jewelry on your bench. Where you go with it, is up to you.

### **Some Interesting Reading**

To learn more about branding, marketing and your place in the global market, try some of these books and online resources:

***The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Branding Yourself***, Sherry Beck Paprocki and Ray Paprocki, 2009.

***The New Rules of Marketing and PR***, David Meerman Scott, 2010. And see Scott’s blog at <http://www.webinknow.com>.

***The World is Flat: A Brief History of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***, Thomas L. Friedman, 2005.

***Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want***, James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine II, 2007. And see their interesting site at <http://authenticitybook.com>.

***Beyond Branding: How the New Values of Transparency and Integrity are Changing the World of Brands***, Nicholas Ind, 2005.

***The Age of Engage: Reinventing Marketing for Today's Connected, Collaborative and Hyperactive Culture***, Denise Shiffman, 2008. And see Shiffman's site: [www.ageofengage.com](http://www.ageofengage.com). Great stuff.