
Good promotion gets work seen, develops reputations and is key to establishing and advancing the practice of all artists.

As well as creative endeavour, being a visual artist is a business, and promotion is a vital component. To progress, artists need outlets for their work – exhibitions, sales, reviews – all of which are controlled by someone else.

Finding exhibiting opportunities and developing relationships with key individuals are important goals for most artists. Promotion isn't a quick fix, but the continuous work of being visible and building a reputation.

1. Preparation

If your work isn't documented, it may as well not exist.

In order to promote yourself, you need to have a certain amount of clarity around who you are and what you do.

- Look at what you want to achieve, and how you can progress to that point.
- Make sure you actually have some work to promote (even the greatest marketers need to actually produce the goods).
- Being administratively prepared will also help you.

Images

If your work isn't documented, it may as well not exist. When sending images think quality over quantity. Take note of image size, dpi, and file or the medium type requested.

Low-res digital photographs (usually 72 dpi) are handy for emailing, but be careful to also archive high-res images (usually 300dpi) for other usage. Always label your submissions.

Text

Always have a statement on your practice, an up-to-date CV (professional arts related only), text on works and bibliography ready.

This will allow you to easily and quickly respond to interest. Be sure to update this material frequently, as and when your projects come to fruition.

2. Increase your visibility

To get your work seen, you need to have had your work seen. This may seem to be a catch 22, but there are plenty of ways of generating visibility for your practice:

- apply for open submission exhibitions
- take part in arts related events, such as seminars, workshops and conferences
- create your own initiatives.

Rather than directly approaching a specific gallery, you could apply for any open opportunities they run or where they are acting as an invited curator.

If curators and galleries know what you do, they can decide if it is attractive to them. It is certainly more advantageous to put yourself in their eye line than trying to foist yourself upon them or send unsolicited packages.

3. Networking

Our working lives are web of networks.

Socialising, attending private views and networking are important ways to meet and get noticed by key arts personnel.

Networking may seem to be a disingenuous and painful activity. However meeting and talking to other members of the arts is not only beneficial to you, but also to them. Curators and galleries need artists, and writers need topics.

We all want to work with the best and most suitable persons. In order to do this we must have knowledge of them. Networking allows these circles to support each other.

Our working lives are web of networks. The person next to you in your studio, degree course or exhibition may all open up opportunities. But remember to be polite and friendly – don't just try to corner someone or harass them into offering you a break.

4. Building relationships

Should you meet someone interested in your work you can send them further information or direct them to your website. Alternatively you could invite them to visit your studio.

How best to present yourself will depend on practice. For example, a painter may need physical proximity to show their work to best advantage. If the majority of your work is ephemeral, time or project based, rather than existing as a physical object, it might be more appropriate to send as copies of documentation.

5. Professionalism

Be aware of the quality of material you are sending out.

When all your hard work pays off and you do get a break make sure you are prepared for it. Whether sending material, returning an email or just having a business card to hand.

Where a break turns into an opportunity, ensure that you're professional at all times in your dealings. No matter how good your work is, tantrums, delayed installs or bad behaviour will put someone off working with you again. By reputation, stop others working with you also.

If you deliver work of quality in a competent manner that initial relationship could extend to referrals and continued support throughout your career.

6. Promotional material and tools

Press releases and statements

No matter what stage of your career, you will need to do a certain amount of writing and speaking about your work. Learn how to write with confidence and clarity, be concise and pitch your tone to match your aim. Take note of deadlines and include details of how to get images or further information.

Invitations

Be aware of the quality of material you are sending out. Ensure that the images are good quality, attention grabbing and represent your practice in the best light.

Business cards

Business cards are handy, not just for passing on personal contacts but also directing people towards information on your work and your website.

Get them professionally printed as their quality will reflect on you and your practice. Have them with you always - you never know who are going to meet.

Website

An online portfolio can be an invaluable tool. It provides the facility to research your work or be directed towards documentation without having to formally request it.

Key components should be: images, a biography and statement. Make sure the site is easy to navigate and not full of visual trickery (unless your work is technology based). Keep it clean, simple and let the work speak. Keep it updated regularly in order to bring people

back to check on your progress. A poorly-constructed or out-of-date site may well have the opposite effect to promotion.

You can learn to create your own website or have someone create it for you. There are also online galleries which offer space (for example Saatchi online) but take care to find reputable options that would be good for your profile.

Remember, if you do decide to put your work online, you should see your website as a tool to be used rather than just hoping that people find it.

Mailing list

If you go to the time and effort to make contacts, then you need to maintain them. Compile a database of contacts or keep a mailing list. Make sure it is easily organised, easy to update and private.

To create your list look at who you know, have worked with or is already interested in your work such as: other artists, tutors, curators, galleries, buyers, arts writers, publications, your local arts officer and those you deem relevant to your career.

Keep contacts informed of important information only: exhibitions, awards, residencies etc. Do not bombard them with your every creative thought. Although galleries have their own mailing lists make sure that invitations go out to your key contacts also.

7. Dealing with the media

Artists need outlets for their work – all of which are controlled by someone else.

Journalists and critics can form close working relationships with artists, writing frequently about their work and helping to build a public profile.

It is possible to build a rapport with the arts press and publications based on your reputation and the quality or artistic content of your work. Local press are usually more interested in the community aspect of the story. They may also be more reliant on the information you give them or your interpretation of your practice.

You may not be presented in the way that you hope to be by local press. To combat this, supply your own images or ask for control over photography used.

When doing interviews or contacting press know what you are going to say so you can control the message. Make sure you are clear, not over wordy and include vital information: what, where, when and who.

Remember if someone has been positive about your work make sure to put them on your mailing list and make regular contact where warranted.