



Above:
Below, left:
Below, right: *Carmel Macchiato Carved Bowl.*



Marketing Your Pottery: The Quest for Wow!

STORY AND PHOTOS BY HOLLY MCKEEN



Holly McKeen has formulated a strategy which helps her integrate all aspects of her life, including honey production and beef farming as well as a bed-and-breakfast operation, with her pottery.

Most potters love to *make* pots more than *sell* them! The reality is, however, that making a living from clay takes a strong business and marketing sense in addition to artistic ability and passion. Developing a quality body of work is certainly the first step, yet understanding how to sell the product becomes equally important. Some believe that creating a successful pottery business in today's marketplace requires the determination to build a "Wow!" into the overall experience of doing business with you.

At one time, marketing was only about advertising, but times have changed. As our lives become saturated with multimedia ads of all kinds, and an overabundance of product choices, modern entrepreneurs have realized that they must look for new ways to differentiate their products. It has never been more important to understand your target market, catch the interest of buyers, create excitement around your product, and capture customer loyalty for your brand that has them spreading the word.

Today, there is much more to consider in marketing your pottery than the look of your business cards or show invitations, although these are tangible pieces of your overall marketing plan. In his new book, *Purple Cow*, Seth Godin focuses on the importance of being "remarkable" in every aspect of your business. Godin says, "Everything from service to design are now at the heart of what it means to be a marketer ... Marketing is the act of inventing the product. The effort of designing it. The craft of producing it. The art of pricing it. The technique of selling it ..."



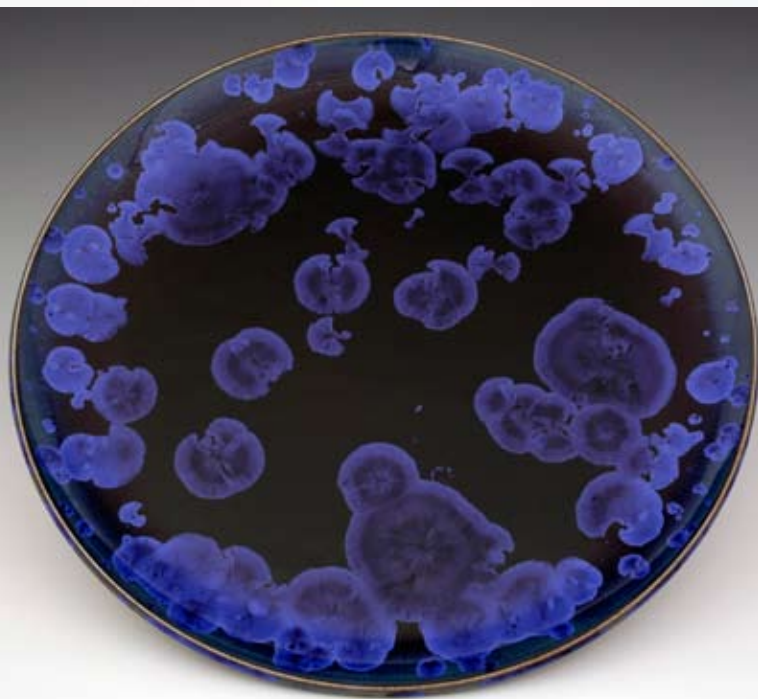
In applying these notions to the business of pottery, our marketing naturally begins with the making of a pot that is somehow *different*; *noticeable*; *remarkable*. People are interested in finding products that they can get excited about, or attached to—something they'll want to tell their friends about.

Next, we need to consider what venues and activities will best add to that excitement: keep the energy up, be positive, fun, professional, or noticeable; create an experience that will keep folks talking about this special pottery, or this interesting potter. The overall remarkable experience you provide will include essentials such as quality & uniqueness in the making, a positive personal interaction, integrity, great service, a satisfaction guarantee, and pricing and packaging that reflect the value of your pottery. Give your customers all these things, and you might just hear "Wow!" As they start spreading the word about you and your pots, you will see your sales increase, and your business prosper.

When first researching ways to make a living from my pots, my husband and I considered the usual venues, and what might fit best with our lifestyle. I knew I did not want to be tied to the production demands of the wholesale market (although I did work and show in a gallery, consign pots in a couple of locations, and participate in a few established shows, both

large and small). In reflecting back on these experiences, I realized that I might find more enjoyment in opening a showroom attached to my studio right here on our farm. The idea of building our own gallery and marketing it ourselves felt more exciting than the other options, so we created Greendale Pottery & Country Guest House. While the option of opening a showroom on-site is not available to every potter, the principles for business success apply equally, whether dealing with retail or wholesale clients, studio shows, art market customers, or gallery owners.

The intricacies of owning & operating a pottery business can be just as demanding as the making of the pots. I have enjoyed taking marketing courses and reading more on the subject, testing different ways to gain exposure, discovering how to bring people in, and more importantly, learning how to bring them *back* with their friends! From carefully considering the design, making, and finishing of the pottery, to the showroom/studio setup, Web site design and optimization, to networking, advertising and media relations, we have worked hard to present an image of quality and excellence in the overall experience of doing business with us. In 2006, our second year, we were excited to be nominated by our customers, and juried as a finalist for the "Best New Business of the



Top left: Crystalline-glazed honey vase.

Bottom left: Crystalline-glazed plate with cobalt blue over black glazes.

JEFF WILLIS PHOTOS



Sand and Sea Tea Set.

Expand your Horizons with Cross Marketing & Local Tours

Potters often put together very successful studio tours or events with other potters and artists. Think about expanding on that idea, and take a closer look around you. Once you have a strong sense of your target market, look nearby for other well-run small businesses with the same clientele as you. Talk with them about ways you could jointly market events! We live in a rural area an hour from

Vancouver. By joining together with other high-quality, small shops in our vicinity, we draw more clientele and provide a “unique country shopping experience” enticing customers from farther away. We have a honey store, a natural soap shop, an antique store, and a specialty cheese shop close by, with whom we have several events through the year.

Shared promotional materials and e-mail lists expand our customer base. We are able to produce events at a very low shared cost, and we draw quite a crowd! Our customers have told us how much they enjoy coming out to the country to buy directly from the makers. It’s all about the fun experience! We also highlight the farm aspect of our location to be part of a very popular

“Circle Farm Tour” (we also raise organic beef). This agri-tourism initiative of our regional tourism association is a highly professional and extensive marketing campaign that has served the pottery as well as the beef sales.

Keep an open mind and always be on the alert to respond to interesting opportunities whenever they arise.



Plate. Crystalline-glazed porcelain, fired to cone 10 in oxidation.

Year, Independent,” a Business Excellence award from our local Chamber of Commerce.

How did we go about this? Well, not surprisingly, folks have told us it’s not just about the pots, although the pots have been well-received. We have found that, for our customers, it really is about the whole experience. Our clients love coming to visit our wonderful farm setting, to see the pottery being made, and to listen to me share my excitement over a new design or new glaze. They like the unusually colorful stoneware glazes and the beautiful crystalline-glazed porcelain, something new to many of our customers.

Our clients love being invited back into the studio area to see new pieces in progress. They feel a part of it all when asked for their feedback on design or practicality, and I gain a sense of the marketability before the finished product gets to the showroom. On Saturday mornings, there will often be a kiln opening to allow customers the opportunity to peek

into the kiln along with me, and to lift out a still-warm piece. It’s fun to sell a piece right out of the kiln, and watch the excitement the new owner feels from being there when it was born! It’s also a great opportunity to educate customers on the process and the value of handcrafted work, another aspect of effective pricing as it relates to perceived value.

Our customers tell us they like that we have dependable, regular showroom hours, even though we chose to limit our hours to Thursday, Friday, and Saturday to provide uninterrupted production time the rest of the week. Some Thursday mornings, there are folks waiting on the porch at opening time! They also appreciate the consistent quality, availability and variety of stock, and how every item is gift-wrapped. Mostly, we hear how much our guests enjoy sharing in my excitement of how I get to earn a living—right here at my studio on our farm. They love the positive energy in the shop. We want a visit to our pottery to be remembered as an uplifting and valuable experience, a

far step beyond a trip to the mall. Clients get attached to the relationship being built through this process, and the relationship keeps them coming back. These things are all part of our marketing strategy, over and above the quest to offer well-crafted and unique pots.

Whether your customers are in your booth, at your studio show, or wholesalers on the phone, your marketing is all about the entire experience. Think about ways you can give your customers a positive, memorable experience that benefits them. When you are able to connect with customers and engage them in sharing your passion for your pottery, they will spread the word. Build that customer loyalty, get them talking to their friends about you, and watch your business grow! @

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