

How to Turn Your Creative Hobby Into a Successful Business

Making art can be intimidating — even when it's just a hobby. But creative entrepreneur and full-time wedding photographer (<http://photosbyjennaleigh.com/>) Jenna Kutcher (<http://www.jennakutcherblog.com/>) didn't let that stop her from turning her hobby (dabbling in watercolor paintings) into a profitable revenue stream. She is entirely self-taught, and she's sold nearly 2,000 watercolor prints in less than two years through her online shop on Society6 (<https://society6.com/jennakutcher>).

Her lack of formal training has never been an issue, and her advice below will demonstrate that when you find something you love to do, happiness can follow. Read on for Kutcher's six tips on how to start a new creative hobby and transform it into a successful business.

1. Start Lean



Image courtesy of Jenna Kutcher

Kutcher strongly believes you don't need the best tools to get started. "Some of my best pieces happened on card stock paper from Target with Crayola watercolor," she says. "Don't feel like you need to invest a fortune to start a hobby. You can always invest later, but true artists can make masterpieces out of just about anything!"

2. Get Smart

You also don't need to go overboard when it comes to instruction. A class at a local community college can help you better understand the tools involved in the craft, while teaching you the basic techniques to get you started. But if a formal class doesn't fit your schedule, budget, or comfort level, there are other opportunities to learn online through blogs and YouTube tutorials.

For a more organic approach, try studying art that inspires you and practicing different techniques to achieve a similar look, which is what Kutcher did. “Instead of trying to recreate other people’s moments, I would focus on what drew me in and what steps they took,” she said. “Then I would put my spin on it.”

3. Ditch Big Expectations

The old saying, “don’t put the cart before the horse,” is true when it comes to your artwork. Pursue your hobby as a passion first, instead of a career path. While Kutcher makes money now by selling her prints, watercolor painting started merely as a creative outlet. “It’s so relaxing to me,” she says. “Sitting down to paint at our dining room table with the light streaming in is my happy place. I think painting is something that so many people can enjoy because it’s therapeutic in a sense, and there is no pressure to share every piece.”

4. Make It Your Own



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Image courtesy of Jenna Kutcher

While some drawing classes, for example, may have you sketching bowls of fruit or your hand in different positions, your work might be more rewarding if you go with meaningful subjects. For Kutcher, that was handwriting. “I love doing modern calligraphy and writing out quotes that hopefully inspire others,” she says. “The other side of my painting is watercolor florals. As a perfectionist, I have thrown away a million floral designs that aren’t ‘perfect,’ but watercolor has challenged my idea of perfection and has pushed me to let the flaws out because they are what makes a painting interesting.”

5. Let Your Passion Grow Organically

The more you practice, the more control you’ll have over your medium. But like a child forced to take up an instrument or play a sport without any real interest, make sure your heart is in it. “As an artist, I was given this advice that has saved me: ‘When you feel like doing it, do. When it isn’t coming naturally, step away,’” says Kutcher. “I’ve tried to exercise this advice in my everyday life, because we aren’t efficient or passionate about the work we are creating when we force it.”



Image courtesy of Jenna Kutcher

6. From Hobby to Career

If you've honed your craft to the point you feel ready and inspired to monetize your work, congrats! While sharing your creative work can feel like baring your soul and leaving yourself wide open to criticism, starting with people who support you can be very rewarding. For Kutcher, this was the step that helped launch her print shop.

"I started sharing my paintings and scraps on Instagram and Facebook, and people started asking how they could buy them," says Kutcher. "It happened pretty fast, actually, and I was caught off guard because it was never my intention. But being the entrepreneur I am, I had to do something. To date, I have sold almost 2,000 pieces on my own and I've collaborated with some incredible brands to create art for them. It's been such a crazy piece of my story, but something I love because it was so unexpected!"



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Image courtesy of Jenna Kutcher

When taking the big step toward becoming a creative entrepreneur, Kutcher focuses on two important points:

- **Find an Audience**

Blogging and social media tools are a great way to get your work in front of people. A strong following takes time to grow, but by staying committed and networking with other artists and creative individuals, the payoff can be great. For example, Kutcher has a very dedicated social media following, with more than 53,000 followers on [Instagram](https://instagram.com/jennakutcher/) and 10,000 followers on her [Facebook business page](https://www.facebook.com/jenna.kutcher/), and selling her artwork still requires a great deal of effort.

“Don’t just jump in and think it will be an overnight success; you have to promote, you have to keep creating, you have to learn how to get the word out about your products,” says Kutcher, who posts one new painting a week to Instagram and continues to share new pieces in development each week.

- **Pick a Plan**

Marketing your work to potential customers is important, but developing a solid business plan should be at the top of your to-do list. “I knew I didn’t have the time or resources to package and ship everything on my own, so I opted for a third party to do all of my printing and shipping,” says Kutcher, who explains that this approach has freed up a lot of time, but minimizes her profit margins. “To me, I would rather not deal with all of the logistics of running a print shop, but you have to choose which business model is best for you.”

Having a career doing something you love is a coveted dream for many creatives, but it can also make your art start to feel like work. If you can keep up your passion while using it to produce a paycheck, then go for it. Just remember that not every hobby has to make you money. Sometimes having a creative outlet to turn to when you need it is reward enough!