



To Sell or Not to Sell?

By Diane Woodall

Making lampwork beads is fun and rewarding. It is so rewarding, in fact, that some members of our group are making a respectable profit making beads. Lampwork has the unique distinction of being a "hobby" with the potential to pay for itself....and much more. There is strong demand for attractive, well-made lampwork beads and we all want to help meet that demand. The question is, **when is it the right time to begin selling your beads?**

Kalera Stratton, a talented bead artist I met at the Louisville ISGB Gathering two years ago, had this to say in a Lampwork, Etc. thread about when to begin selling your beads: "... [the better your beads are when you first start selling them, the better your reputation will be, and you'll get higher prices earlier on. Not that you shouldn't sell simple designs - but a bead can be simple and perfect or complex and perfect, and in order to quickly gain a good reputation and a following, the beads you sell should be perfect even if they're simple.](#)"

We may never actually achieve perfection, but technical proficiency is the key here. You must ask yourself, "Is there anything technically wrong with this bead?" If not, it is saleable. Let the buyer decide if it's pretty or not. You cannot possibly be expected to gauge the beauty your own work objectively. You'd be amazed how often a bead you don't like will be the first one to sell.

In 2004 Corina Tettinger published a booklet called [The Spotlight on Marketing Lampwork Beads on the Internet](#) and I have read it so many times my copy is dog-eared. I consider this publication to be the best resource out there for anyone interested in selling lampwork beads online. In the Spotlight Corina addresses technical proficiency: "[This is the bottom line. If your beads aren't nice, all the smart marketing in the world won't bring you any success. What are nice beads? Well, I guess a lot of that is a matter of taste, but at least the holes should be nice and smooth \(and cleaned!\), the shapes should be even \(unless they are purposefully uneven\), the colors should be crisp \(unless it's an "organic" style\), and they should be properly annealed.](#)"

[I don't know exactly what it is about beads, but I don't think there's any other art, craft, or hobby \(whatever you want to call beadmaking\), where people are trying to SELL their products almost right after having figured out the basic techniques, or sometimes even sooner.](#)"

The downside of selling too soon is that your beads will fetch a lower price than you want and the more beads you sell at the lower price the harder it is to move beyond those beginner prices. You may, in fact, get a reputation as someone with bargain beads. It's a risk every beginning beadmaker has to face especially if you sell on the Internet. It may be best to wait until you have achieved some proficiency so that you are known for quality from the beginning.

Be warned, Internet buyers are especially savvy when it comes to buying beads and you can do more harm than good by jumping into **online** bead sales too soon. There are, however, other options when you are just starting out, and they are a lot closer to home than you may realize.

The HSGB has been invited to sell our beads at Fads N Phases and at Spring Beads right here in north Houston and a show of this type is the perfect place to begin selling your beads. Your customers have an opportunity to pick up the beads and inspect them, so they know exactly what they are getting. And you have an opportunity to explain that you are just starting out and want to offer some more affordable beads than the more experienced beadmakers have for sale. Just make sure your price does, indeed, reflect your lack of experience. Even beginner beads can be beautiful and your lower prices will be very attractive to customers looking for a bargain. Continued...

Competing with the big names on eBay, Just Beads and Etsy can make you feel like you are a minnow in a huge pond. Being one of five or six artists at a local show, however, will give you much better exposure as you start your career and you will be there with people who want to see you succeed...other HSGB members (Hotties)!

I spoke with two of our members for this article because both of them have a lot of experience buying beads at live shows and online. Janet Robinson (our queen of shards), and Suzy Kelly were both kind enough to tell me about their experiences with beginning beadmakers. Suzy actually looks for the “newbies” because she has been able to get some beautiful beads at great prices. Janet also likes to encourage beginners for the same reason, but when asked when to start selling your beads Janet said, “I would take some time to improve. Otherwise you will be turning buyers away with substandard beads. If I attend a show and approach a table with wonky beads with misshapen holes and the artists is really thrilled and mentioning they are quite new to lampworking, I sometimes wonder if their judgment is clouded. Did they really think this was their best work? Is this how they want to represent themselves? I will probably skip that table at later shows due to that experience. Learn to make a good round bead (spacer). That is the basest basic technique that must be learned. Everything ventures from there.”

Janet goes on to give this advice to beginning beadmakers, from the perspective of someone who buys a lot of lampwork beads from artists with varying degrees of experience: “I hate to say this, but I can usually spot a newbie bead a mile away. That's not a bad thing. I have bought more than my share of newbie beads. They have simpler designs/shapes and less use of color and added materials, like foil, frit, enamel, etc. If they are pressed, you can see seam lines and chill marks, which I avoid (I feel that chill marks mean that the bead may have not been properly heated before put in the kiln, and its unsightly).

I would recommend the newbie keep it simple. Practice one technique...and get it down. Then sell that in lots of colors and add frit and silver. An impressive pair of earring spacers is better than a tray full of wonkies! If your holes have sharp edges, consider NOT selling that bead. It will tear the stringing material in jewelry designs and will be uncomfortable to hold in the hand. Your work reflects back on you. If I go to a table and search through your beads and find that one bead with sharp edges...it may leave a bad cast on the rest of your beads.”

Janet could not have spelled it out any better than this:

1. No chill marks. It detracts from the finish.
2. Better be annealed.
3. Properly cleaned holes.
4. I don't expect perfect holes (or footprints), but absolutely no sharp edges. The more pricey the bead, the better the holes should be.
5. No chips or cracks - yes, I have gotten beads with chips...
6. If etched...needs to be well done, otherwise it detracts from the finish again.
7. If your bead has reduced (gotten black gunk) - don't assume its a design addition...it's not -- its black gunk!

I should also add that any raised dots should be melted in enough so that they are not “undercut” and any other raised designs need to be well adhered. It just takes practice to get the kind of heat control you need to melt your raised designs in correctly.

Lack of experience is not always a turn off to buyers. Some people like Janet and Suzy love newbies beads. When I asked Janet if she avoided beads made by beginners she said: “Not really...some folks just have talent! I do look at their prices and I feel that some of that price covers their experience as well. A Newbie bead and a Kim Neely bead, even if similar, won't command the same price from me. I like to find new artists and follow them and collect their

works over time. It's interesting to see how they change and finally find a niche."

.....continued.....

Keep in mind that the kind of beads Janet and Suzy are looking for may be made by beginners but they still have the same attention to detail as any good lampwork bead. Being a beginner doesn't mean you can't make beautiful, well-made beads.

Suzy has been using purchased lampwork beads in her designs for some time. Now that her daughter, and fellow Houston Hottie, Kate Corbett is making lampwork beads Suzy has a ready source for the handmade beads she loves to incorporate into her jewelry. But all of her years of buying them taught her a few things. First of all, the best beads in the world won't sell online if your photos are bad. Suzy cautions, "If I cannot get a very good look at the beads, I don't take a chance." So before you venture into online sales please learn to take good photos of your beads, including one that clearly shows the scale of the beads. I take one photo with the bead(s) in my hand so my customers can easily see how big they are. You don't want to risk disappointing your customer because they couldn't see the scale of the beads in your photo. They may not request a refund, but you may never get another sale from them. Of course, photography skills aren't needed if you do live shows.

As far as giving advice to beadmakers in general, Suzy had this to say, "I love color so that is a big factor in what I buy. Must be very wearable and in the colors of the moment. Also, I look for wonderful combinations of neutrals I don't like beads with blobs of glass all over them. I look for form and proportion. Accidents that look like accidents give beadmakers a poor reputation. I want everyone to know and appreciate the tiny works of art that all of you create! "

Art is such a personal thing that it is important for each and every beadmaker to discover their own niche and allow themselves time for their individual style to emerge. By all means, go forth and get your beads in front of people who will want to buy them. You must be the final judge on when your work is good enough to sell. I just hope that seeing things from the perspective of people who have experience buying what you are selling will help you to know when the time is right to announce to the world..."I'm here and I have beautiful beads for sale!"