



SNAPSHOT

## Business as art

Ann Gadd left the advertising world because she wanted to pursue her dream of becoming an artist. As a natural-born business woman, the world of struggling painter was not for her though, and so she made a thriving business from her passion instead. By Juliet Pitman

If making it as an entrepreneur is tough, making it as a commercial artist is even more so. But for Ann Gadd, the business of art and the art of business are not so very far apart. A combination of entrepreneurial flair, marketing suss and enormous artistic talent has helped her to secure the kind of commercial success that most artists only dream of.

Known for, amongst other things, the phenomenal success of her 'sheep paintings' there can be no doubt that part of Gadd's success derives from a unique artistic style and subject. But it's equally true that she is an astute businesswoman and marketer.

For many artists, marketing is a dirty word, but on that point Gadd has this to say: "Don't be under the illusion that as an artist you are in

anything other than a business. You have a product and you want it to sell. The way I see it, you can either do that successfully by marketing your work well, or you can retain a misguided sense of 'integrity' and leave it to fate whether your work sells or not. I simply didn't have the option of not being commercially successful. I had a family, two children and a bond."

She goes on to add: "I've always maintained that an artist needs to have something unique and different. You should never try to ride on someone else's style. But I also know that the minute you have something unique and good, other people will try to copy it. So my strategy with my sheep paintings was to get them out in as broad a market as possible, as quickly as I could, so that there was never any confusion about who had the original idea," she says.

### Vital stats

Player: Ann Gadd

Company:

Ann Gadd, commercial artist

Launched: 1997

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## Broadening a market

It was a strategy that drove decisions uncommon in the artistic world. Instead of restricting her works exclusively to galleries, Gadd published books of the sheep series, a move that many artists might argue diminishes the value of the original work.

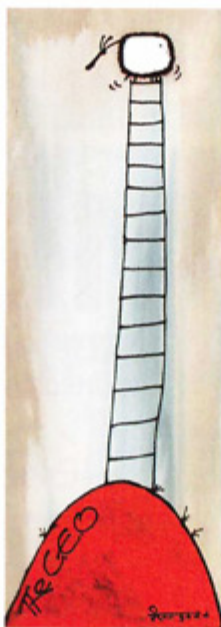
She begs to differ. "The books act as a 'brochure' for the work, getting it out there to a far broader market. They also help to stamp my ownership on the artistic style. And while only a few people might be able to afford a painting, many more are able to purchase a book, so publishing broadened my market considerably," she says.

It's all part of her strategy to take her art to as many people as possible. "I realised that many people don't visit art galleries either due to time constraints, lack of interest or because they feel intimidated by the sometimes austere atmosphere of a gallery. This means that none of these people would ever get to see my work if I restricted myself to galleries alone," she adds.

It's a strategy that's worked remarkably well, driving a growing groundswell of public demand for her work. "The public really created the demand – they loved the sheep paintings. I remember taking seven of my sheep paintings to a gallery on the Thursday and by the Monday they were all sold," she relates.

The gallery wanted more paintings, even offering to pay cash for them upfront. Unsurprisingly, they also wanted exclusivity. Gadd turned them down but she learnt an important lesson. "The minute you create something desirable, people want to own you. You need to know when to step away from the gold they are offering you and retain your independence," she says.

Independence is part of Gadd's DNA – she took an unprecedented



step, not to mention an enormous risk, publishing the first sheep series book herself. "I had an agent in London who was very enthusiastic but couldn't get the publishers interested. Everyone said it would never work and that I'd never sell more than 1000 copies. I didn't believe they were right so I published the book myself – and proved them wrong," she says. As a result she's managed to reap the full financial rewards of book sales, and not just the royalties.

## Thinking business

There can be little doubt that Gadd's business experience from a 'previous life' in advertising has stood her in good stead as an artist. "From business I learnt the ability to make decisions quickly without endlessly debating what to do. It's meant that I could catch the demand for the sheep series early on and really make the most of it," she says.

She also thinks like a business person, placing important emphasis on professionalism and service. "I try to treat every customer as I would like to be treated. More often than not, I try to give something away with each transaction – this might be free couriering, a free item, a

personal touch such as including a free card, often in which I have written the receiver a personal message. I have also attempted to break the archetypal mould of an artist of being unreliable, by delivering commissions on time," she explains.

It's a practice that other early-stage or single-operator entrepreneurs can learn from. Just because you don't have the corporate office, staff complement or high turnover of a large company, doesn't mean you should not behave like a professional business. "If you want people to take you seriously – whether that's as an artist or a business, or in my case, both – then act accordingly," Gadd comments. □

## ANN'S ADVICE TO ENTREPRENEURS

Learn from a seasoned business woman.

- » It often seems that success has come easily to successful people, but this isn't necessarily the case. Remember that for every success there have usually been previous failures. The only difference with successful people is that they don't let the failures prevent them from moving on to the success that might lie just over the horizon.
- » Take risks and find the courage to experiment – but be realistic. Accept that not every risk will pay off.
- » Push yourself to offer the world something unique, instead of simply emulating others.
- » Marketing is about talking to your people and you can only do this if you spend time with them. I use my shows to listen to what people like and dislike.
- » It's easier to fulfill a desire than to create one, so build your business around giving people what they really want – not what you think they want, or what you think they should want. To do this, you have to get inside their heads.
- » Stay close enough to your market to pick up immediately when something has struck a chord – and make sure you have the systems in place to be able to ride the wave and maximise the opportunity when it comes.
- » If you believe in something you should persevere – even when others tell you it won't work. It is possible to win out in the end.

