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# How I Turned My Hobby For Painting Into A Successful Art Business



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Founder, **Innerglow Art**

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1

FOUNDERS

0

EMPLOYEES

## Hello! Who are you and what business did you start?

I'm Sarah, an artist from Plano Texas and living out my life long dream of being an artist. I am a stay at home mom to two; my oldest Elijah is 17 months and youngest Skyla is 4 months old. My husband is also an entrepreneur, so our schedules are pretty flexible and our children get to grow up seeing us both pursue our passions.

I started **Innerglow Art** about 3 years ago. I specialize in painting custom abstract paintings for people's homes. While most artists avoid the route of commissioned paintings, I truly thrive at the connection of meeting people in their homes and painting a meaningful piece for them.

I feel like this sets me apart from other artists. I incorporate my abstract style with the color combinations to match someone's home decor to a size that's perfect for their space. I work closely with them for a few weeks to come up with a painting that's truly unique for them. My

paintings are also inspired by scripture and feel that there is a connection between the word of God and the movement and energy that is expressed through my paintings.

I am most proud of how my art allows for a connection with the buyer. To me, it's more meaningful to know the artist and their process than purchasing a piece of art in a retail store or gallery.



## **What's your backstory and how did you come up with the idea?**

Growing up I've always had this unique passion for art and all things creative. I was that artsy girl in all the art classes in high school and even took a few art classes in College.

“ When strangers were noticing my art and asked if I had a website, business card, etc., it really pushed me to start the business.

I never thought I could actually have a “successful career” with art so I majored in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology. I worked as an Assistant SLP for 2 years after graduating and worked for a pediatric home health company. I truly enjoyed working with special needs children with language disorders and thought this was my calling. However, after applying to grad school and receiving rejection letters for the grad program, I was completely devastated. I felt like a huge failure and was so discouraged. In response, I started painting again.

Around this time, painting helped me channel my emotions in a positive way and gave me time to reflect, pray and talk to God. It first started out as a hobby, and within a few months after posting a picture of a painting I created on FB, I was encouraged by friends and family to sell my art. Then opportunities opened up for me to share my art with others - donating my art to

non-profit organizations and charities, raising money for my friends going to Ethiopia, and applying to art shows.

When strangers were noticing my art and asked if I had a website, business card, etc., it really pushed me to start Innerglow Art. I was not only reaching the biased views of family and friends, but it seemed that others outside my circle were drawn to my art as well. This gave me the confidence to start an art business. Working for a home health job (where I schedule my client visits) gave me the flexibility to start my own side hustle.

Early on, I knew that if I were to start an art business, I didn't want to just paint pretty paintings for peoples homes - I wanted to paint with a purpose. I decided for every painting I sold, a portion will be donated to my parent's non-profit Compassion for the Philippines. They provide basic necessities and food for the poorest of the poor in third world parts of the Philippines.

With the experiences and basics, I learned in school about art and design this all informed my skills and technique with art. Creatives aren't usually skilled in business, so I sought to find a business mentor early on to teach me. My husband was also a business major and was super business savvy and helped out a lot.

When the custom orders started rolling in, it was difficult to juggle both my home health speech job and my growing art business. By the end of my first year with art part-time, I decided to quit my SLPA job and pursue art full time. Thanks to my wonderful hubby and his six-figure sales job at the time, his salary alone could support the two of us. This allowed me to give everything I had and pursue my dream with art.

## **Take us through the process of creating your first paintings.**

I started painting on large gallery-wrapped canvases sold at my local art store and bought basic acrylic paints.

I picked up a pallet knife and textured sponges for the first time and started to explore and play with these new tools I've never used before. I also was drawn to the element of gold and gold leaf and have incorporated that into most of my paintings to add texture and dimension.

“ Big dreams start out small and they start with making one decision each day towards your goal.

At first, it was difficult for me to put my art up for sale because I loved the paintings so much I wanted to keep them for myself and was so proud of what I'd created! My mother encouraged me to hold things loosely and "share it with the world." If I can just make one person smile, encourage one person through my paintings, I feel His presence and have gratitude in my heart.

After creating pretty art on canvas, I realized I could have my art printed on things like leggings/journals, I could paint on things like glass tile making coasters, and even jewelry. I love changing things up and creating fun artsy gifts which can be more affordable than a large piece of art.

## **Describe the process of launching the business.**

Creating a website was not easy for me and I had little experience with how to make one.

A friend suggested Wix, so I registered with them in hopes to create my own. This was tedious work that took up a lot of my time. I connected with an old school acquaintance who happened to be a freelance web designer and offered to help me out for free.

This website only showcased a gallery of my art with a contact form for people to request commissioned paintings, but you could not purchase my art directly from my website. My best friend was a photographer who took some amazing photos with me and my art, she also was a graphic designer who created my first logo design for free. With custom paintings and invoices, I manually kept track of paper receipts. This was very difficult to manage on my own so I eventually hired a bookkeeper who now manages my invoices, monthly reports, taxes, etc.

This past year, I've invested in a professional web designer/branding. She helped me with a new website, design refresh that truly represents my brand and my target market. I now have an e-commerce website.

The major costs upfront were art supplies and my time - the time is very valuable. Canvases and paints are not cheap. I learned how to use Instagram for the first time and felt like I was late to the game of growing followers, learning about hashtags and other insta things.

In the beginning, I used it as a public photo album of my art but learned that it could be adventitious to sell. I started posting personal experiences, I gave glimpses into my studio process and learned about hashtags. Before I knew it, my Instagram following began to grow. I was able to sell my art directly from Instagram. Through posts, through my stories, people were requesting if my paintings were for sale BEFORE I listed them for sale. This was awesome.

## **Since launch, what has worked to attract and retain customers?**

I feel like word of mouth is one of the strongest marketing tools. Throughout the past couple of years, my business and brand have grown to have a reputable reputation.

I always like asking my clients, "how did you learn about me?". My top answers are Instagram and through a friend. Currently, I'm learning how to use subscribers on my website (as a new tool I never used in the beginning) and nurture them to be up to date with my business through newsletters.

I also plan to learn more about FB ads, which I haven't got around to, but have heard great things about it. Keeping consistent posts on my Instagram and keeping up with my engagement has helped with people continuing to purchase my art.

I like to also offer new art items at art shows and craft fairs based on the holidays. For instance, at Christmas, I will paint on ornaments. Existing customers will come back around to support by purchasing these items.

## **How are you doing today and what does the future look like?**

As of today, Innerglow Art is profitable, while live art shows and arts festivals have helped a lot, we haven't been able to commit to as many shows this year since our second child. In total, as of Jan 2017, we have generated about \$113k in total sales and expenses at \$46k. We try to stay within 70%-90% in gross margin.

The expenses include the cost of job materials, charitable contributions, bookkeeping services, web design, and art show fees. With hiring help like babysitters and an intern, they are helping me maintain my business, not necessarily grow or scale just yet. Staying at home and taking care of two babies have been my main priority these days and currently only work 2 days a week 8am-11am. I will catch up on emails and put in more time after the kids are asleep at night. With a new e-commerce site, I'm working to create new inventory other than just commission work to make available for purchase. I'm also hoping my website can be used as a supplement to art shows, making my art accessible to anyone in the US rather than just locals.

I would love to continue to do art shows and festivals, but have to be selective knowing my time is valuable especially with the high demands of little babies. I would love to continue to have the help of an intern to maximize my time so I can focus on painting and creating new art, while she can do the other demanding tasks.

## **Through starting the business, have you learned anything particularly helpful or advantageous?**

Real talk. Pricing is hard.

I started my business making art for free. Mistake #1.

Then when I did charge I just threw out a random number I thought was okay based on what other abstract artists were charging. Mistake #2.

Honestly, I'm going on 3 years and sometimes I don't think I have it all figured out. But what I can say is my confidence and value in myself has come a long way! Here's a tip I learned from a business owner starting out: Double the price/cost of materials. Canvases, paints, varnishes, etc. all need to be considered.

People don't know that it costs quite a bit of money to make art! Making art is not cheap. You also have to factor in your talent, which is hard right?! How do you put a price on talent?! Do you charge by the hour? Not really, because what may take one person an hour to create, may take another person 7 hours!

So what do you do? If this is your business, then you should treat it like a business - and successful businesses make a profit. If this is your hobby, then that's a different story. I think the first step to pricing is to figure out who your ideal client is, who it is you're trying to sell your art to, then charge a fair price for a fair product..

## **What platform/tools do you use for your business?**

I love [Quickbooks](#) (for bookkeeping) and [Squarespace](#) (for website) is user-friendly and easy

to manage.

Some of my favorite editing apps for my photos are [Snapseed](#) and [AColorStory](#). I also use [Inshot](#) and the [PLANN](#) apps quite a bit for videos and Instagram.

## What have been the most influential books, podcasts, or other resources?

### Books

- [The One Thing - Gary Keller](#)
- [Linchpin - Seth Godin](#)
- [Purpose Driven Life - Rick Warren](#)

These books were influential in helping me discover my ultimate purpose, help me navigate through this life in a successful life by focusing each day on one main goal, and standing out in this world as a linchpin and valuable.

### Podcasts

- [How I Built This - Guy Raz](#)
- [The Jennifer Allwood Show](#) - for women business creatives
- [Artist/Mother Podcast](#) - artist/mother life of successful artists
- [Mom Struggling Well](#) - navigating motherhood biblically

These podcasts currently inspire me to keep creating and learning from other successful business owners. They also inspire and teach me how to be an intentional mother and wife, which are ultimately my top priorities and come before business.

## Advice for other entrepreneurs who want to get started or are just starting out?

Dreams without goals are just dreams. Jump in! I read a quote the other day “Myth: do what you love, and you’ll never work a day in your life. FACT: do what you love, and you’ll work EVERY. DARN. DAY of your life” Why do we look at taking the easy route or try to make a quick overnight success?

Big dreams start out small and they start with making one decision each day towards your goal. Being an entrepreneur is hard, it's risky, it comes with lots and lots of failure, it's not for everybody. I've learned that every failure is a learning experience, failure is a good thing.

Don't just aspire to make a living, aspire to make a difference.

## Are you looking to hire for certain positions right now?

I currently have a paid intern working for me who I outsource to run my supply errands, take paintings to the framer, drop off artwork to post office, etc. She helps with any small tedious task in the studio whether that be wiring my canvases or painting the sides.


It was a bonus that she's a creative film major; so she's able to utilize her film and photography talents alongside filming me in the studio. I will be looking for someone to fulfill her position


when she returns to school in the fall!

## Where can we go to learn more?

- Website : [www.innerglowart.com](http://www.innerglowart.com)
- Facebook : [innerglowartstudio](#)
- Instagram : [innerglowart](#)
- Email : [innerglowart@gmail.com](mailto:innerglowart@gmail.com)

If you have any questions or comments, drop a comment below!


-  
  
Sarah Hickey , Founder of Innerglow Art

  
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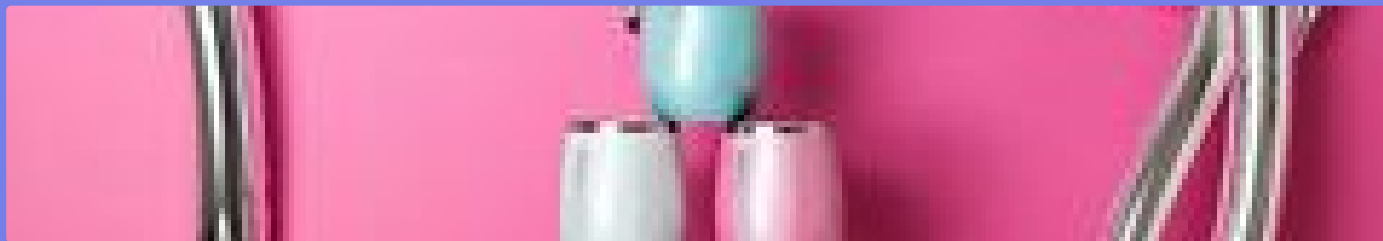
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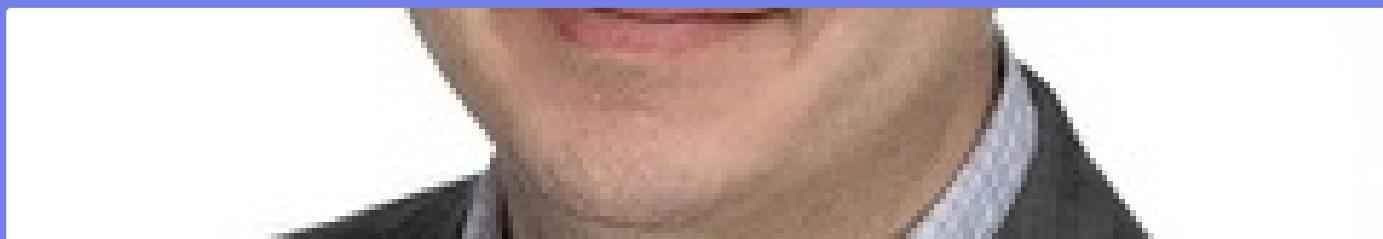
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