

# SHOP CLASS ENTREPRENEUR

USE PINTEREST &  
INSTAGRAM TO LAUNCH A  
HOME-BASED BUSINESS

THE START-UP STORY OF  
**DAKOTA MECHANIC  
STUDIOS...**



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**WRITTEN FOR GUYS**

# **Shop Class Entrepreneur**

*Using Pinterest & Instagram To Launch A Home-Based Business*

**By Jason Miles**

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## Introduction

I'm browsing the aisles of the Kona Flea market, and amongst all the imported junk from China, and local produce, I stumble upon a humble table that has a small collection of necklaces and glass artwork. It's not fancy, and the lady behind the table looks like a grandma more than a flea market regular.

As I look closer at her table, something catches my eye. It's a large marble, the size of a golf ball, and it has an incredibly interesting clear glass middle with an optical illusion inside that makes it look like it goes on for a foot or two, like it's much deeper than it actually is. She says,

*'My son makes those in his glass blowing shop – they are called Vortex Marbles, it is a fairly complicated glass blowing process.'*

Now she's got my attention. I am an instant loyal raving fan. I ask,

*'Does he sell them beyond the flea market, like online or in a gallery or anything?'*

She tells me,

*'Nope, he just makes them and I sell them here. We sell everything he makes. It takes him two hours just to start the process, and then if the marble doesn't crack he can continue to make it into the vortex illusion. He doesn't have time to do a website or anything. He's made really big ones that we've sold for as much as \$700. These are \$60 to \$120.'*

I am hooked, not only on the product, but also on his story. I tell her I'd love to buy one, and I'd love to contact her son. She bags one up and tells me she is including her son's business card.

An hour later we are at lunch, and I pull out my prized purchase. I gaze into it and become semi-hypnotized it is so cool. 'A Vortex Marble, wow'. I remember that she said she was going to put in one of her son's business cards, so I look for it.

What she included was a picture of her son, probably 2 inches by 2

inches, with his name on it. No phone number, no email address, not even a street address of his workshop. There is literally no way to contact the guy. I'm speechless; almost mad at the lack of marketing horsepower this guy and his mom are bringing to the party. They're finding some success, but they could do so much more. The goal of this bonus chapter is to stop you from being that guy.

The lessons from the vortex marble?

1. Quality radiates off of some hand-made objects like magic, and it draws people to it in a powerful way. You simply have to show the product for the magic to begin working.
2. Craftmen that have a story – immediately have an easy way to bond with prospects. Just tell the story.
3. If you've got that type of product, and that type of story, then your job as a marketer is simple. You just show the product to the widest possible audience you can, and then create an easy way for people to demonstrate their loyalty by purchasing and advocating for you.
4. If you are a shop guy, with some skills, and you want to start a simple home based business, then your job is to find a product you can make easily that radiates the 'magic' and do some basic marketing.

I'll show you how. I'll use as my primary example an exciting start-up business that I helped my brother-in-law set up in 2012, you'll learn a lot I promise. But let's start at the beginning.

You need more money. You are a hard working guy. You know how to make stuff in your shop or garage. But...

You haven't figured out how to turn that into a real business, so you can quit your day job and work from home, or at a minimum have a consistent second income each month. Let's say \$1,000 a month.

You think maybe selling items online is the answer. You want to learn what it would take because making money from your garage is clearly better than driving to work every day.

Great news – this bonus chapter, is written for you. Actually it is more like an entire ebook isn't it?

Here is what you're going to get in this brief ebook. I'll provide lots of small examples, and one in-depth example and by the end you will learn:

1. How to identify the types of things that will sell well and make you a nice profit.
2. How to make a brand name that establishes your credibility.
3. The best way to get top dollar for your items.
4. The minimum necessary Internet effort to succeed.
5. How to use Pinterest, Instagram and other social networks to promote your new business.

Learning to be an online seller is no different than joining an apprentice program for becoming a mechanic, plumber or electrician. Maybe it will take a year, maybe it will take two years, but if you stick with the program, you will learn this stuff. Then more pay and more opportunities will come your way.

Cool thing is, you can piece together a 'how-to-sell-online' apprenticeship yourself, for free, by finding ebooks like this, and guys like me, to help you learn what you need. Don't pay someone to learn this stuff, which is a waste of money. Just commit to learning.

I can guarantee you one thing, that if you don't try to build an online business, or you start and drop out of the program, you'll look back with regret. So stick with it.

Why should you listen to me? Well, I helped my wife work through this exact process and now her business is regularly doing over \$20,000 a month. I work with over 1,000 small business owners through our Liberty Jane Partners program, and I'd like to help you.

Finally, a quick note about the level of detail in this ebook: It outlines the general principles for starting an online business. There aren't detailed step-by-step instructions on how to use things like Google, EBay or Pinterest - just Google that stuff.

Let's get started,

Jason Miles

## **Part One: Finding The Right Product**

If you've gotten this far, you probably have an idea of the type of thing you want to make and sell. It's probably something you enjoy making, or something you feel like you can make really well. Maybe you learned it in shop class. For example maybe you love making wooden bowls, and you want to figure out how to sell them on the Internet.

Stop.

If you try to start a business this way, your chances of success are really low.

When it comes to making stuff you can sell for a profit, there is one rule that is more important than anything else.

### **Don't try to create demand, fill demand**

Don't make something because you enjoy making it, and then expect to figure out how to sell it on the Internet. That usually won't work. It is a recipe for failure. You might get lucky, but probably not.

So how do you determine if people are already buying what you want to make or find something you can make and sell for a profit? Here are four ways to easily find out:

1. Go to EBay and search for the item you are considering selling. See if similar items are being sold successfully. Look for the following indicators:
  - a. The number of similar items and the amount their selling for.
  - b. The results of auctions of that item, how much did it sell for, or did the auction end with no bidders.
  - c. The number of bidders in the auctions.
  - d. The number of views the auction item received.
  - e. Is any seller specializing in just that item, or a collection of related items?
  - f. How many positive reviews do they have?
  - g. How frequently are they receiving positive reviews, infrequently or frequently? (That will tell you how frequently the items are selling).
2. Go to Etsy and search for the item you are considering. Look for

the following indicators:

- a. Are there similar items?
- b. Are they being listed for a high price?
- c. Are there sellers dedicated to that item?
3. Go to Amazon and search for the item.
  - a. Are there similar items available?
  - b. Are there sellers dedicated to selling the item?
4. Go to Google and search for the item.
  - a. Are companies successfully selling the item or similar items?
  - b. Are the prices these companies selling the item for attractive?

## **7 Questions To Get You Started On The Research:**

1. Is there an item you can easily make, that is in high demand?
2. Can you get the component parts cheaply or easily?
3. Can you finish the item fairly quickly?
4. Is there a 'made in china' version that people are happily buying instead of an 'original'?
5. Is there a higher end version that sells nicely, that is likely made by 'craftsmen' or higher-end brands?
6. Is the item small enough to handle easily and ship without too much drama?
7. Is the item appealing to a certain type of collector, fan or group?

Let's look into each of these questions.

### **1. Is There An Item That Is In Demand That You Can Easily Make?**

There are a million companies looking for 'in-demand' items that they can start to manufacture. Every manufacturing business is focused on that concept. So you can bet that if you see a lot of demand for an item, then you're going to see a lot of manufactured alternatives available to fulfill that demand.

So you're thinking, *'how am I supposed to find an item that is both in-demand and that I can easily make?'*

The good news is – there are some in-demand items that have special attributes that make them a bad choice for mass manufacturing, or mass production. These are the items you can focus on. Here are two obvious examples:

1. Collector items that people are searching for, that you can find, clean up and sell. Ever hear of Frank & Mike the fun guys from American Pickers? That is the business they are in. Their business can never be out-sourced to mass manufacturers in China because the items they are selling are valuable because of their historic value. Technically they aren't making anything, they are just finding it, cleaning it up and reselling it. That is called arbitrage, and it is a good business.
2. Collector items that are valued based on the quality of their craftsmanship, made-in-America label, or the brand name that they are sold under. Some collector communities value the 'real-thing' and they are willing to pay for it. Your job in this case is to create a brand to sell your items under. I know, you're thinking – I'm not a world-class clock maker, how am I going to compete against the best? Later in this book I'll show you how.

## **2. Can you get the component parts cheaply?**

Because I just mentioned that your best shot at finding a product that will sell well is for collectors, you need to start thinking 'old stuff' not 'new stuff'. If you can find your component parts in a junkyard, or for free, or at near-zero cost, then you're off to a good start. If you component parts you need to make the item are expensive, or difficult to get, then you need to rethink the plan.

## **3. Can you finish the item fairly quickly?**

Your time spent on each item needs to be fairly short if you're going to sell the item for less than \$100 online. If you need to spend several hours on the item, then you need to get a really nice price to make it worth it.

Your real costs include two things, 1) the cost of the component parts, and 2) your time. Don't work for free –even for yourself. If you spend



time doing the work, then you need to make some kind of profit out of the deal.

A chunk of wood is pretty cheap. But if you need to spend five hours turning it into something valuable, then you better get five hours worth of money out of it when it sells.

But an hourly rate in your garage can be much less than an hourly wage at a regular job. Right? First, you're working at home, when you want. You are your own boss. You have no travel-to-work related costs. There are other benefits too, but I think you get my point.

My favorite show on TV right now is Duck Dynasty, the reality-TV story of the Robertson family and their Duck Commander business.

Phil Robertson started by taking chunks of wood, and turning them into duck calls. With a lathe, he could make them fairly quickly, then package them up, and sell them. In the show they say that they can make 1,000 a day if they 'need to'. And they sell for \$20+ a piece. So \$20,000 a day can happen by their small team. If they could only make 10 duck calls per day, they wouldn't be rich, famous, or on TV.

You might be able to find an old item, clean it up for 30 minutes and sell it for five times what you paid for it. That'll work.

You might be able to find an old part off of a tractor in a junkyard for nearly free, polish it up and sell it for a couple hundred dollars to John Deere collectors. That'll work.

You might be able to fix broken collector items and resell them for a profit. That'll work.

You might be able to find old books, carefully cut out the pictures, and sell them online as prints. (Yes, this is actually a real business model that many people are using to make a nice online income).

You might be able to take something that is garbage, or a recyclable material, and make it into a useful item, like a purse, bag, wallet, or other utilitarian object. The hipsters call this activity 'up-cycling'. That'll work.

#### **4. Is there a ‘made in China’ version that people are happily buying instead of an ‘original’?**

Supply and demand is at play anytime people want something. If there is a substitute that is cheap, that will adequately fulfill people’s interest in the item, usually, that cheap item will be very successful. Demand will shrink. Your opportunity will fade.

In some consumer markets the customers are easily satisfied with a low priced option. The companies that are trying to compete for that business are in a pricing war. It is a ‘race-to-the-bottom’ where the company that can squeeze out the cheapest production will win the market. That’s a bad situation to be in – especially if you’re the David and a giant company is the Goliath.

#### **5. Is there a higher-end version that sells nicely, that is likely made by ‘craftsmen’ or higher-end brands?**

Every house in America, from Bill Gates’ mansion to the humblest slum apartment on Skid Row all have a spoon in the kitchen or a cup on the counter. But the quality levels vary wildly, right?

In some markets there are a variety of consumers, and some are willing to pay very different prices, based on different values, desires, quality levels and prestige factors. That is the type of market you want to look for – and you want to serve the high-end of a market. Consider yourself one of these:

- A craftsman
- A custom builder
- An artist
- An ultra-premium seller

You might not feel like you can live up to those terms yet. But you can, if you pick the right niche and you create a brand that reinforces to people that you are one of these things. I’ll show you how a bit later in the book.

**6. Is the item small enough to handle easily and ship without too much drama?**

Aim for a product less than 20 pounds. Beyond that and you're going to have a hard time shipping it around the country and/or world. Even if the customer pays for shipping, it will be too hard to manage it.

**7. Is the item appealing to a certain type of collector, fan or group?**

The most enthusiastic buyers are collectors, fans or members of a historic group. Find a product that appeals to them, and you'll have a steady stream of willing buyers.

Let's look at the story of Dakota Mechanic Studios as our example of answering these questions in an interesting way.

## **Part Two: The Dakota Mechanic Studios Story**

Let me share the story of my brother in-law and his adventure in starting a home-based business using Pinterest and Instagram. I'm really proud of his new business, and our work together on it. I think you'll see a lot of lessons along the way.

As a staff member at Missionary Flights International, Brian Lites is spending his life on what he is passionate about – airplanes that are in service to support missions work in Haiti, the Dominican Republic and other islands in the Bahamas. That's cool.

From their Florida headquarters, Missionary Flights International serves over 700 missions teams in Haiti and Dominican Republic with air services like supply flights, emergency flight services, and regular passenger flights. They fly old World War II era DC-3's that can land on short runways and even on grass fields in remote areas.

Brian is the airframe mechanic in charge of keeping the old planes in good working order. It's a life well spent. Remember when the Haiti earthquake hit and thousands of people died, and many more were stranded? Brian's planes, with their unique attributes, were the only ones that could land in Haiti for several days as the airstrips were damaged. We were so proud of him and what the team at MFI was doing.

But as you might guess, some extra income would be nice. So for the last few years Brian and I have kicked around the idea of him starting a small side business that he could do in the evenings or weekends.

That idea started to click in March of 2012 when I was at his house in Florida working on [Pinterest Power](#). We were standing out in his garage and Brian said,

*'I've got something I think I might be able to sell online'.*

Those are magic words to me, so I said,

*'Tell me about it – what is it?'*

He said,

*‘See this piston – it is out of a Pratt & Whitney engine – the same engine that was used in the B-17 Bomber in WWII, and is used in the DC-3’s we fly. These old engine parts are not use-able as replacement parts because they are too worn out, and so the vendor we get them from can’t sell them for a useful purpose, so he just sells them to the Aluminum recycler for the scrap metal value. But that just seems wrong – these are cool old WWII era parts that should be preserved. I was thinking I could cut one in half and make book-ends or something like that, so airplane buffs can have it as a keepsake.’*

So we started talking about the idea. We talked about,

1. The market for these types of items
2. What Brian had seen online that was similar
3. Who he thought might be interested in that type of item
4. If he could get a steady supply of those types of items
5. How long it would take him to get it ready to sell
6. What equipment he’d need to do the work
7. How much he thought the items might sell for

Later that day we did a family outing to the West Palm out-door mall. We wandered into Restoration Hardware and guess what we saw? Giant desks and chairs made to look like they were fabricated out of vintage airplane sheet metal, but of course they weren’t really vintage airplane parts, it was just made to look that way. They were on-sale for several thousand dollars. They had other smaller pieces on display as well, that fit into their aviator related collection.

My first thought upon seeing the Restoration Hardware items was,

*‘Brian is going to make a lot of money!’*

So we went back to his house, and over the next few days he cut the piston in half, and bead-blasted it, and powder coated it. That is stuff he knows how to do easily, but it was completely new to me. The

finished pieces shined like an art-deco piece in a museum. The book-ends were totally cool.

After he was done we all sat around and worked on the hardest part of the entire project. The hardest question was - what to name his new venture. We needed to name it before we could make a website, logo and social media accounts.

The branding of your small business is critical. Let's talk about it, and about how we got Brian his name.

## **Part Three: Branding Your Small Business**

A good name, matched up with a good product, can turn into a good brand that has real power in the marketplace.

So what goes into a good name? There are lots of attributes that make it almost impossible to boil down, but if you cover these three things, then you'll be well on your way to success.

1. A good name is (obviously) available for your use. Google any name you come up with, and see if it is already used. If so, move on. Then go to [www.godaddy.com](http://www.godaddy.com) and search for it to see if it is available as a domain name, if not, move on to another option.
2. A good name is unique. Each word needs to be fairly 'available' in the mind of the customer. Can "AAA Auto Body" serve as a unique name? Nope. It's too generic and therefore no one will remember it. Don't fill your name with words that are generic, like 'XYZ auto parts', that is a mistake because 'auto' and 'parts' are two words that will never be associated with your brand exclusively. They are category words that you cannot own in the mind of the customer.
3. A good name is easy to say. Why use difficult or complex words. If your name is a hard word to pronounce, don't use it. Some words are long, but fun to say. Last night at dinner we said the salad had "edamame" (pronounced ed-oh-mommy) in it. Someone said, those are just soy beans, and I said, 'yeah, the marketers came up with edamame as a sales gimmick – make it fun to say and people will buy more'. People would rather say 'edamame' than 'soy beans'.

One great short cut for naming is to consider a proper name. My favorite example is Ben & Jerry's. Just two common first names, smashed together, and bam, a great business name comes out. Smith & Hawken is another example. Harley Davidson, Mercedes Benz, Boeing, and Bubba Gump's are all examples of good proper names applied to a business context.

So how did we settle on Dakota Mechanic Studios for Brian's business? We brainstormed for hours going over tons of possible options.

At one point Brian explained how the DC-3 airplane was nicknamed the DAKOTA by the British soldiers in WWII, and how any airplane buff would know that nickname. It had sort of an 'insiders only' appeal.

Then I recalled how Brian's gamer tag in XBOX is Dakota Mechanic, and how that is a phrase he's personally attached to pretty closely. It started to click.

I knew that we wanted to position him as an artist, so the word 'Studio' seemed appropriate.

At one point we said,

'What about *Dakota Mechanic Studios*' and everyone said, 'yeah, that will work'. It is not fancy. It is not trying too hard to be cool, and it conveys both the unique DAKOTA term, which will appeal to airplane buffs, and 'studios' which puts it clearly into the 'artist' space. The only problem is that the 'un-initiated' will think it is North or South Dakota related.

I jumped onto Google to see how competitive that phrase was and there was very little that came up. Then I jumped on [www.godaddy.com](http://www.godaddy.com) to see if the domain was available – it was.

Dakota Mechanic Studios was born. Now it was time to start selling Brian's first item, the piston bookends.



## **Part Four: Your First Selling Tool – Your Story**

If you've got a good name, matched up with a good product, you're ready to start selling and building a loyal customer base – it's the first step in turning your small business into a good brand that has real power in the marketplace.

How do you develop a good story? It's not hard, just follow these steps:

1. Think about your life-long journey and what has led you to create this business, and focus on this product.
2. Think about the experiences that have shaped you, or helped make you good at this particular thing.
3. Tell the back-story related to why you are passionate about the product.
4. Indirectly answer the question, "Why should I support your work".
5. Weave these elements together into a 'biography' that you can share online.
6. Use your biography any place 'about us' content makes sense.
7. Remember, people buy from people. People like to support a new business that is started for exciting reasons.

Here are three pieces of Brian's story that we wrote up, broke apart and use to explain his new business. These were first used on the EBay listing and on his website:

### ***ABOUT DAKOTA MECHANIC STUDIOS:***

*I've always had hobbies that involved making functional art, I guess since High School shop class. And usually when I make something, someone asks me if they can buy it, or buy a copy of it. Or I end up giving it away as a gift. So I decided to set up a little website, and start to offer things on EBay. I come across a lot of vintage parts off of old airplanes that are being sold for scrap metal. That's just wrong. Once a cool old part is sold for scrap it is melted down and lost forever. These parts are a window into the past, and a cool part of American history. And on top of that, a lot of them are truly interesting objects, that could be 'upcycled', into very nice functional*

art.

**ABOUT THE STUDIO NAME:**

*The **D**ouglas Aircraft **C**ompany **T**ransport Aircraft (DACOTA later written DAKOTA) was a name given the DC3 / C-47 by the British. The name DAKOTA became a popular nickname for the planes. So no, I'm not from North or South Dakota. But I am an airplane mechanic. I'm working to reclaim, restore, and re-purpose these old vintage parts and make them available to people who might like a neat World War II era keepsake. Even if you don't like some of the items, I hope you can appreciate my mission, and maybe even help spread the word about my work.*



**ABOUT THE ARTIST:** *Working on airplanes is a passion of mine. In my work each day I have the privilege of maintaining three World War II era aircraft. As the Assistant Director of Maintenance for Missionary Flights International my days are spent managing inspections and repairs on these aircraft. Missionary Flights owns and operates three DC-3's, which are based in Fort Pierce, Florida at the St. Lucie County International Airport. Our organization exists to "stand in the gap" for nearly 800 missionary families and 270 mission organization in Haiti, The Dominican Republic and the Bahamas.*

## **Part Five: Easy Internet Selling**

If you've done the market research outlined in section one to come up with a unique product that will appeal to a collector community, and created a unique brand name, and an interesting story, then your next step is to sell your item quickly and easily online.

The easiest way to sell this type of unique object online is via an EBay auction. Trust me, it is the best way to get maximum money for minimum effort. EBay was all the rage a few years ago, and through business choices they made, they did a lot of PR damage with their seller community. Many people walked away. But it is still one of the largest websites online, the largest online auction site, and has a massive audience. It is a great place to sell a unique item at auction.

I'm not going to walk you through exactly how to do an EBay auction, but you can Google it and find lots of great tutorials. Also check on YouTube for great tutorial videos. If you need a good book, I'd highly recommend Jim Cockrum's ebooks or Skip McGrath's books.

Why sell your item as an auction instead of just putting a 'regular' price on it? Here are five huge reasons,

1. Your items are a scarce commodity – you only have one, or maybe a few available to sell. You need to sell them for as much as you possibly can – an auction is the best way to get the maximum possible money for each item you have to sell. Imagine for example you sell your items for \$20 in a conventional 'buy-now' method. But if you can sell them at auction and get \$40 each, then you can either 1) sell half as much and make the same money, or 2) make twice as much money. Auctions are the best way to get maximum money.
2. An auction creates an event – and that is good. The best way to market any type of product for sale is to put on a big event. It gives you a finite window of time to promote the item, and get people to pay attention, and that is a good thing.
3. An auction creates built-in competition. When you sell items as 'buy-it-now' items, there is no concern in the customer's mind that someone else might snatch the item away from them, but in an

auction, that is the vibe that is created. See, when you list an item as a 'buy-it-now' item, you create the impression that you have a lot of them, and that you can make more. You shouldn't send that message to prospects. You want them to understand that it is a special, rare item.

4. An auction sets up a purchasing deadline. And in a selling environment, your biggest challenge is to create a sense of urgency, and the purchasing deadline helps create that sense of urgency. It forces people off the fence and into action mode.
5. An auction allows your customers to set the price, not you. This is incredibly helpful because if you set your prices incredibly high, then your customers, and competitors will resent it and get angry with you – that anger is a real problem in terms of the long-term value of your brand. But in an auction format, your customers are declaring the worth of the item. They are positioning you as a premium provider in the marketplace. Then, if you do sell items later as 'buy-it-now' items, you can use the auction prices as justification for the high prices.

If there is one thing I can do to assure you of business success, it is to start learning to run effective auctions for your items. The better you get at running auctions, the more success you'll find for the long-term. It forces a level of quality upon you that is a healthy pressure.

So if you've got a product that you are proud of – and you think it is a high quality piece, then you've got to create an EBay auction that really clicks with your prospective customers.

There are five primary steps involved in your success:

1. Take very good photos. If you're not sure how, Google it. Your photos are the ticket to high ending auction prices. So get a good camera, get good, natural lighting, and do your very best to capture the product in an interesting way.
2. Write very good descriptions. Your copywriting is incredibly important. Include
  - a. A detailed description.
  - b. Information on the history of the item.
  - c. Your story about why you are selling the item.
  - d. Your unconditional money-back guarantee – have one.

- e. Your 'about me' information, which you should make interesting and personable. People buy from people, so be a friendly, helpful, personable person.
  - f. A good name for your item. In Brian's case, the bookends were made from a piston that came out of an engine that was used in several different WWII era airplanes, the B-17 Bomber being the most famous. So we called them the 'B-17 Bomber Bookends' but then in the listing description we explained the details of the engine, the planes the pistons might have been used in, and how there was no way to know for sure which plane the piston came out of, but that it was an authentic piston out of the same type of engine that was used in the B-17.
3. Use a good EBay listing template. Pay the extra few cents and use a template that looks like it fits with your products niche or industry.
  4. Set up your auction to end on a Sunday night at 6:00pm Pacific. You can list it for 7 days, or 10 days, but target an ending time of 6:00pm on a Sunday night. It is one of the peak traffic times on EBay, and therefore a great time to have lots of people see your auction.
  5. Start your auction for .99 cents with no reserve price. In other words, your saying your willing to sell it for whatever the marketplace offers you, even if it is just .99 cents. That's trust!

Trouble shooting a failed auction. Let's say you do the steps involved, and you have an auction that ends for a very small amount. What do you do? You have three variables to sort out:

1. Decide whether the item is actually not popular.
2. Decide whether your presentation is bad.
3. Decide whether you have a good product, and a good listing, but you failed to get enough people to show up to the auction.

Let's look at each of these situations.

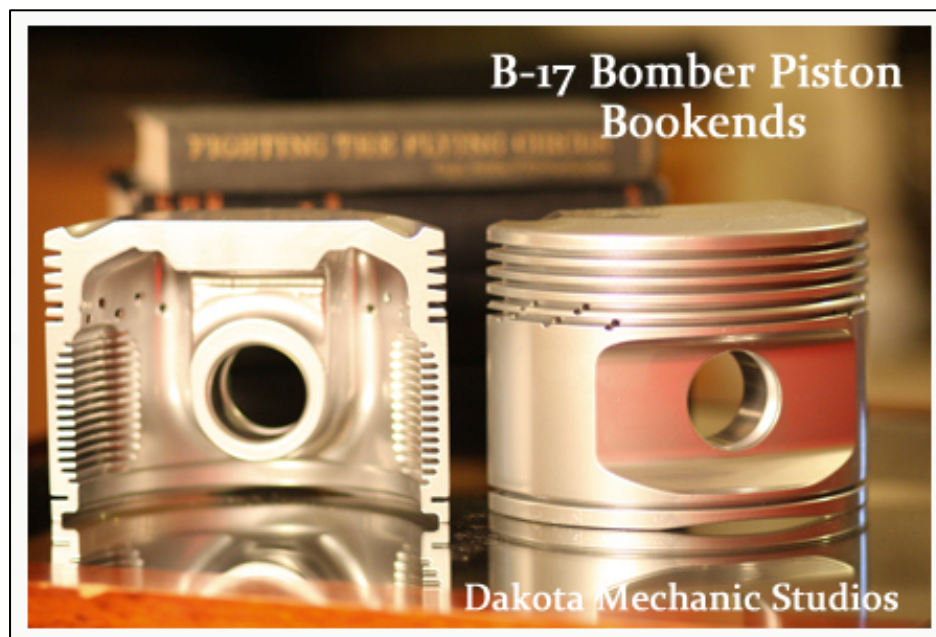
If your product isn't popular, then you made an error in judgment in the market research phase. You thought they would like it, and maybe even had a little bit of evidence, but clearly people aren't passionate

enough about your product to pull the trigger. Re-evaluate your basic market research.

If your presentation is off, then you can fix it. Take better pictures, write a better description, or do something else to create a better listing. Ask people to give you an honest evaluation of your pictures and your overall listing. Most auctions that fail have bad pictures, poorly written descriptions, and weird formatting of the listing. You want it to be clean, crisp, professional and polished.

If you failed to get enough people to show up to your auction, then you can solve that problem by focusing on the marketing. EBay keeps track of the number of views an auction gets, and so you can see if people are looking at the item.

Back at Dakota Mechanic Studios (aka Brian's garage) we had the product ready, the photographs taken, and the copywriting done for the listing. We launched the first auction. It sold for \$36. Here is a picture of the item:



After the success of the book-ends, and after they started selling regularly for around \$40, Brian started to add alternative product ideas, including a clock version of the piston, then a Master Rod version of the clock, and each item did well. Several of the items

started to get very nice prices, over \$200 each. You can see all of Brian's recent auction items, and see his photography and his copywriting at this URL:

<http://feedback.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?ViewFeedback2&userid=brianslites&ftab=AllFeedback&myworld=true>

Let's assume that you are going to work hard at the market research and find a popular product, and that you are going to work hard at the photography and copywriting so the item looks good. In the next section we'll focus on how to use a simple website, Pinterest, Instagram and a few other tricks to start to build a loyal following to grow your auction results.

One last thought on EBay – if you want an in-depth ebook on how to get ultra-premium prices, then pick up a copy of [\*Price It Like Picasso\*](#), my 9-step guide. It's available in all digital formats, and is just \$4.99.

## **Part Six: Growing Your Business With Social Media**

There is one principle in online selling, especially auctions, that is more important than anything else. Here it is,

**The more qualified prospects you can get to see your item,  
the better your auction is going to do**

It's a numbers game, so you want to boost the numbers in your favor.

EBay does a good job of getting people to see auction items. In my experience, on average, you can expect to get 100 people to view your listing. That's good. And if you don't want to do anything else to get your business going, then just focus on perfecting the system of EBay auctions for a year. That's a great approach.

But if you want to get maximum money as quickly as possible, then you need to find alternative ways to get fans and followers to show up and consider placing a bid on your item. You want to turn that 100 visits into 1,000, then 2,000. Yes, that's possible. We've done it for my wife's business.

Here is the step-by-step process we used to get Dakota Mechanic Studios up and running. I've broken it down into 5 Big Steps.

**Big Step #1 - A simple Website:** You can set up a simple website as a way to share more information about your business and your auctions. For Brian's site we used [www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com). We purchased the [www.dakotamechanicstudios.com](http://www.dakotamechanicstudios.com) domain name so we could use it so that when people search for him, that website will come up in the search results. You can purchase a domain directly through wordpress, or you can use an alternate site, like [www.godaddy.com](http://www.godaddy.com), which is what we used.

Don't be misled, getting a website set up is not hard, doesn't take any money, and can be learned fairly easily. Here is a collection of simple tips to make that happen:

1. Use [www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com). There are lots of online guides to show you how to do it in a step-by-step way. It is free.



2. Want someone to do it for you for \$5? Go to [www.fiverr.com](http://www.fiverr.com) and search for 'websites'. Someone will do everything for you quickly and easily. Search in Fiverr for the 'top rated' sellers and use people who have a good reputation.
3. While you're on Fiverr you can also get a nice logo for \$5.

**Big Step #2 - A Pinterest Profile:** Pinterest is a natural for physical product sellers. You take pictures for the auction listing, and EBay even has the Pinterest Pin-It button installed now. So how do you use Pinterest to support your new business venture? Here are four ways:

1. Set up a Pinterest Profile using your brand name, or even your personal name, and create boards that are focused on your niche, or industry.
2. Become a visual 'curator' for your target customer.
3. Share new products on your Pinterest boards.
4. Find, follow, and comment on related boards.


Let's look at each of these options,

**Setting Up Your Profile:** Setting up a Pinterest Profile that really clicks for your target audience is a simple exercise. You can see Brian's Pinterest Profile here:

<http://pinterest.com/dakotamechanic/>. You can see another great example, my business, here: <http://pinterest.com/cinnamonmiles/>. The elements of a great profile include:




1. I profile picture that will resonate with the target audience.
2. A profile name that is description of what you do.
3. A profile description that explains your efforts even further.
4. A set of links to your website, or twitter account – if you have them for your business efforts.
5. A call to action to check out your auctions or website – if you have one.

Here is a look at Brian's Pinterest Profile:





### DakotaMechanicStudios.com - Brian Lites


I'm an airframe and powerplant mechanic with Missionary Flights International maintaining three DC-3's. I also re-purpose cool old airplane parts. Check it out [dakotamechanicstudios.com](http://dakotamechanicstudios.com)



 South Florida


Repins from

 Erik Ranke

 Mark Donaldson




 Tassos S

Here is Cinnamon’s Pinterest Profile for Liberty Jane Clothing:





### Cinnamon Miles / Liberty Jane Clothing


Hi, I'm Cinnamon Miles. Co-Founder & Lead designer at Liberty Jane Clothing. We design trendy clothes for dolls & daughters and publish them as downloadable patterns on [www.libertyjanepatterns.com](http://www.libertyjanepatterns.com)...



 Seattle, WA

Repins from

 Ali Bleasdale


 Nadia H-McConnell

 Jeanne Fleming

**Pin things that your target audience would appreciate.** You want to be the ongoing visual curator for your target audience, or at least one of the sources for their visual browsing. Here is a collection of Brian’s Pinboards:

#### Rhett & Link Greatest


5 pins



Unfollow

#### Amazing Airplanes


52 pins



Unfollow

#### P-47


4 pins



Unfollow

#### Douglas DC-3 / C-47

40 pins



Unfollow

Here is a collection of Cinnamon’s Pinboards:

#### Liberty Jane Designs for ...

102 pins



Unfollow

#### Made with Liberty Jane P...

82 pins · 



Unfollow

#### My Custom Projects

4 pins



Unfollow

#### Costumes

31 pins



Unfollow

**Share New Products On Pinterest:** When you have a new product being sold at auction, pin it to Pinterest, so your followers there can see it. Even if they don't see it until after your auction is over, they will become familiar with your new item, and start to look for it on EBay. Include the link to the EBay auction, so that if they see the item after the auction ends, then they can click through to the item and see what it sold for.

**Find, follow and comment on related boards:** If you have a target audience in mind, then there will be countless opportunities to find, follow, like and comment on Pinboards that are targeting that niche. You have the opportunity to engage with them and, in a non-spammy way, make yourself known.

**Big Step #3 – Set Up A Newsletter:** When you have a website, you can start to think about collecting email addresses and emailing people when you have an auction running. This is the original and still the best form of social networking. You can simply ask people to 'sign-up for my newsletter'. Then send them a simple, to-the-point email about what you're working on.

To get Brian up and running quickly we used [www.mailchimp.com](http://www.mailchimp.com), a service that is free until you get a fairly big email list and then a fee starts to be imposed. You can integrate your mailchimp email tool into your website so that people can easily join your newsletter list. Not sure how to do that? Go back to Fiverr.com and work with your website person to get you set-up. It might cost you another \$5, but so what.

Use the free resources and tutorials at mailchimp to learn more about email marketing.

**Big Step #4 – Try Other Sites, Like Instagram:** Just when I thought I had Brian all set-up with a great marketing effort for his new business, he surprised me. One day he said,

*'I'm not getting as much interest from Pinterest as I am Instagram'.*

*'Instagram', I said. 'How are you using Instagram?'*

So he proceeded to show me how he set up his Instagram profile, and started taking pictures of airplanes and using the Instagram system of Hashtags to let people know about his work.

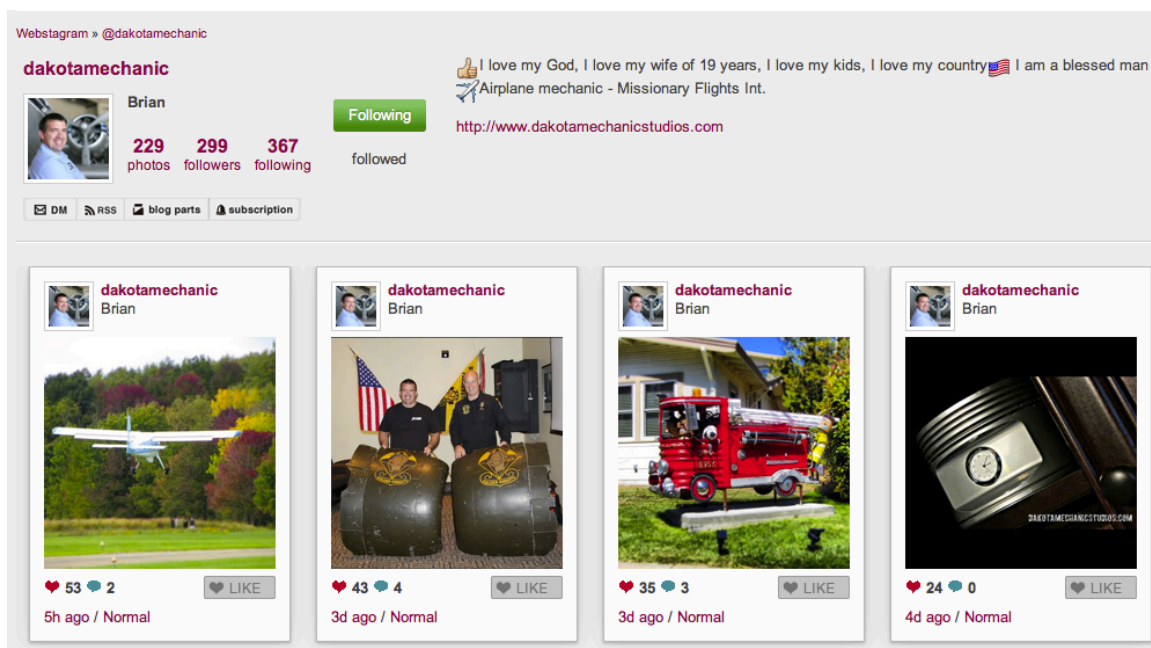
A Hashtag in Instagram, like Twitter, uses the ‘#’ sign, as a way to identify content that is associated with a specific topic. Like #airplanes.

There are lots of Hashtags associated with airplane enthusiasts. I’d imagine there are Hashtags associated with your product niche too.

What is Instagram? It is a mobile app, created originally for the Iphone, but now also available on Android phones. It has over 100 million registered users and in August of 2012 it passed Twitter in terms of the daily users.

Crazy, right? And you’ve probably never heard of it.

Here is a look at Brian’s Instagram Profile as seen through webstagram: (webstagram.com is a website that let’s you view Instagram profiles and content.)



Here is an example of how he posts photos and uses the Hashtag system to spread the word about his work:



Webstagram » List of @dakotamechanic » @dakotamechanic's photo

**dakotamechanic**  
Brian

[ Thumb | Mid | Large | Orig ] 5h  
Normal



♥ 54 💬 2

LIKE

#heliocourier, #instagrammer, #instagram, #avgeek, #follow, #airplane, #helio, #followme, #airplane\_lovers, #bestoftheday, #picoftheday, #photooftheday, #airplanes, #igdaily, #aircraft, #plane, #aviation, #instagrammers, #favorite, #instagood, #popular, #ohio, #webstagram, #instamood,

♥ [ @ ] twodudesreviews, [ @ ] fabscussel, [ @ ] pilotox1dia, [ @ ] tom\_gunnar, [ @ ] zsgap, [ @ ] edgaralbertino, [ @ ] whiskypapa, [ @ ] sschafer03, [ @ ] amir\_shmaltz, [ @ ] ryan\_the\_pilot,

» View all 54 LIKES

Notice that there is a heart with a 54 next to it. That means 54 people liked this picture. Brian has found more interested followers in Instagram than he has in Pinterest, but he's continuing to work in both platforms.

There are lots of online guides for how to get started in Instagram, so I won't go into those details here.

Last week Brian surprised me again when he said, 'have you heard of Gentlemint?' It is a new site similar to Pinterest that Brian recently tried, and has gotten good results from. It is [www.gentlemint.com](http://www.gentlemint.com). He is going to keep trying to find his target audience online and joining their communities.

Your niche or industry will likely have it's own niche communities or preferred platforms. Your job is to look for those online communities and join them, then build a following and share information about your products.

You might find a Facebook Fanpage to be the best route, maybe Twitter or Youtube. Just realize that Pinterest offers a few very special attributes:

1. It is low maintenance; you don't have to check it daily.
2. The content is 'good' for a long-time, compared to work on Facebook or Twitter, where your work becomes worthless after a day or two. In other words, people see your work in Pinterest for weeks, months or years after you share it.
3. You can target your niche or product focused prospects very closely. You can find people interested in your niche, follow them and comment on their images to start a relationship.
4. As you build an audience, they can do the Pinterest work for you by sharing your images on their Pinboards.

**Big Step #5 – Set Big Goals, And Grow Each Aspect Of Your Business:** When you've got a product that is selling well, then you only have a few issues to worry about, including,

1. How to improve your auction listings.
2. How to work less, and earn more.
3. How to get more fans and followers so prices go higher.
4. How to expand to dominate your niche.
5. How to find ways to scale your business up to the next level.

How is Brian doing these days? His weekend listings continue to get solid results. So he has set a goal of doing \$1,000 a month in sales. This seemed achievable because he was selling items that seemed to

have a fairly consistent auction result, some selling for \$40, and some selling for \$200+, so he knew he could simply plan on listing two or three items each weekend, and he'd hit his target income.

An extra \$12,000 a year, from a part-time business, isn't a bad starting point. There are lots of famous business leaders that started in their garage in a very similar way. Only time will tell how Dakota Mechanic Studios will do in the long-term, but one thing is for sure, the lessons Brian learned in started the business will change his life forever.

## Conclusion

The Internet, and Internet selling came along in 1995, just seventeen years ago. It is one of the biggest developments in the history of mankind. Many would argue that it is bigger than the discovery of America, bigger than the printing press, bigger than the Wright Brothers.

So the only question is – are you going to participate in this history making opportunity? I hope you do. You can start in your shop, and take your time, and build something of lasting value.

Let me leave you with a parting comment from Henry David Thoreau,

*A truly good book teaches me better than to read it. I must soon lay it down and commence living on its hint. What I began by reading, I must finish by acting.*

I wish you all the best in your online selling ventures.

Jason Miles

Ps. I'm truly grateful that Brian agreed to let me share his story and the details of his business. I hope you are too. Do me a favor and visit his auctions, share them on Facebook or Pinterest and support his work. Visit [www.dakotamechanicstudios.com](http://www.dakotamechanicstudios.com) today.