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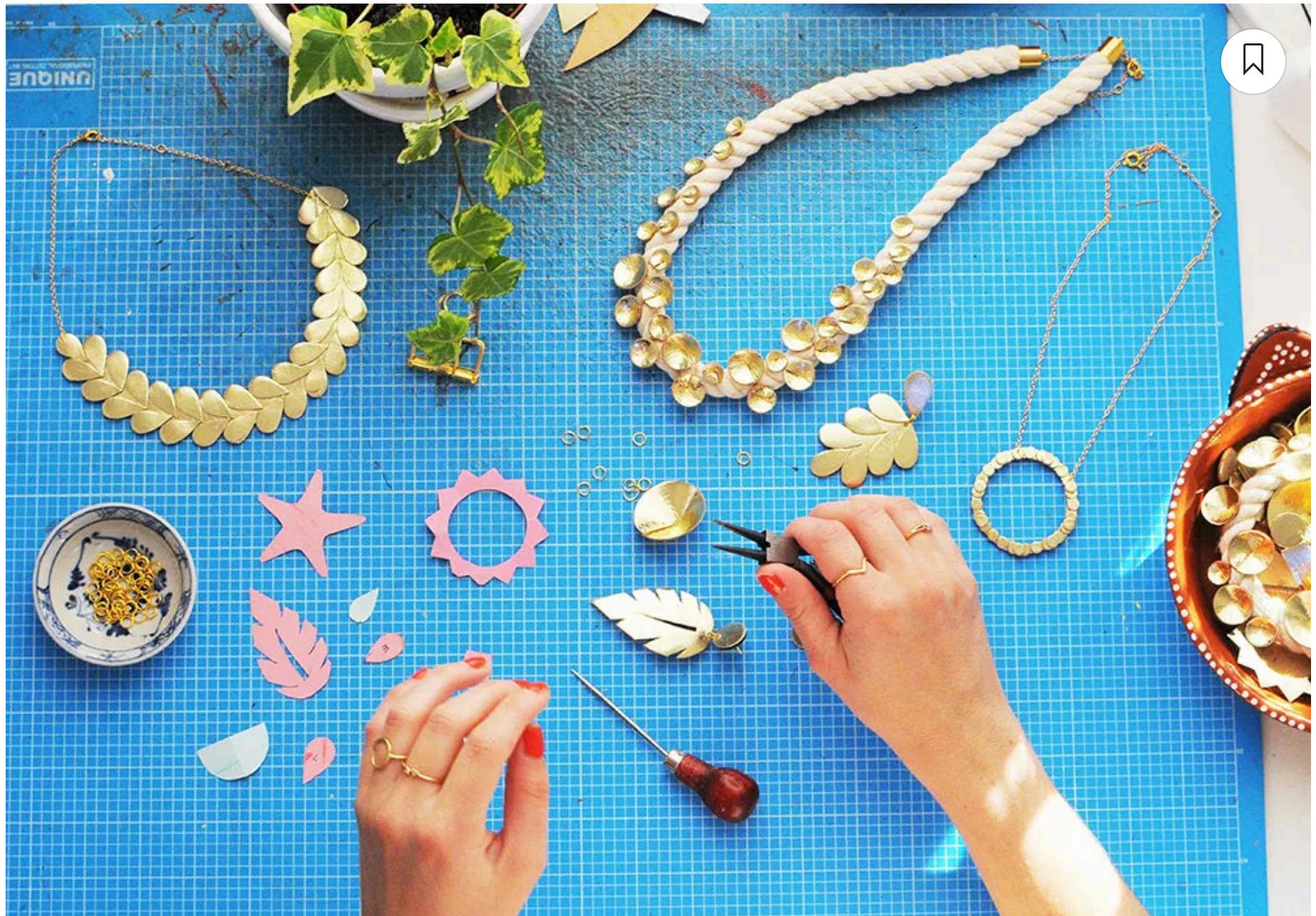
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5 Common Mistakes New Etsy Sellers Make



Experienced Etsy sellers share lessons they learned while building successful creative businesses on Etsy.
by Katy Svehaug



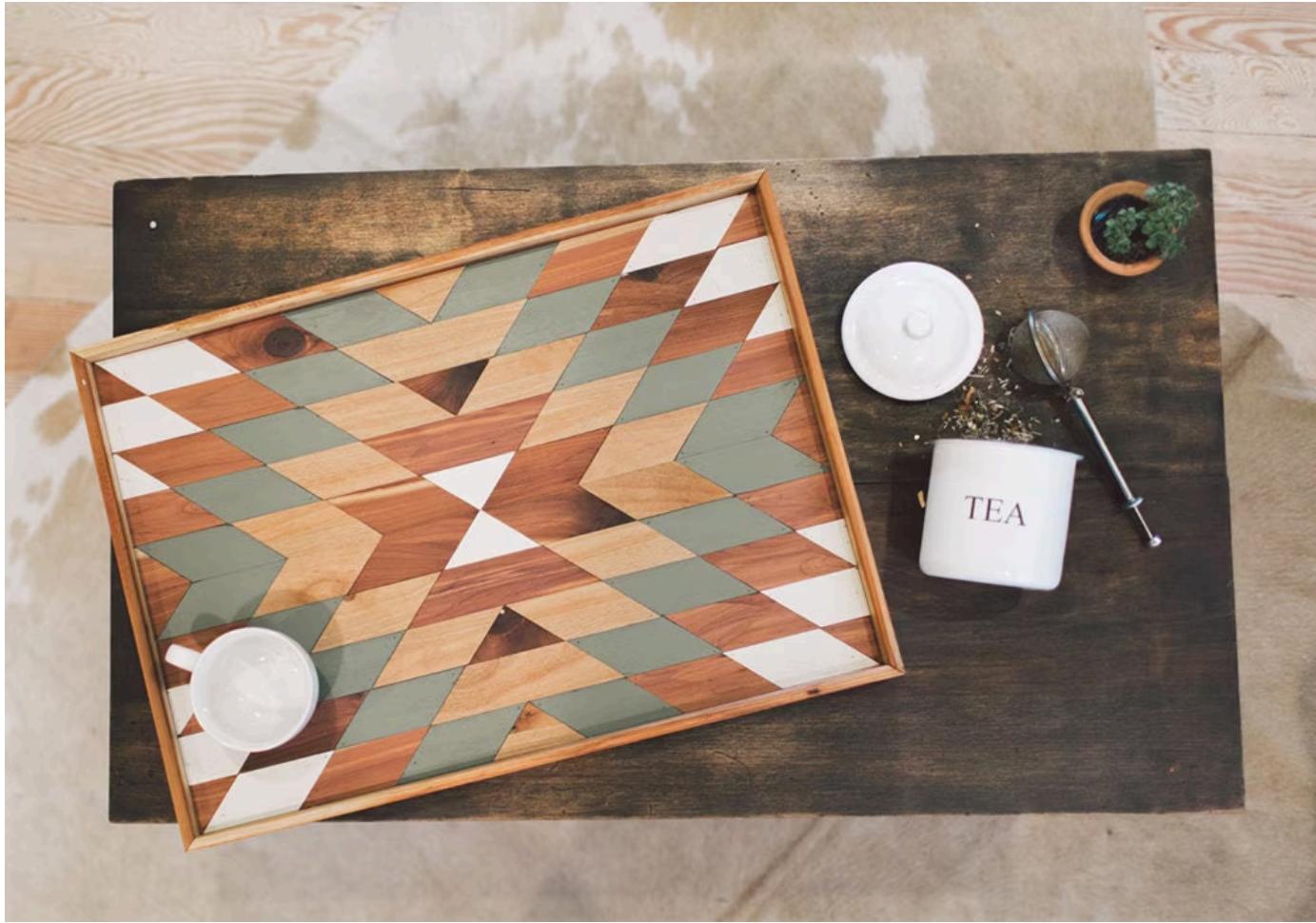
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From mastering product photography to developing an effective marketing strategy, starting a new Etsy shop can often feel overwhelming — just ask any experienced seller. “When I first opened my shop, I lacked confidence,” explains jewelry designer Pauline Hagan, “but the great thing is that hard work pays off.” Since launching her business in 2012, Pauline has turned her shop based in Prague, Czech Republic, [Benu Made](#), into a full-time job through careful planning and a diligent approach to business development. Read on for advice from Pauline and other experienced sellers about how to avoid common mistakes as you build your Etsy shop.

Mistake #1: Not focusing enough on product photography

“In my opinion, photography is the single most important thing for the presentation of an online shop,” says Janine Stone, the power-tool powerhouse behind [If You Give a Girl a Saw](#), a shop based in San Luis Obispo, California that sells wooden headboards, trays and wall hangings. “Photos are the first thing to either catch or lose the interest of a potential customer,” Janine says, “and they have proven to be one of the most useful marketing tools in my business so far.” Janine struggled with product photography for months after she opened her shop in 2014 before hiring a professional photographer. Now, her photos are well-lit with natural light and create inviting scenes that showcase the multiple uses for her products.



The [Infinity Wooden Wall Hanging](#) from Janine's shop can also be used as a tabletop or breakfast tray, and her photos help demonstrate the multifunctional nature of her products. Photo by [If You Give a Girl a Saw](#).

Pauline, owner of Benu Made, says her approach to photography has also evolved since opening her shop. "I knew from the beginning that plain, light backgrounds were ideal," says the seller, "But at the time I did a little too much editing in Photoshop, which distorted the colors." She has since developed a fixed process for capturing photos, using a DSLR camera and bounce card to photograph her

items on a marble background, utilizing the natural light from a nearby window, “ideally on an overcast but bright day,” she says.

If purchasing a DSLR or hiring a photographer is unrealistic for your business, using a point-and-shoot camera with at least 10 megapixels and a “macro” setting is a great way to ensure you’ll be able to capture quality, detailed images that you can crop and edit.

For more tips on capturing great product photos, check out the [photography section](#) in the Seller Handbook.

Mistake #2: Ignoring the business side of running a shop

“A lot of sellers focus only on the aspects of the business that are fun for them,” says Maresa Ponitch, owner of Brooklyn-based shop [Dusty Rose Vintage](#), such as curating and making. “They don’t realize what a small percentage of their duties that stuff is in the beginning.” Maresa recommends taking a methodical approach to starting a new business, paying special attention to pricing, expense tracking and developing a business plan.

Janine, owner of If You Give a Girl a Saw, agrees. “I think I speak for a majority of creative-minded individuals when I say that business is not necessarily our strong point,” she says, “but if you create a rhythm that works for you, the intimidation factor lightens dramatically.” At the end of each week, Janine sits down to electronically update her expense records, which makes calculating her income

and estimated quarterly taxes faster and easier. “I wouldn’t say I’ve nailed it — no woodworking pun intended — but I would say that through trial and error, I’ve found a balance that keeps a smile on my face.”

Read [Tips for Tracking Your Business Expenses](#) for advice on how to get started.

Mistake #3: Neglecting the importance of tags

The tags and titles you create for your listings help shoppers find your items on Etsy. Many sellers note that creating your tags is an ongoing process, which requires experimentation, patience and an open mind. “A good trick is to ask your friends what they would type in the search bar if they were looking for a similar product,” Pauline suggests. She’s also found that groups of words or “compound tags” work best for attracting customers.

[Shop Stats](#) are a helpful tool you can use to monitor the success of various item tags. When Janine started experimenting with minor changes in her wording to reach a broader audience, she used her Shop Stats to narrow down a list to 13 tags that are relevant to her target customer. “I’ve found that tags are constantly evolving,” she says, “So updating my keywords is permanently a part of my schedule.”

Want to know more about creating great tags? Read [Give Your Titles, Descriptions and Tags a Makeover](#).

Mistake #4: Not getting the word out about your business

Developing an effective marketing approach takes time, but it is an important part of building a following for your new small business. For Maresa of Dusty Rose Vintage, crafting a social media strategy was particularly challenging because of her diverse product offerings as a vintage seller.

"When you see an Instagram feed that looks amazing, it's usually because there are similar colors, motifs, models or other recognizable patterns that tie everything together," she explains. "I've made my social media more about the story of the brand's process than just about the visual aesthetic." As a result, engagement from her followers takes on extra meaning because it indicates a genuine interest in the work going on behind-the-scenes at Dusty Rose Vintage.



On the [Dusty Rose Vintage Instagram](#), Maresa promotes her brick-and-mortar vintage warehouse, products in her Etsy shop and special events, along with posting other brand-relevant content.

To find out what marketing approach might work best for your shop, take the [What's Your Social Media Personality Type?](#) quiz and get ready to start sharing.

Mistake #5: Giving up too quickly

"I would estimate that 85 percent of creative business owners that I work with give up way too soon," says Maresa. It takes time and work to grow a business and hone your product line. Three years after Pauline of Benu Made started her business on Etsy, her proudest accomplishments are the jewelry pieces she's created through her evolving style and creative approach — an evolution that has helped her shop grow into a source of stable income. "Selling online can be quite baffling at first, since there are so many new skills to learn," she explains. Spending time reading articles in the [Seller Handbook](#) helped her build confidence early on in her business.



A behind-the-scenes look at Benu Made's product development process, as Pauline sketches her designs. Photo by [Benu Made](#).

The more time, effort and thought you put into building your shop, the more you're likely to get out of it. "Watching the evolution of your shop as you and your business grow, you can't help but feel a deep level of gratification," says Janine of If You Give a Girl a Saw, as she nears the 100-sale mark. "It gives you the drive to keep going, keep creating and to work harder each day."

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Words by Katy Svehaug

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