

SELLING T-SHIRTS FOR FUN AND PROFIT



4 Tips To Help You Design And Sell A Successful
T-Shirt

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For the past several years, the t-shirt market, or rather the market for selling t-shirts online, has been exceedingly hot. Just Google "T-Shirt Success Story" and you'll find example after example of people who've started a successful t-shirt marketing business on literally nothing. Many of these people now have steady five figure monthly incomes all based on selling well-designed t-shirts. Obviously, this is of interest to anyone who wants to break out of the nine to five employment world.

So, why are designer t-shirts so popular? In a nutshell, it's because they are the ultimate niche product. As such, they appeal strongly to every person's desire to be individualistic and share that individuality with the world. It doesn't matter what your particular interest, hobby, lifestyle, personal ethos or identifier might be. Whatever it is, it can be expressed on a t-shirt that then "brands" you when you wear it. In other words, t-shirts remain popular because they make individual people stand out against the bland background of the day-to-day world. For \$20, they allow everyone to break the bonds of anonymity and proclaim their allegiance to whatever it is that floats their personal boat.

What's endlessly interesting, is that the t-shirt started out, and to some extent and in some form, remains an undergarment. It was only in the latter half of the previous century, that the "plain white tee" known to millions became a blank canvas for marketers who wanted to connect brand and lifestyle to the individual ego.

Today's t-shirt phenomenon can trace it's lineage back to the concert t-shirt of the 1970s and 1980s. Back then rock and roll was becoming big business. Big bands began to realize that they were a brand and that they could sell more than music to their fans. The fans, on their part, were devoted to particular bands and were proud to express that devotion publically. Additionally, attending concerts by big name bands carried social cachet. Someone who was able to score tickets to see Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd or the Rolling Stones not only wanted a memento from the big

night, they also wanted a way to tell their peers that they had been there.

Bands, on their part, realized that the profit margin on a mass produced and branded t-shirt was enormous. The public was more than willing to pay 10 times what it cost to produce the shirt. As a result, the t-shirt became a social statement and more and more marketers realized that there was a viable business market in selling swag to fans.

Fast forward to today and that business model is hotter than ever. The internet has made it possible to take the band/fan dynamic and apply it to any group of people, no matter how obscure their fandom might be. Sites like Teespring, Tees in the Trap, GearBubble, RedBubble, and dozens more allow savvy entrepreneurs to create and sell t-shirts to the tiniest of micro-niches. There is still a great amount of gold in them t-shirt hills.

In this article, we're going to focus on specific tips that you can use to mine some of that gold. We'll look the things that you can do to improve your t-shirt designs so that they appeal directly to the niche you're targeting. We'll also look at the things that you can do to sell more t-shirts to that niche.

Know Your Market

A lot of sellers get into trouble because they don't understand the concept of a t-shirt market versus a t-shirt niche. The niche exists within the market, but you're never going to find the niche unless you understand the larger market that supports it. Let's take a look at some of the more popular t-shirt markets that are out there.

- **Commodity Shirts** - There are fairly straightforward t-shirts that are defined by need rather than want. These shirts are usually work or event related and contain a specific logo or brand as well as a designation like "STAFF" or "SECURITY". Now there are numerous niches within this market but, by and large, customers here are looking for the lowest price available. Think \$10 per shirt or less.

- Novelty Shirts - These are shirts that are you probably only wear once. They aren't strictly need based like commodity shirts, but they aren't something that anyone really wants either, except during a specific event. So, think about t-shirts for a pub crawl or that contain a funny saying that references a specific occasion and you'll get an idea of what we're talking about. Customers here don't want to spend an arm or a leg. Think \$10 to \$20 a shirt.
- Pop Culture Shirts - Now we're getting into the meat and potatoes of the t-shirt market. These type of shirts definitely are squarely in the "want" end of things. Customers identify with the movie, tv show or game that the shirt is designed around and will easily pay \$20 to \$25 per shirt to broadcast their affinity. While this market is popular and profitable, you do have to watch out for copyright infringement.
- Specific Interests - These shirts are distinguishable from pop culture shirts because they don't revolve around bands, movies or games. Instead, these shirts are all about individual interests and hobbies. Think home brewing or Frisbee golf and you'll get the idea. This is another popular and profitable market that has the added benefit of being relatively free of copyright or licensing issues. Customers will easily pay \$20 to \$25 per shirt.

Know Your Customer

Right now, there are people out there who want to buy a t-shirt. It doesn't take magic beans or a Ph.D. in sales to get them to buy yours. All it takes is an understanding of why they want to buy a particular shirt. When you figure out this reason, motivation or desire, then you have the keys to the kingdom for that particular niche.

For example, people may want to show support for a particular political figure or issue. They may need a cool gift for a family member or friend. They may have seen someone else wearing a similar shirt and they want to follow suit.

The idea is that there are literally thousands of reasons why someone wants to buy a t-shirt. Once you figure out a specific reason for a target audience, you are already light years ahead of your competition. Using the reason you can design a shirt that hits all of your audience's buttons in terms of their needs and wants. You can put exactly the right words or use the right phrase that makes the shirt irresistible to them. Also, knowing your customer makes you bulletproof when it comes to getting plagiarized. Sure, someone can always copy your designs. However, they will never be able to steal your knowledge and insights into this particular niche.

Start With a Subject You Know

A t-shirt that you design will only sell well if people want to buy it. So, if you decide to design a shirt for a subject or a niche that you know nothing about, you are at a decided disadvantage. Why? Because you don't speak the language of the group that you're trying to market to.

People who are immersed head deep in a subject, be it a band or a hobby or a lifestyle, are very much members of the same tribe. They have certain shared traits, phrases, and tropes that they use like a secret handshake to identify the other members of this tribe. When you come in and try to sell to them without any prior knowledge of the subject, your designs are immediately perceived as coming from outside the circle of the tribe. Not only do these designs not resonate with the tribe, they are actively unpleasant to them. If you wear a t-shirt to proclaim an identity, then you certainly don't want to wear a t-shirt that brands you as someone who knows nothing about that identity.

If you're already familiar with a subject, then you already know some or most of the inside knowledge that makes that particular group tick. You aren't saddled with the hours and days of research that it takes to learn the language of this particular tribe. Instead, you can jump right into the deep end of the pool and start brainstorming ideas that will have a pretty good chance of connecting.

When Designing, Remember That Less is More

The best t-shirt designs are always relatively simple designs. Why? Because a simple design grabs the eye quickly and is also quickly understood. Think about a t-shirt as a billboard that people wear on their chests. In general, most of the traffic viewing that shirt will see is only for a few fleeting seconds. Any impression that the shirt makes has to take place within that time limit. If no one can understand the shirt in a few seconds, then the purpose of the shirt is lost. There is no communication of affinity in an interest of lifestyle simply because the message itself is too cluttered and, therefore, too confusing.

Keep fonts simple and readable. Keep colors to a minimum. Put the message first and foremost and put your mad Photoshop skills to servicing that message. The clearer that you can make that message, the more t-shirts you will ultimately sell.