



Value

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I'm often asked for advice on costing and pricing. It's a subject I will talk about if pushed – but I feel there are much more compelling questions about value that need to be tackled first.

For example: How much value do you put on your own creative output? How do you value yourself and your time?

Put a little time and energy into exploring these questions and you will then find yourself better informed (and maybe better prepared psychologically) to think about the price tag.

Self-worth

Levels of self-confidence and self-worth underpin our ability to confidently ask for the 'right' amount. These can affect – in either direction – the price tag we place on our own work. Having said that, underpricing is way more common than over-pricing. The statement 'I want my work to be affordable' can be a subtle cover up for not having the confidence to ask for a higher price.

Remember the thousands of hours that have gone into learning your craft. A local plumber may well be charging a far higher hourly rate on the basis of far fewer hours of training. This must not be forgotten.

Self-worth not only affects the figures we write on our price lists - it can also skew our perception of who our real audience is. The danger is you maybe pitching too low, to the wrong set of customers, because you don't feel confident about pitching to a more appropriate higher level target market.

Perceived value

The truth of the matter is that it's your customer, not you, that will decide the value of the work and therefore the price that they will pay.

Works of art exchange hands for large sums of money because someone perceives them to have that value. Putting aside the market forces of commercial 'art trading', how is that perception of value created?

Testing your assumptions

Don't rely solely on your own judgment. Over the years you may develop a feel for pricing, but that still doesn't beat testing your hunches by getting out there amongst real people and asking questions. Do not rely on surveys. Do not ask family and friends. Do get feedback from peers – at the very least to find

out that you are not alone in your struggle. But at the end of the day, a sample of your 'ideal customers' will give you the best guide.

This is not a struggle that goes away – it's a constant in the life of all freelancers. Every time you give birth to a new product or range, all of this needs to be re-examined.

Location, location.

The same object will fetch silly prices in Harrods and yet be available for a few pounds on your local market. People in Harrods tend not to be thinking about cost. The decision is made simply on whether they want the thing or not. They don't make their decisions on the basis of affordability, but on whether they value the work enough to want it in their home or workplace.

What if you were to seek out and pitch your work to high net worth individuals with a much higher level of disposable income? You've tried, you say, and can't connect with them, well, what if those people are in a different city, region or country? Maybe your audience is in Dubai or New York.

Context is important – explore the 4 P's

There is a marketing exercise called the 4 P's that you can use to help you check that you are applying the right 'mix' of business tactics. The 4 P's go as follows:

Product: What are you selling – is it right for your ideal customer group?

Price: Is the price right for this group?

Promotion: What techniques and incentives are you using to attract and engage customers?

Place: Where are you focusing your marketing efforts?

Each element of the mix needs to be right and properly interrelated to the others for the mix to work. For example a high value item probably won't sell if it is being promoted into a market that is principally focused on low value items. Where do your ideal high value customers gather – where do they look to find what they want need? Where will you find the maximum footfall for your type of work?

Who do you pay attention to?

I often talk to people who are conflicted because different people are giving them different messages about the value of their work. 'What do I do about the people who say they can't afford it?' they ask.

The truth is that the ones that say – 'Great work, great price' are your true customers – find more of them – ignore the latter. They never were and never will be your customer so stop wasting time trying to convert them. Never push against closed doors.

How to add value

The one thing that really adds value to your work and encourages people to spend more time thinking about it, is the quality of the story you tell. People aren't just investing in the product of materials and time anymore – they want to buy a bit of social capital – something that they can talk about, feel a connection with, and understand on a deeper level. You need to give them that information. The most visited page any craftsperson's website – after the gallery of images – is the About Me page. Use this to tell the most compelling story you can about yourself, your inspiration, your values, and the design and making of the work. This alone adds value and helps create a bond of shared values with the customers that really matter. By the way, there's another video all about that in this series.

What if none of the above are working?

If, hand on heart, you have tried exploring all of the above and your work is still not selling at the right price in any volume you must seek advice and support. Don't completely exhaust yourself trying the same tactics over and over again. Find a creative mentor to help you explore the quality of your work. Join makers' groups. Take up opportunities to meet with your peers, seek feedback and get some objective review of what you are doing. For example, some networks run regular surgeries for exactly that reason.

There may well be things that can be put right fairly simply by talking to someone who has been down the road before you. Asking for help is not an admission of failure – it's a mark of integrity.

Above all do what you must do to help you gauge and internalise the value system you work within. This will really boost your confidence and help you price your work far more accurately.