

BOOTH TO BANK START SMART



FROM KITCHEN TABLE TO FIRST SHOW
WHERE CREATIVITY MEETS OPPORTUNITY

BY DEB FLOOK & MARIDEE HANSELMAN

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About Us



The Driving Force Behind ForgeAhead!

We're Deb & Mare — two creators who turned kitchen-table projects into thriving studios, placed our work in shops, built success at busy art shows, and now share it all in our book: *Booth to Bank ~ Start Smart ~ From Kitchen Table to First Show — Where Creativity Meets Opportunity.*

Our journey started small, like so many artists: a kitchen table, a few supplies, and the dream of making creativity pay its own way. Over time, we grew into full studios, placed our work in shops, launched successful art-fair booths, and eventually developed the step-by-step systems that became our ***Booth to Bank Series***:

1. **Booth to Bank: Start Smart**
From Kitchen Table to First Show — Where Creativity Meets Opportunity
2. **Booth to Bank: [Level Up](#)**
From Tent to Triumph — The Booth to Bank Way
3. **Booth to Bank: [No Booth? No Problem!](#)**
Where Artists Meet Opportunity — Stay Creative, Stay Home, Still Thrive

Our mission is simple: to help creative people succeed on their own terms. Whether you're painting, potting, sculpting, making jewelry, or still finding your niche, you'll find real tips, honest stories, and proven strategies here. We're here to make the business side of creativity easier — and a lot more rewarding. Because every artist deserves to not just create... but to thrive.

Introduction: Why Booth to Bank?

Imagine walking into an art show, your booth set up is just the way you envisioned. The colors pop, the display flows, and you even created a little sign to promote the show on Instagram — letting your local followers know exactly where to find you. People stop, not just to look, but to buy. Your work is leaving with customers who can't wait to share it with others. And you? You're not only covering your costs, you're building profit, confidence, and momentum. Success! It feels amazing.



That's the dream every artist has. But the truth is, most of us don't start there. We started with wobbly tables, trial and error, and a lot of "what ifs". We learned by showing up, making mistakes, and slowly piecing together what actually works.

This book is that map — a clear guide so you don't have to stumble through the same missteps we did. Inside, you'll find real stories, simple steps, and strategies you can use right away to turn your creativity into income.

Our journey wasn't smooth, but it was worth it. And now, *Booth to Bank ~ Start Smart* is here to help you find your own version of success — faster, smarter, and with a lot more joy.

Chapter 1: Getting Started — Kitchen Table to First Show

Every journey has a beginning, and for many artists, it's not in a studio or a fancy workshop. It's at the kitchen table surrounded by scraps, supplies, and a spark of curiosity. That's exactly how Deb's story began.



“I started making wood disc earrings with pretty paper for myself, just sitting at a card table,” Deb remembers. “At the time, I was working in the hospitality business, living in this beautiful old mansion with my husband. Guests would come for tours, suppers, and overnights — and right there, on that little table, sat my creations. People noticed. They’d ask, ‘Do you sell these?’ That’s when it hit me — people wanted what I was making.”

That moment of validation — when someone outside your circle sees value in your work — is often the first turning point for an artist. For Deb, it lit a fire.

She soon discovered lampwork beads and thought, “They’re so pretty — I need to figure out how to make them.” Not long after, a photograph stopped her in her tracks: a brilliant enamel piece on Yucca Bloom. She didn’t even know what enameling was at the time, only that she wanted those vibrant colors for herself.

“I tracked Yucca Bloom down on Facebook, watched her video, and realized it was enameling. I knew right then I had to try it. I ordered a sample kit from Thompson Enamels on the spot.”

With her first enamel pieces finished, Deb nervously posted them on Facebook. When a professor from Western Michigan University commented that they were “great,” she was elated — secretly thrilled to her core. That was the moment she knew: she’d found her niche.

“I fell in love. This is what I wanted to do. I made so many earrings... and I realized I’d either have to sell them or give them away for the rest of my life.”

Still, moving from creating at home to showing in public takes courage. Deb describes her first show — the 2014 holiday event at a local nature center — as a leap of faith.

“I went in with fear and trembling, just wanting to see if it would sell. I told myself, if these pieces sell, I’ll know I have a career. If they don’t... well, maybe not.”

The pieces did sell. That single day confirmed what she had suspected: her art had a place in the world. For two more years she balanced her

hospitality work with her creative business, until she finally made the decision to step away and pursue her art full time.

Every artist starts somewhere — and often it's messy, uncertain, and a little scary. The lesson from Deb's story is simple: start where you are, pay attention to feedback, and take the leap even if you're trembling. That first show might just change your life.

Chapter 2: Mare's Story — Finding the Right Fit for You

When it came time for me to think about shows, I had to ask a different question: is this the right fit for me?

I studied fine arts at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa, and spent a semester abroad in Florence, Italy. My love was silversmithing. After graduation, I wanted to dive into the jewelry world — but life had other plans. I went west to California with Anth, where he studied at USC and dreamed of politics. I dreamed of being a silversmith.

Jobs in silversmithing were scarce, while computer programming was everywhere. I'd already done computer work in college, so I slipped into that world for “a few years” that turned into decades. Eventually, I returned to Kalamazoo, Michigan, craving art again. I signed up for jewelry classes at the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, new equipment, new skills, new friends in the art world — and that's where I met Deb, teaching enameling. I fell in love with the medium and decided: Deb's creative world of art shows sounded fun, exciting and decided immediately, I'd give shows a try.

Deb guided me on everything I'd need to do art shows the right way: the right tent, heavy water weights, tables, tall chair, lights — the full setup. I ordered it all on Amazon. The next thing I knew, I had enormous boxes stacked outside my door.



Those exact boxes were not at my door, but you get the idea, right? And that's when reality hit. The tent alone was so big I'd need a new vehicle just to haul it, plus tables, a tall chair, displays, my jewelry, and all the extras.

Setting up the tent requires two people, and hauling gear from auto to the designated booth place would require a wagon and many trips. For me, doing shows solo just didn't add up.

So I pivoted. Instead of doing the show circuit, I chose to sell my jewelry through boutiques and resort-town shops. It turned out to be the perfect fit.

Mare's Words of Advice: "If you're considering shops instead of shows, do your homework. Scout locations, set up appointments with shop owners, and always bring a few samples of your work along with a business card and a simple display plan idea that fits their space. Pay attention to how much room the shop actually has for your art. Remember—shopkeepers are busy. Dropping in unannounced with your samples can overwhelm them and leave the wrong first impression."

"Be sure you understand the commission structure before you agree. A fair split is usually 40/60 in the artist's favor, though 25/75 is excellent, if you can get it. But don't settle for a deal where the shop keeps the majority of the profit like 60%—your art deserves better."

Every artist has to find the sales path that fits their life. Shows aren't the only option. What matters most is that your art is priced appropriately by you and for you to profit nicely and that you place your work in the right arena, where it will reach people who truly value it and pay the price on the tag. Usually, if you are in the right arena, and a customer loves your work, it sells.

In other words, if your art sells for around \$10 retail, a flea market could be a good fit. But if your work is priced at \$75 or higher, the flea market isn't the right place—bargain hunters dominate that scene, and they're not likely to pay what your art is truly worth.

Chapter 3: Getting Accepted Into Shows

Once you've found the kinds of shows that fit your work, the next hurdle is getting in. Applications can feel intimidating — photos, fees, forms — and rejection stings. But Deb's story proves it's all part of the journey.

"I didn't know the first thing about applying. You pay the fee, you send the pictures, you wait. And sometimes? You don't get in. It's that simple."

Most shows require: an application fee (often \$30–\$50, nonrefundable), 3–5 product photos plus one booth photo, and a short artist statement. Bigger or juried shows may ask for more, and entry fees can climb from \$75–\$200+ for regional shows.

"Don't give up. 'Three strikes you're out' doesn't apply here. Sometimes it takes six tries before you get in — but eventually you will."

Rejection isn't personal. It might mean the show is full, your photos didn't stand out this time, or simply that your style wasn't the best match for that jury. The important part is persistence.

At first, Deb didn't even know the difference between juried and non-juried shows. Non-juried are first-come, first-served — easier to get into, but less curated. Juried shows require review by a panel and are more competitive, but they usually draw buyers who come ready to spend.

"My advice? Invest in good pictures of your work. It's the first impression — and sometimes the only impression — a jury gets."



The application process is part of becoming a professional. Every artist faces rejection, but persistence pays off.

ZAPP or Zapplication.org is a fantastic resource for discovering art shows across the nation. It lists when and where the shows take place, application deadlines, and exactly what you'll need to apply—like photos and an artist statement.

Tip: Many shows require a photo of your booth setup. If you're just starting out and don't have one yet, look for smaller local shows that don't require booth photos for acceptance. Take pictures with your phone of your booth before the crowds arrive! Another option is to set up a simple “practice” or “dummy” booth at home—indoors or outdoors—and take clear, well-lit pictures. These photos should work just fine for your applications.

Tip: Many shows open applications 7+ months ahead, with deadlines to submit your application to the show 4 months out—plan early to lock in your spot!

Chapter 4: Setting Up for Success — Booth Design & First Impressions

Once you've been accepted into a show, the real fun — and sometimes the real stress — begins. Setting up your booth is more than putting a table and tent in place. It's your storefront, your first impression, and your invitation for people to step in.

“At first, I thought all I needed was a table and a cloth. But then I walked around and saw other booths — the color, the signage, the way people displayed their work — and I realized I had to step it up.”



Deb's Art Fair Booth (above) created a good experience and successful show.

Shoppers don't just buy art; they buy the experience. A strong booth makes people curious. A messy or empty booth makes them walk past.

One of Deb's first mistakes was putting too much on the table. "I thought more pieces meant more sales. But really, it just overwhelmed people. Less is more.

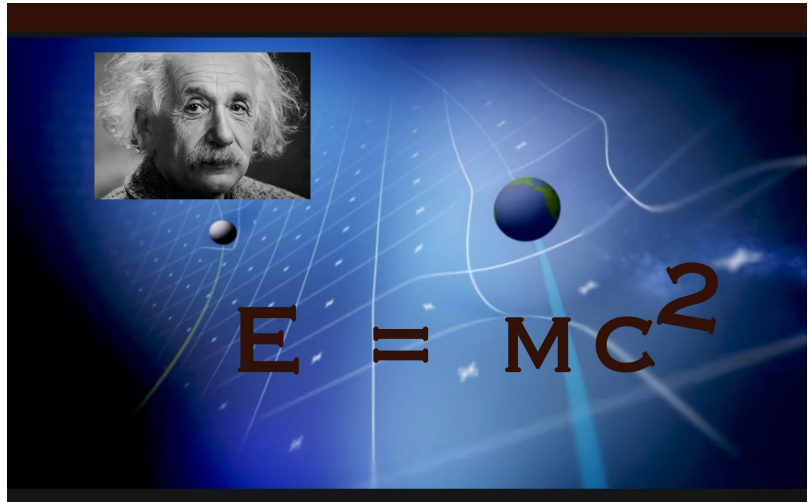
Good lighting, neat table coverings, and a welcoming smile go a long way. Once Deb invested in table risers, better clothes to cover the tables, and a clear sign of what her artwork and shop name were, and large images of her jewelry in her brand colors, her sales went up. People saw her as a real artist, not just a hobbyist.

Your booth is your stage. Even small upgrades make a big difference in how people see your work — and whether they decide to buy.

Chapter 5: Pricing for Beginners

If there's one topic that makes every artist hesitate, it's this: what should I charge? Pricing feels personal, uncertain, and often emotional. But it doesn't have to be impossible. Keep things in perspective. It's not rocket science or Einstein's $E = mc^2$.

Deb realized, "Pricing was the most difficult thing for me. At first, I didn't charge enough. I just wanted people to buy my work. Over time, I realized my pieces had more value than I gave them credit for — and discovered people were willing to pay for them."



There are formulas, but part of pricing is simply paying attention: looking at what similar pieces sell for, adjusting for location, and trusting that sometimes people will pay more than you think — if they love the piece.

"You need to learn what the market will bear. Pricing is a balance of research and gut instinct."

A simple starter formula is:

$(\text{Materials} + \text{Time} \times \text{Hourly Rate}) \times 2 = \text{Retail Price}$

For example, if materials cost \$10 and you spend 1 hour valued at \$20/hour, the total is \$30. Multiply by 2 = \$60 retail.

Find your arena. Find your audience. In other words, choose a place to show your artwork where pieces are priced in the same range as yours. Think of it this way: if you're selling artwork priced at \$200 or more, a flea market isn't the right fit. Those spaces attract bargain hunters, not customers and/or collectors willing to invest in higher-priced art. Even if your creations are extraordinary, they won't get the appreciation—or the sales—they deserve in the wrong arena.

Successful booths also offer a range: low-priced impulse buys, mid-range bread-and-butter items, and high-end statement pieces.

Deb says, "I charged too little for years. Now I know better — and so will you."

Chapter 6: Selling Without Selling

The best booths aren't just about what you sell — they're about how people feel when they step inside. Shoppers don't want to be pressured; they want to be invited.

Deb's booth is wide and open, giving shoppers plenty of space to step inside. Warm lighting makes the booth inviting and highlights her art beautifully at eye level. It's a simple setup, but it works wonderfully well.



“I realized early on, people don't like feeling cornered. They need space to walk in, look around, and discover things on their own. That's when sales happen naturally.”

A few simple choices can make a huge difference: keep the booth open, avoid bright orange extension cords, raise displays to eye level, and put clear price tags on everything.

“I found that when people say, ‘Oh, that’s pretty,’ it’s a good sign. Even if they don’t buy right then, you know your art connects. The key is letting them discover it without hovering.”

Candles, fiber arts, woodworking, ceramics, sculptures and/or paintings — every medium has its audience. What matters is how you present it.

“The booth is your stage. Set it up right, and you don’t have to do the hard sell.”

Chapter 7: Talking to Customers

For many artists, the hardest part of selling isn't the making, the packing, or even the booth setup. It's talking to strangers.

"I'd worked in hospitality for years, giving tours, hosting suppers, and welcoming people into a big old mansion. Talking to people was second nature to me."

But not everyone starts out comfortable. Deb's grandchildren, who sometimes helped her at shows, were terrified to talk to customers at first. Over time, they relaxed. The more you do it, the easier it gets.

Customers buy the story as much as the art. Simple openers like "Have you been to this show before?" or "This piece was inspired by..." help break the ice.

"The more I shared little stories about my pieces — how I made them, what inspired them — the more people connected. It's not about a sales pitch. It's just about being real."

Chapter 8: Selling Beyond the Booth

“I have customers who’ve been coming to my booth for years now. They love my earrings, and they tell me it’s because they’re well made. They also love the variety I bring — and the fact that I use niobium wire, which is perfect for people with nickel allergies. That brings them back again and again.”



Deb designed this soft fabric banner online and has used it at countless shows. It's 7.5' × 3', fits a stand, or hangs from a tent—simple, durable, and effective.

A successful show isn't just about what you sell that day — it's about what comes after. Some of the best opportunities come from commissions, special requests, and repeat buyers.

“Many years ago, one woman who spent \$110 on earrings at my booth was one of my very first repeat customers. She came back, over and over for more. Those kinds of customers are gold.”

Deb keeps a simple notebook and logs every sale and price to track the day. She also collects names, phone numbers, emails, and notes for custom pieces—then follows up within a few days to keep the connection alive.

When it comes to selling at shows, having a reliable way to accept payments is just as important as getting in. One of the most popular tools is the **Square Reader**—a small device that plugs right into your iPhone or Android phone. It lets you tap/swipe credit cards quickly and securely, making transactions fast and simple. It's widely recognized by customers, trusted by small businesses, and makes taking payments at your booth nearly effortless.

Selling doesn't end when the show closes. Building a loyal customer base is what transforms your art into a business.

“Those people who come back, year after year, are the ones who keep you going. Treat them well — they're your best investment.”

Chapter 9: Avoiding Rookie Mistakes

Every artist makes mistakes in the beginning. It's part of the process. The key is to learn quickly and not let early stumbles discourage you.

Deb says, "I tried to go too big, too fast. I bought more equipment than I needed and jumped into shows that were bigger than I was ready for. Looking back, I should've started smaller and built up."

Here's a "booth" you don't want to copy.



Starting small is fine, but this setup is a reminder that presentation matters. The decorations are cute and may help sell a few things, but the overall

display does little to showcase the artwork itself. Even great pieces can get lost in a poor presentation.

Now picture the opposite. A booth that's clean, open, and welcoming, with good lighting and art displayed at eye level. Shoppers feel invited to step inside, the work is easy to see, and the presentation makes customers more confident about buying. That kind of setup shows your art at its very best.



Start with what you can manage — a small indoor show, a single table setup, or just a handful of pieces. Learn the ropes without draining your budget or overwhelming yourself.

“If you’re not busy, don’t give up too quickly. Look around. What are the booths with customers doing differently? Watch, learn, and adjust.”

Avoiding beginner mistakes isn’t about perfection — it’s about patience. Start small, observe, and be willing

to adapt.

“Don’t quit too soon. Every show teaches you something if you’re paying attention.”

Chapter 10: Odds and Ends for First-Time Success

Sometimes it's the little things that make the biggest difference. Here are a few extras every first-timer should know:

- **Take payments.** Cash is fine, but bring change and a simple card reader (Square, Venmo QR, or the PayPal Zettle). Don't lose a sale because you can't take plastic.
- **Be weather ready.** Strong tent weights are a must. Water weights work especially well — heavy-duty bags or pouches that hold up to 100 pounds each. Fill them at the show, and your tent will stay put. When you're done, just empty them and pack them flat. Note: in windy weather 25+mph, plan on using about 100 pounds per tent leg.
- **Stay comfortable.** A tall chair, water, snacks, sunscreen, and layers will save your energy during long days.
- **Package your artwork with care!** As a jeweler, organza bags, envelopes, or boxes instantly make your pieces feel professional and gift-ready.





For pottery, wrap generously with paper or bubble wrap. For paintings, keep them secure from the elements—and if rain rolls in, have sheets of paper ready to wrap the paintings, so customers can carry their purchase safely to the car. These thoughtful touches make

a big difference, sending customers home feeling cared for and delighted with their experience.

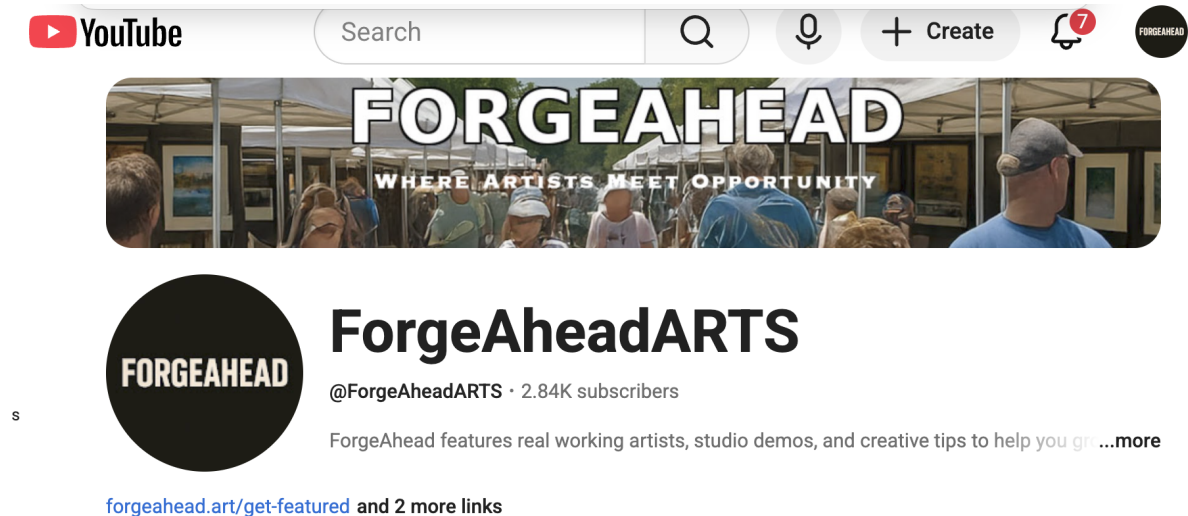
- **Practice first.** Set up your booth at home to test your layout before the big day.

Chapter 11: Starter Checklist: What to Do Before Your First Show

- Choose your first event (start small — indoor if possible).
- Gather 100–300 pieces (this is for jewelry, enough to restock displays). If you are a potter, sculptor, painter, etc., these numbers will be adjusted greatly.
- Prepare your booth and displays: tables set up with table coverings, signs, lights, chair(s), decorative displays to show off your creations.
- Bring essentials: lunch, water, change for cash sales, receipt book, Square or your credit card reader, packaging for your product sales.
- Price your pieces (simple formula: $(\text{Materials} + \text{Time} \times \text{Rate}) \times 2$).
- Create a welcoming booth: open entry, raised displays, clear signage.
- Practice talking about your art (share stories, not sales pitches).
- Keep a notebook for sales and customer info.
- Stay flexible — learn from every show, every booth, every buyer.

Chapter 12: Feature Me! — All Artists, Just Like You!

We'd love to hear your story — how you found your creative path and where you are now. Our YouTube channel, [ForgeAheadARTS](#), features artists and creative businesses in simple, uplifting spotlights that help your work get seen. It's an easy way to connect with other makers, reach new buyers, and give your art real visibility.



Your art. Your story. Your spotlight.

We're brand new on YouTube, and this is your chance to grow with us on a platform that's *truly massive*. As of 2025, YouTube reaches **over 2.5 billion people every month**, making it the **second-most visited website in the world**—right behind Google itself. Billions of hours of video are watched daily. When you support our channel with a full watch, a 👍, and Subscribe, you help your own feature travel farther into that huge audience.

Feature Me ~ Highlighting ALL Artists

We share Feature Me videos that introduce you, shows your work, and links viewers to your shop, site, blog, and socials. It's friendly, inspiring, and designed to help real artists get discovered.

You create the art; we'll shine the light. One feature can spark new eyes on your work—new fans, new reach, and maybe your next buyer.

When you're ready, tap [Feature Me](#) and let's share your story.

You've Got This!

You've just taken the first steps toward turning your creativity into income. Whether you're still at the kitchen table or ready to set up your first booth, you now have the tools, stories, and encouragement to get started on the journey.



Next up is for artists already doing shows — or feeling that this is where they're meant to be.

Booth to Bank: [Level Up](#) ~ From Tent to Triumph — The Booth to Bank Way.

This ebook is a deep dive into everything needed to thrive in the art fair arena. It's a momentum-building

guide for artists who want to step into shows with confidence and purpose. It's about creating an art-show career that truly supports you — from your booth setup to your sales, your rhythm, your growth, and the way you step forward as a professional, working artist..

And for those who seek another path, we have ***Booth to Bank: [No Booth? No Problem!](#) Where Artists Meet Opportunity — Stay Creative, Stay Home, Still Thrive.*** In this ebook we explore the good, bad and ugly sides of online art sales, as well as, what it takes, what works and what choices do I have?

Thank you for letting us be part of your journey. Every leap you take keeps creativity alive. Keep creating, keep sharing, keep growing.

Cheers! Here's to your next show—and many more, ForgeAhead!

Mare & Deb ~ The Driving Force Behind ~ The ForgeAhead Team

Deb Flook ~ Enamel Jeweler & Professional Art Show Career
Maridee Hanselman ~ Silversmith & Enamel Jeweler & Author

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