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When and How to Expand Your Geographic Market

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Question: What do I need to know before I make the jump from a regional market to a national or even international market?

Moving up the ladder from regional to national, and perhaps even international, can seem daunting, but one thing to remember is that everyone started somewhere. Those photographers or illustrators you might aspire to be like all started out at the bottom. Every famous artist was once unknown! So when and how do you know you are ready to take that next step up on the ladder to building your career? First of all – is the work good enough? How many artists have looked at an image or an ad campaign and said, "I could have done that," or "I could have done that better!"

Make Sure You Are Up For the Task

Art buyers want, or rather need, to know that if they are hiring someone new, young, and possibly with less experience than their typical hire, that the artist will have the capabilities to produce and handle a larger shoot or illustration project, manage more complex billing, and stay on top of the necessary paperwork. Maybe ask yourself these questions before moving into a larger market:

- Can you reproduce that great shot or illustration in your portfolio, or was it just a one-off?
- Do you know all the right questions to ask when estimating a larger job?
- Have you done your research?

Growing Your Art Business is Like Growing Any Business



You hone your craft and build your capabilities one step at a time, while being sure to always conduct yourself as a professional. I think it is important to really work the regional market thoroughly and continue to do so as you expand towards promoting on a national basis. I often create two sets of mailing lists for my clients:

- One for the regional market, which includes more contacts with whom they can potentially set up appointments and,
- Another containing national contacts lists that are primarily art buyers and producers.

Recently, one of my clients called me up for a consultation to talk about estimating her first big national ad campaign. This was a huge deal, and it was both exciting and nerve-racking all at the same time. She didn't want to come across like she was out of her depth, where only she knew that she could handle it – and neither do you in that situation. She didn't need numbers from me, as her husband is her producer.

What we did talk about was how to approach the conversation with the art buyer, what kinds of questions to ask, that sort of thing. Remember, there is no such thing as a stupid question. Anything can be worded in such a way so as to sound intelligent and show that you are simply covering all bases. So although my client had produced plenty of large jobs locally in Chicago, we discussed how to reassure the art buyer that she was perfectly capable of producing in multiple cities. By portraying her ability to produce nationally, my client was able to offer the art buyer a variety of options. Now the good news is that she was awarded the job. That and I got my bottle of champagne and box of Godiva chocolates, as promised!