



Cashing In on Crafts: How You Can Turn Your Hobby Into Income

USAA member Nicole O'Brien.

By Kathy Sena for *USAA Magazine*

AS A MILITARY SPOUSE living in Okinawa, Japan, in early 2012, Nicole O'Brien wanted to create a business that would boost the family income, allow for flexibility with her young children's schedule and — a biggie — be portable enough to work no matter where her husband's assignments took them.

Fortunately, O'Brien has a wicked way with metal and wood. She started Unique Pl8z, an Etsy® shop featuring handmade license plate art and key chains.

Now living near family in West Warwick, Rhode Island, O'Brien says the business "gives me more stability with our crazy life. It's something I can control."



For business owners like O'Brien, Etsy, an online marketplace for unique goods, is where you want to set up shop, says Marcia Layton Turner, online entrepreneur and author of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Selling Your Crafts on Etsy."

In 2013, Etsy generated \$1.35 billion in sales and had 1 million Etsy shops, or individual sellers. "It's where buyers go when they're looking for something one of a kind or handmade," Turner says.

Create a range of products — five to 10 — within your niche and then list items for sale, Turner says. Focus on taking great photos. Then see what's popular.

When setting prices, research what other sellers are charging for similar items. Consider your time, too. "The cost to sell on Etsy is so low that you think your profit margin is going to be huge, but you have to keep in mind how long it takes to actually create something," Turner says.

The next step is marketing. Share links to your product pages everywhere you can online. "Pinterest[®] is the perfect place to post great photos of Etsy items, since it's where people go for design inspiration," Turner says.

Create an Instagram[®] account for your business as another way of showcasing photos. Then build a Facebook[®] "fan page." This is a helpful way to educate customers, share your latest pieces and get customers talking about their experiences with your products.

Etsy provides a flexible way to earn money — and that income can grow to be substantial. In 2012, O'Brien's family was facing accumulated debt, and her first year's gross income for the business was about \$20,000. "This year my family is debt-free," she says, "and my business is on track to gross \$80,000."

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