

Editorial COMMENTARY

by Tom Starland, Editor and Publisher

How Networking the Arts Should Work

We started our publication, *Charleston Arts* in 1987, which evolved into *South Carolina Arts*, and eventually *Carolina Arts* in 1995, based on one principle - helping the arts community get the word out about what they are offering to the public.

Before then, we had run an art gallery which suffered from not having money to advertise its exhibitions in the current day media of the mid-1980s - newspapers, magazines, radio, and TV. I would never use billboards for anything - they are a scourge on our landscape. And, in Charleston, SC, we couldn't break into the "coverage club" which benefited from press coverage - mostly the big non-profit arts organizations.

A few years after brooding about closing that gallery - along came desktop publishing - thanks to Apple computers, and we jumped into the publishing biz offering the area its first arts newspaper. Then came the Internet, smart phones and eventually the social networks.

So here we are today publishing a totally online visual arts newspaper, with three blogs, Facebook pages and Twitter. We're putting more info out there to more people than we ever dreamed of, but it could be better with more targeted networking.

Today, most art galleries, arts groups, and non-profit art organizations including college and university galleries, art museums, arts councils, and government arts agencies have Facebook pages. Individual artists also have Facebook pages. Some of these folks use their Facebook page aggressively - posting info about every event they offer and more. Some use it just to post news about major events. And, some still haven't figured out that there is more to Facebook than just having a page.

Some Facebook pages have a handful of

"Likes" or followers, some have hundreds and thousands of followers and a few have an unbelievable number of followers - it seems they have friended every Facebook page they have come across. I'm not sure all those people are really following their posts.

Because the *Carolina Arts* and my personal Facebook pages are used to distribute info about things going on in the Carolina visual art community, I usually don't go out and make "friend" requests, as I know I'm adding a lot of posts from day to day and I have a hard time making it through posts coming into my page on a daily basis. And, I really want to keep it focused on the visual arts in the Carolinas, but will fully admit - it has gotten away from that goal. I am amazed at what many people post on their Facebook page - especially some who are part of our art community.

But because Facebook is free - we have to take it for what it is, yet some have found a way to make Facebook work for them and their community.

Shared Networking

Ask yourself how many times have you made a posting on Facebook and gotten 30-50 Likes and 20-40 Shares of that post? Not many I bet.

To me, the power of Facebook - spreading your info, lies in the power of the Share - getting as many people to Share your post to their network of friends. And, the more shares you get determines how many people will be exposed to your info.

There is a group of artists who live in a small community in central North Carolina (no names) who have created what I think of as a "share network". If one of them posts something on their Facebook page - within the hour they can get up to 20 Likes and

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10 Shares - reaching 100s if not 1,000s of Facebook viewers in a short period of time. If I make a post about one of these artists the same thing happens. This is a group of people who are "share networking". And, each time they do it the network can get a little larger.

Last month when I sent out notice to our e-mail list that the July 2013 issue of *Carolina Arts* was ready to be downloaded I asked those folks to focus on Likes and Shares. And we got a record number on that Facebook posting - 39 Likes and 75 Shares.

It doesn't seem like much, but up until that point the most Shares we have gotten on a single posting were 46. Our *Carolina Arts* Facebook page had at the time 1,240 page Likes. Supposedly all those people are following *Carolina Arts* or say they like what we are doing, but they are not participating by Sharing our issues each month.

What difference does it make?

Well, our July issues are usually our least read issues - mostly due to the disruption the July 4th week does to our distribution network. Many people who usually help distribute the paper are on vacation or thinking about people who get to take vacations. Many colleges and universities, and arts groups also close down during the Summer.

In 2012 our July issue received 55,574 downloads. Our average is over 100,000 a month and we've gone as high as 178,805 downloads in one month. So this July I tried a little experiment and asked for those who help us distribute the paper to focus on Shares on our Facebook page. Those 75 Shares helped us break the 100,000 mark in July with over 112,000 downloads as of this writing. That's the power of Shares.

Sharing Is In Your Best Interest

If you have an article about an exhibit, an ad about an exhibit, or are an artists represented by a gallery mentioned in an issue of *Carolina Arts*, it's in your best interest to Share a post about a new issue of *Carolina Arts* being available. The more people who know about us - the more people will learn what you're doing as an artist.

When we post a notice of an exhibit at a

gallery or art venue - everyone who is associated with that exhibit or venue should Share that post. They should also encourage others in their network to Share that post.

It doesn't take a lot of effort to do, but it's some of the best marketing you can do.

We have posted info about a gallery's exhibit on the *Carolina Arts* Facebook and the gallery we are highlighting didn't Share or even Like the post. The artist(s) being featured didn't Share or Like the post. I have to wonder why they even bother with Facebook. Others use that kind of post as a platform for launching a Facebook campaign.

Make Your Facebook Posts Work

Every day I see posts on my Facebook page that offer a photo of an art piece. There is no title offered, no mention of size and medium, sometimes no mention of who the artist is. I can't think what the person who made such a post is looking for from their Facebook audience beyond a few Likes.

I've seen organizations mention events with no time or date offered and no link for further info. It's like saying, "We're going to do this - now it's up to you to find out more on your own."

And, don't just make a post about an event the day before it takes place or hours before it begins. That might catch a few folks with nothing to do and time on their hands, but most of us need advance notice to make plans to attend an event. Make an informative post a month out - starting with "Save the Date", then make another post a week before the event, then make that day-before post and hours-before post. And if you're really smart, take a few photos during the event to post to show people what they missed.

Make Facebook work for you - ask people to Share your posts when you make them.

Frankly, I find Facebook a pain in the rear with all its changes and limits on who sees your post hoping that one day you'll pay for Facebook, but while it is free, I'm going to use it for all I can get out of it since I'm spending so much time looking at posts people and organizations have made on my

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Rhett Thurman



Of a Feather

Oil on Wood

6 x 8 inches



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