

## GREETING CARD MARKET

Reproduction of original art into greeting cards offers artists the opportunity to participate in a \$7.5-billion market. Of course, the bulk of this market is captured by the very large card companies, but an estimated \$1 billion is left to individual artists. Consumers purchase over seven billion cards each year.

- ▶ Of all cards purchased annually, roughly half are seasonal and the rest are for everyday occasions.
- ▶ Of the seasonal cards, 60% are Christmas.
- ▶ Valentine's cards are 25% of the seasonal sales.
- ▶ Birthday cards account for 60% of everyday sales.
- ▶ Each household in the US purchases an average of 35 cards every year.
- ▶ 80% of cards are bought by women.
- ▶ There are 2,000 card publishers in the US.

Greeting cards have many uses for artists. Besides the added sales at your shows, they can provide an excellent self-promotion tool: announcing shows, advertising for commissions and introducing new work, either originals or prints.

Depending on your style of art, consider direct sales to historical and tourist attractions, as well as fundraising ideas for churches, civic organizations, nonprofits and school groups.

Think of a *new idea* to bring to the greeting-card industry. One lady makes cards with buttons attached. Another artist makes fragrant cards, another Braille cards. What is your niche?

Each line, however popular it may be, will need to continue to add new designs and concepts. Once you start a line, you want to expand it by creating cards for a variety of occasions and seasons so both your rep and stores remain happy. No one-year marketing plans here! You will need a well-created, five-year business plan to succeed.



### TIME-LINE

Often a card has only an eight-month life span, similar to products in the fashion industry. Of course, there are exceptions. Some cards and designs, especially those with well-known characters, will be seen year after year.

The wholesale greeting-card industry has a high and a low season. The quieter wholesaling seasons are November-February, when all the Christmas orders have been taken, and indeed the Valentine orders, too. New lines are being prepared for the Spring Stationery Show in New York in mid-May.

**TIPS**

- Cards are put on shelves with the top one-third showing. In most cases, create your design and wordage with this in mind.
- Store buyers often avoid cards on uncoated stock because they become dirty and crumpled from handling.
- Most buyers want cards to state the occasion on them, so make your cards specific. Close to half of the market is birthday cards; the next largest market is Christmas cards (partly because they're purchased by the box); then Valentine's Day, Easter, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Graduation, Thanksgiving, Halloween.
- Make your card appeal to both sexes. If you choose to create for one sex, keep in mind that 80% of all cards are purchased by women.
- Front color is very important.
- Colored envelopes can be catchy but should not be too dark—the writing won't be legible.
- Organize your card inventory so you can keep records easily. Each style will probably have a set of 12-16 cards. For coding, put the style, name, and year it was printed on the back as part of your code.
- The back of the card should have the name of your card line, logo, artist's name, identification number (you make this up), price, copyright year, and "Printed in (country)" if imported.
- Get a copy of Artist Guidelines from the Greeting Card Association (see Chapter 10). It is written by my colleague Joanne Fink, who has incredible knowledge and experience in this industry and does much to help artists. This guide is an essential tool for the card market whether you're self-publishing or freelancing.

**MOCK-UPS**

One surefire way to gauge whether you've got a potential winning range of cards is to produce a set of mock-up cards. Use the standard format of 5x7". You will also be able to show this to potential publishers, friends and family. Keep in mind that friends' feedback can be misleading: Many friends don't want to upset you, so they say your designs are cute or lovely. Whatever testing you do—unless it's full-scale market research—is at best an educated guess.

Follow the industry and attend the best trade show—The National Stationery Show held in New York City in May—to allow your product to be seen by as many of the retail outlets as possible. The minimum cost for a booth will be \$2500-3000. (See more info on trade shows, pages 179-181.) Double this booth cost for your actual costs: travel, hotel, food, display material, leaflets, etc.

It's a good idea before renting a booth at a show to check it out as a consumer. Is it the correct show for your goals?