

## NAC: Hard work, persistence pays off when marketing art, ideas

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It's tempting to just give up, or maybe never even get started, when thinking about embarking on the difficult path of marketing your artistic talent. After all, it's a tenuous market out there for any kind of business, but to take the risks in establishing yourself as a professional, self-employed artist requires an immense amount of patience and courage. How does one plant his roots in the rocky ground of art entrepreneurship?

One such entrepreneur, Kristi Soli, has a few tips to share about how to navigate the craggy terrain of the art business wilderness.

Soli can be called an artist-inventor; she has founded her own company, created her own style of art, and conceived an original product line. But along the way she has had to strive to achieve her vision.

"The world does not beat a path to an inventor's door," she explained. "Invent a better mousetrap, then develop a distribution system and a marketing strategy. And that's just the beginning."

Soli is the founder and president of Evale Innovations and has patented a line of accessories called Pot Pants, which are decorative coverings for plastic hanging plant baskets. She is also a painter and has developed a style she calls cognitive surrealism, which employs layers of swirling colors and warped abstracted imagery that intend to engage the viewer in a visual puzzle. She sells her work as prints, never selling the originals, while continuing to market her hanging pot fashion-line.

"You have to create the want," Soli said of marketing her artistic talents. "Find a theme and brand it."

She may have indeed found her niche and branded her own style, but Soli, who lives in Uncasville, has traversed an unsteady line to get to where she is. By her second year of college, she created a portfolio of oil paintings, participated in competitive ski jumping, and taught ballet, piano and gymnastics, all while pursuing degrees in her dual interests of science and music. Through the recommendation of a fellow ski jumper, who was at the time studying aviation, she decided to transfer to the University of North Dakota at Grand Forks to study aviation as well.

Earning a Bachelor of Science in airway science and her airline transport certificate, she soon found herself flying charter planes, which brought her to Connecticut, where she flew and taught flight instruction for Coastal Air services.

Curiosity brought Soli from one interest to another. So how did she come to starting her own art business?

In 2004, she found herself a single parent and decided starting her own business would be the most practical way to earn a living. Soli would come up with prototypes for a number of inventions and show shoeboxes full of these to friends and neighbors, and made contacts. "This is the place to ask questions," Soli said, "from people who have experience in areas of business systems, manufacturing, marketing and patterning."

Research was a key factor in Soli's quest to put her product on the market. When Soli eventually came up with the concept for her Pot Pants, she sought out the expertise she needed in order to help actualize her design, and consulted the Clemson University Apparel Research Center. From there, she was able to get advice about what kind of weather-resistant fabric to use for her product and where to find it. She also sought the advice of a business counselor, who helped her find a family-run sewing company in China that would affordably manufacture her line. Soli's inquisitiveness and willingness to do a little footwork brought her from one opportunity to another.

Soli since has launched her unique products at the Micro-Enterprise Forum at the Connecticut State Capitol in April and at various trade shows. Her work also can be seen at [www.potpants.com](http://www.potpants.com) and [www.kristisoli.com](http://www.kristisoli.com).

Soli said through all the transitions her life and her work have experienced, she feels as if she's achieving success. "I did the best I could with what I had," she said. "If you are willing to work hard, be patient, and achieve you will leave a mark on this world."

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