

Information for Artists

The UK greeting card industry leads the world on two counts - design and innovation and per capita send. On average people in the UK send 55 cards a year, 85% of which are bought by women.

But just how do you, as an artist, go about satisfying this voracious appetite of the card sending public? There are two main options: either to become a greeting card publisher yourself or to supply existing greeting card publishers with your artwork or verses and be paid a fee for doing so. The idea of setting up your own greeting card publishing company may sound exciting, but this decision should not be taken lightly. Going down this route will involve taking on all the set up and running costs of a publishing company as well as the production, selling and administrative responsibilities. This often leaves little time for you to do what you do best - creating the artwork.

Finding The Right Publishers For Your Artwork

While some publishers concentrate on producing a certain type of greeting card (e.g. humorous, fine art or juvenile), the majority publish a variety of greeting card ranges. Unfortunately, this makes it more difficult for you as an artist to target the most appropriate potential publishers for your artwork.

There are various ways in which you can research the market, quickly improve your publisher knowledge and, therefore, reduce the amount of wasted correspondence:

- **Go Shopping:** Browse the displays in card shops and other high street shops, department stores, supermarkets, garden centres and gift shops. This will not only give you an insight into what is already available but also which publishers may be interested in your work. Most publishers include their contact details on the back of the cards.
- **Trade Fairs:** There are a number of trade exhibitions held during the year at which publishers exhibit their greeting card ranges to retailers and overseas distributors. By visiting these exhibitions, you will gain a broad overview of the design trends in the industry, as well as the current ranges of individual publishers. Some publishers are willing to meet artists and look through their portfolios on the stand but others are not. Never interrupt a sale. If you believe your work could be relevant for them, when they are free, ask for a contact name and follow it up afterwards. Have a supply of business cards handy, perhaps illustrated with some of your work, to leave with publishers.



The Greeting Card Association Website

(www.greetingcardassociation.org.uk). This resource provides advice about submitting designs and a list of publishers looking for freelance designers.

Types Of Publishers

There are two broad categories of publisher - wholesale and direct-to-retail - each employing a different method of distribution to reach the retailer. Wholesale publishers distribute



their products to the retailer via greeting card wholesalers or cash-and-carry outlets. They work on volume sales and have a rapid turnover of designs, many being used with a variety of different captions. For example, the same floral design may be used for cards for mothers, grandmothers, aunts and sisters. It is therefore usual for the artist to leave a blank space on the design to accommodate the caption. Until recently, wholesale publishers were generally only interested in traditional, cute and juvenile designs, but they now publish across the board, including contemporary and humorous ranges. Direct-to-retail (DTR) publishers supply retailers via sales agents or reps. Most greeting cards sold through specialist card shops and gift shops are supplied by DTR publishers, which range from multinational corporations down to small, trendy niche publishing companies. These publishers market series of ranges based on distinctive design themes or characters. Categories of DTR cards include contemporary art/fun, fine art, humour, words and sentiment, children's, photographic, traditional and handmade/hand-finished and, of course, Christmas cards.

Approaching A Publisher

Unfortunately, there is no standard way of approaching and submitting work to a card publisher. The first step is to establish that the publisher you wish to approach accepts work from freelance artists; then find out their requirements for submission and to whom it should be addressed.

It is always better to send several examples of your work to show the breadth of your artistic skills. Some publishers prefer to see finished designs while others are happy with well-presented sketches. Never send originals: instead supply your

images on disk, or as photocopies, laser copies or photographs, and include at least one design in colour. You can initially send your designs to as many publishers as you like, but never be tempted to sell similar designs to two publishers - a bad reputation will follow you around.

Some publishers will be looking to purchase individual designs for specific sending occasions (e.g. new baby, new home, sympathy) while others will be more intent on looking for designs which could be developed to make up a range. Bear in mind that publishers work a long way in advance, for example Christmas ranges are launched to the retailers the previous January. Development of a range may take up to six months prior to launching.

Also remember that cards in retail outlets are rarely displayed in their entirety with many of the racking display systems obscuring part of the design. Therefore, when designing a card make sure that some of the 'action' appears in the top half.

When Interest Is Shown

Some publishers respond to submissions from artists immediately while others prefer to deal with them on a monthly basis. A publisher's response may be in the form of a request for more submissions of a specific design style or of a specific character. This speculative development work is usually carried out free of charge. Always meet your deadline (news travels fast in the industry).

A publisher interested in buying your artwork will probably then issue you with a contract. This may cover aspects such as the terms of payment; rights of usage of the design (e.g. is it just for greeting cards or will it include giftwrap and/or stationery?); territory of usage (most publishers want worldwide rights); and ownership of copyright or license period.

There is no set industry standard rate of pay for greeting card artists. Publishers pay artists either on a per design



or per range basis in one of the following ways:

- **Flat Fee:** A one-off payment is made to the artist for ownership of a design for an unlimited period. The industry standard is around £200-£250 for a single design, and payment on a sliding scale for more than one design.
- **Licensing Fee:** The publisher is granted the right to use a piece of artwork for a specified number of years, after which the full rights revert to the artist. Payment to the artist is approximately £150 upwards per design.
- **Licensing Fee Plus Royalty:** As above plus a royalty payment on each card sold. Artists would generally receive a minimum of £100 for the licensing fee plus 3-7% of the trade price of each card sold.
- **Advance Royalty Deal:** A goodwill advance on royalties is paid to the artist. In the case of a range, the artist would receive a goodwill advance of say £500-£1000 plus 5-8% additional royalty payment once the threshold is reached.
- **Royalty Only:** The artist receives regular royalty payments, generally paid quarterly, based on the number of cards sold. Artists should expect to receive a 5-8% royalty, sales reports and royalty statements.



The fees stated above should only be regarded as a rough guideline. Fees and advances are generally paid on completion of artwork. Publishers which have worldwide rights pay royalties for sales overseas to artists, although these will be on a pro rata basis to the export trade price.

Some Greeting Card Language

Own brand/bespoke publishers: These design specific to a retailer's needs.

Spring Seasons: The industry term to describe greeting cards for Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Easter and Father's Day. Publishers generally launch these ranges all together in June/July. **Greeting Card Types:** Traditional; cute or whimsical; contemporary/quirky art; juvenile; handmade or hand-finished; fine art; photographic, humorous.

Finishes & Treatments: Artists will not be expected to know the production techniques and finishes, but a working knowledge is often an advantage. Some of the most commonly used finishes and treatments include: embossing (raised portion of a design), die-cutting (where the card is cut into a shape or includes an aperture), foiling (metallic film) and flitter (a glitter-like substance).

Jakki Brown is editor of Progressive Greetings Worldwide, Jakki Brown, shares some advice for greeting card artists and verse writers.

To promote your greeting card artwork or verses in Progressive Greetings (free of charge) in Art Source contact Emma Cain on emmac@max-publishing.co.uk