

SELLING IT

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At Art firm, home is where the art sells

A Hudson company is following the Mary Kay lead for selling artwork.

By John Reinan
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Mock, if you will, the Tupperware party. Snicker at Amway and Mary Kay.

But first, consider this: Investment legend Warren Buffet wasn't laughing when he bought the Pampered Chef, whose associates sell cookware and kitchen gadgets at home parties.

More than 13 million Americans work in direct sales, according to the Direct Selling Association, ringing up nearly \$30 million annually—nearly double the level of a decade ago.

Stephanie and Steven Weber of Hudson, Wis., had those statistics in mind when they started Artful Decor, which sells custom art on canvas at home parties.

Technology was another big factor in their decision, Steven Weber said. About 40 percent of the company's sales are original oil or acrylic paintings; the rest are reproductions created



The Showroom at Artful Decor offered original oil and acrylic paintings, as well as reproductions.

by scanning an original, then printing on canvas with an inkjet process.

"You can print on demand," Steven Weber said. "You don't have to print thousands of copies. That's a big part of our ability to do this."

Artful Decor's point of difference is canvas, the Webers said. They consider it a more upscale medium than prints or lithographs on paper, and with the new technology, they claim it's competitive in price with paper prints.

"The frame shops love to sell prints with triple matting and non-glare glass," Steven

Weber said. That's why they've stayed away from canvas—there's not the up-sell."

Started five years ago, Artful Decor now has 35 sales reps in the Twin Cities area and recently expanded to Phoenix and Tucson, Ariz.

Prices for framed canvasses range from \$69 to \$1,200; Stephanie Weber said the average customer sale is about \$240, and the average customer makes two purchases a year. The company's annual sales are in the high six figures, Steven Weber said.

Top sales reps can make up to \$40,000 a year for doing 100 three-hour shows a year, or about two a week, the couple said. The Direct Selling Association says about 80 percent of direct-sales reps are women, and two-thirds have education beyond high school. For most of them, it's a part-time or second job—85 percent of direct-sales reps said they spend less than 30 hours a week on it.

Selling in the home is an effective way to reach an underserved customer pool, Stephanie Weber said.

"A lot of people might be intimidated to go to a gallery," Stephanie Weber said. "We're bringing art to people who might not have thought of purchasing it before."

Said Steven Weber, "This is a powerful way to market. It's not a cold call—it's a warm call."

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Artful Decor's sales kit: The company has 35 reps in the Twin cities area and recently expanded to Arizona.