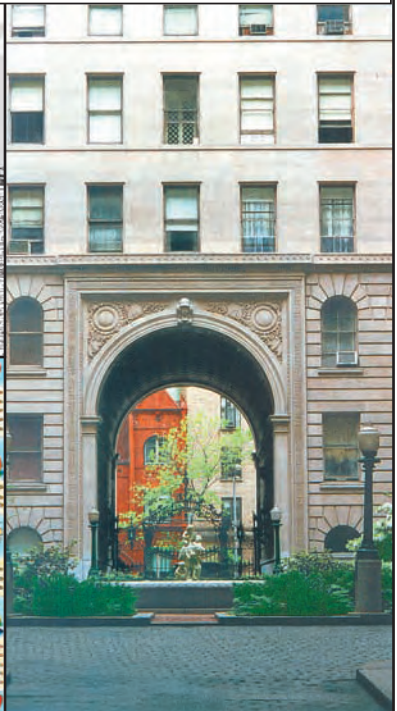




Starting a Greeting Card Business

by Ira and Karen Shapiro



Starting a Greeting Card Business

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Do you have great ideas for a greeting card business, or have you been making cards, invitations or announcements for yourself and friends? Why not turn this into a profitable business?

The \$7.5 billion greeting card industry is constantly looking for new designs and ideas. This information-packed course will tell you how to cash in. You'll learn how to:

- * Design a product to show to prospective customers
 - * Market your products and get orders
- * Deal with suppliers, manufacturers, buyers and customers
 - * Produce products with a minimum investment
 - * Produce your products and fill your orders
 - * And much, much more!

Plus, you'll learn tips worth thousands. Bring your ideas or designs, and our instructor will discuss them during class! Materials fee \$5.

Ira Shapiro, an Architect practicing in New York city for 17 years, is owner of Ira's Peripheral Visions, a family operated greeting card and graphic design company. His products have been selling throughout New York City and the United States for the past 20 years.

Please note that this book is the printed version of the information available on our web site. Updates will be appearing on line regularly.

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About Ira Shapiro & Ira's Peripheral Visions

I was born in Brooklyn, raised in East New York and Canarsie. I attended Public Schools, Brooklyn College, and received a Bachelor's of Science in Architecture from City College. For the next 17 years I worked for architectural firms in New York City. In my spare time I continued to work on my own projects, which included designing and building stained glass windows and furniture, as well as drawing.

Ira's Peripheral Visions was officially launched in 1983. With only a minimal investment of cash, I wanted to start my own business and to generate enough money to support my desire to do intricate pen and ink drawings. I was living in the Park Slope section of Brooklyn at the time. In the early 80's there were many more small independent greeting card stores. I showed my drawings to the local merchants who owned these stores. Alan, the owner of the Windmill Greeting Card Shop, suggested there was an untapped market for note cards with neighborhood scenes.

I did two drawings, each of a scene from the neighborhood. I had them printed and I sold them to the Windmill Shop. The cards sold well. It was so rewarding. I was getting paid to provide the type of drawings that I enjoyed doing. I did more drawings and sold cards to the other greeting card stores in the neighborhood. I spread out to other neighborhoods in Brooklyn including Brooklyn Heights, Carroll Gardens and Windsor Terrace. I did drawings of different areas of Manhattan and sold to stores in those areas too.

My father retired. He came to work for me. He walked the streets of the City, showed my cards to buyers and got orders. He also took inventory at the stores where our cards were placed, and he received reorders. I continued adding new cards and new products. When we began selling Christmas Cards, things really took off. That taught me the most important lesson about this business. That is, if you have a product that people really want, they will find you.

Over the past five years we have increased the range of products we offer. We have gone from prints of black and white drawing to full color images. We have taken over the printing process ourselves, in house, with the aid of computers, computer programs, and laser printers. We offer many custom products including custom cards, invitations, birth announcements and business cards. We can personalize any of our products to meet our customer's specific needs. We've also begun selling gifts, such as decorated light switch covers, refrigerator magnets, and coffee mugs.

The World Wide Web has increased our popularity and our business tremendously. It has allowed us to introduce ourselves and our products to the entire world without ever leaving our studios.

History of Greeting Cards Stores & Retail Sales

Over the past twenty years there have been many changes in Greeting Card Stores, and other stores that sell Greeting Cards. Throughout the years, we've sold our cards in Book Stores, Drug Stores, Department Stores, Museum Shops, and Houseware Stores. Just the other day we took a call from a Hair Salon who wanted to carry our cards!

When we first started out most greeting cards sold for one dollar. Today, cards average about two dollars a piece. In high end shops, some single cards can sell for as much as ten dollars each.

Today, there are fewer and fewer independently owned stores. Most middle to high end Greeting Card Stores are owned or supplied by large companies, such as Hallmark or Carlton. Large book store chains, like Barnes & Noble, tend to have corporate buyers for the chain, rather than individual buyers for each store.

Another major change is that greeting cards are no longer the primary item sold in Greeting Card Stores. Retailers have moved onto items that sell for much higher prices. These include stuffed animals, figurines, calendars, gift books, scented candles, boxed cards, and stationery. Retail space is at a premium so the retailer wants to earn the largest return he can get on his investment in rent.

Other large companies, like Sunrise, may place a rack within a Gift Shop or a Houseware Shop. This may give them exclusivity within that shop or that chain of shops. In chain drug stores like Genovese, Rite Aid, or CVS, several racks from competing companies may appear in the same aisle.

Half Price Stores, Discounters and many large Chain Stores sell greeting cards at greatly reduced prices. It's hard to ignore the fact that as the price plummets, so does the quality of the card. From our limited dealings with this type of a store, it's our understanding that these retailers work on a 25% - 75% split of the retail price, with the 25% going to the vendor.

We are seeing bigger markets opening via Direct Mail Marketing and Web Sales. There are companies that have managed to circumvent dealing with retailers, going directly to the customer via paper catalogs sent in surface mail or well designed web sites offering direct sales to the customer.

With the advent of the personal computer, Greeting Card Software and E-Postcards have become very popular.

Designing Your Product

Do you already have a product in mind? Or are you looking at a sheet of blank white paper and wondering what to fill it with? Any rule that we cite below can be broken! But here are a few things to bear in mind:

Who is your customer? Who is your market? Are you planning on selling your design to a retailer as an Everyday Card or a Holiday Card? Will it be sitting in a rack in a store? Will it be sold via Direct Mail in a catalog? Will it be sold on the web? Who do you imagine is going to buy it?

Think about your own experiences in Greeting Card Shops. What is it about a card that will make you pick it up and examine it or open it to read the verse? What would make you decide that it was the perfect card for you to buy, to express a sentiment to a friend, colleague, or loved one?

The image is the thing that is going to catch your customer's eye first. But the text (or lack of text) will also govern their decision to buy.

If you are selling a single card that will be presented in a rack, please remember that your potential customer's eye will first be drawn to the top of the card, which may be the only part that will be visible in the rack. You can have a stunning design, but if the focus is in the lower left hand corner, your public may never find out about it.

Card racks come in standard sizes. If your card is too big, it may not fit. If it is too small, it may get lost among the competition.

Consider if your card is going to sit vertically or horizontally in the rack. We've found that it's far preferable to have a "portrait" card vs. a "landscape" card if it's going to sit in a rack. If you go with a "landscape" design, it may limit where your card can be placed in a store.

There is a bigger market for Holiday Cards than there is for Everyday Cards. More people will be filling shops right before Valentine's Day and Mother's Day. They will be mobbing the shops at Christmas. Unless you are appealing to a specific niche, it's a good idea to present cards for these holidays to a buyer when you're first starting out. Buyers are always looking for something new.

As Frank Lloyd Wright said, "There's nothing in the world quite as beautiful as black and white. Except for color." Black and white cards can be cheaper to print, but will they appeal to your market?

If you plan on selling boxed cards, you must give careful consideration to your package design as well. Beautiful cards packed in an unremarkable box will likely languish on the shelf.

How many cards do you have in your line? The answer to this question can fluctuate wildly. I've heard successful card companies claim that you must have 150 cards. I've read that Mary Engelbreit did her first stationery show with only "our twelve pathetic little cards. . . Everybody there had four hundred cards." We made our first sale with only two cards. As a rule, it's better to have more cards than fewer.

We recommend that you begin with at least eight cards, which is enough to make a cohesive presentation and fill a rack. Although you are designing for the public, you must keep in mind that if you want to be placed in stores, then you are selling to a buyer. The buyer is the first hurdle that you have to cross. The buyer is going to be considering how to best present your cards in his store.

Setting Prices

You'll have to establish wholesale and retail prices. Check out your competition. If you charge too much people will hesitate to buy. If you keep your prices as low as possible you may sell more, but will it wind up costing you in the long run? You have to find the balance where there may be a slight hesitation to buy but in the end most make the purchase. You must consider what your production costs will be.

The price you charge when selling to stores is the wholesale price. Wholesale price is generally figured by doubling your production expenses. For example if a pack of eight cards and envelopes including packaging and labeling cost you \$1.50 to produce you may figure a wholesale price of \$3.00. In addition you should be aware of what similar products sell for and adjust your price accordingly.

The price stores charge their customers to buy your products is the retail price. Merchants will generally purchase products for one half of the retail price. They may expect to purchase on consignment which means they will only pay you for what sells and they'll return what does not sell. They may markup your retail price more than double, and charge more than your suggested retail price. This may affect sales and increase returns. Be aware that once the cards are in the store, the retailer might add price stickers or soft alarms, while still expecting you to take returns.

Direct Mail Sales by Catalog or Web Site will provide you with a significantly higher profit margin because you have eliminated the retailer as middle man. But you will have more expenses to deal with. You'll require a well designed catalog and a well targeted mailing list. Your printing and postage expenses could add up quickly. Standard return on a catalog mailing is 2%. Consider how you are going to accept payment. The ability to accept credit cards will increase sales from impulse buyers, but the card companies will take a percentage and you'll have to provide a minimum number of sales to avoid paying additional fees.

Direct Sales are made at Craft Fairs, Art Shows, or Open Studios. Your earnings will vary according to the percentage that the hosting show will take on your sales. Some Craft Fairs will charge you a flat rate just for setting up your table at their event. Others will give you the table at a minimum price, but will expect a percentage from your total sales.

Marketing & Selling Your Products

People who want to start their own Greeting Card Businesses typically tell us, "But I don't want to do the selling." We wish there was a Perfect World in which we could each sit in our ivory towers and produce beautiful art without ever having to face criticism and rejection, without having to present our work and without having to deal with retailers and customers. However, in the Real World, I can assure you that sooner or later, you're going to have to get involved in selling. If you can't be enthusiastic about your own products, it's going to be difficult for someone else to become enthusiastic about them. Selling is not nearly as scary as it may seem. In fact, it can be quite rewarding to visit a store and learn that customers have been asking for your cards and that the retailer would like to place more of your products.

There are many different ways to approach selling. The more diverse approaches you take, the better chance you stand of getting good results.

Sales Reps, Sales Distributors, Selling To Buyers and Retailers

Assuming that you are just starting out, you face the challenge of getting people to become enthusiastic about your products. We've found that the best way to do this is to be able to boast hearty sales. This is why we'd recommend that you begin by being your own sales rep and going straight to the retail buyers yourself. You have the advantage of living and working in New York City, where there are hundreds of listings for greeting card shops, gift shops, independent bookstores and other outlets where greeting cards are sold.

As your business grows, you may well want to consider getting a Sales Rep. You will be infinitely more attractive to a rep if you have a product with a proven track record. Bear in mind that Sales Reps typically receive 10% to 20% of your sales. They will want to take over your accounts as well.

If you choose to meet with retail buyers yourself, it is very important to listen carefully to their feedback. Invariably, some of it will be rubbish, based upon their subjective opinions. But pay close attention to their constructive criticism. If you are lucky, the retailer may give you great ideas about how to improve your product, your sales presentation, or where your product would sell the best. Some of our retail buyers have given us our best ideas for improving our products.

Of course, business etiquette is very important here. If your buyer also happens to be working the register or instructing workers in the store, you must always stand back out of the way. Allow him to deal with his customers first. Some buyers might keep you waiting. It comes with the territory. Always be courteous, but if you are getting the runaround then you will want to cut your losses. You'll learn how to tell the difference.

Persistence can pay off. You may not make a sale the first time around, but that is no reason to give up on the prospect. Always behave graciously and politely. You never know when a buyer might change his mind, or recommend your products to a buyer in a different store.

Greeting Card Distributors will buy your cards outright, for as little 25 cents per card or less. They will move your inventory, but your profit margin will be very small, if not negligible.

Mailings - I've known of small companies who invested in beautifully printed catalogs which were sent to Sales Reps with good results. However, most of our experience has been through Direct Mail.

If you are choosing to go the Direct Mail route, we can suggest a few methods to reduce your expenses and net the best result.

Catalogs are time consuming to design, expensive to print and expensive to post. Some companies choose to deliberately limit their catalogs to few enough pages to keep within the 34 cent postage requirement. With a mailing, the average return in orders is from 2% of the customers on your mailing list. Other customers will hold on to your catalog and call you at a later date. Others will toss it before even opening it. People on your mailing list will always be relocating, so invariably some of your catalogs are only going to be returned to you.

Postcards are a fabulous way to promote your catalog or anything about your business. Postcards are cheap to produce and cheaper to post. It's easy to ignore a piece of "junk mail" that's packaged in an unremarkable envelope. But a postcard's image is visible when mail is being collected and it can deliver a succinct message without having to be opened.

We send out postcards to everyone in our database asking them to either visit our web site or call us for a paper catalog. That way our mailing expenses go directly to those who are interested enough to call us and who don't have Internet access.

Newspaper and Magazine Ads - Targeting your market is everything! If you have a niche product and you are trying to appeal to a narrow market you may be quite successful by running an ad in a publication catering to that market. Charlie Yandolino of UAreSoBeautiful.com sells cards with images of African Violets by running ads in African Violet Magazine and promoting her web site which features her images of African Violets.

If you are selling Wedding Invitations, many publications have an annual or semi-annual pullout section dedicated to weddings. Future brides and their families will be sure to be scanning these pullouts and you might benefit by running an ad in one of them.

If you choose to invest in running a print ad, be sure that you secure other publicity in the publication. Most publications will mention their advertisers in their articles.

Conventions and Shows - Big money is spent mounting conventions and shows in the Stationery and Gift industry. Investment in attending one of these events could be quite steep, but it will expose your work to a great amount of buyers in one fell swoop. You may want to share the expense and split your space with another small company or with a sales rep.

Street Fairs, Craft Fairs, Art Shows, or Open Studios - For shows and fairs, you usually pay a flat rate to set up your table with your display. Some fairs or shows will charge you a minimal fee, but they will take a percentage of your gross sales. Open Studios are ideal, because you can run them in your own home without any additional expense. However, be sure that your home is safe and that you are safe from those who come to visit your Open Studio. These events can vary greatly in clientele.

Another great advantage to these events is that you are selling directly to your customers. Therefore you get to see their reaction to your products. You can receive priceless feedback directly.

Commercial Web Site - The Internet revolutionized the way our company does business. No matter what type of greeting card company you see yourself starting, having a web site is an invaluable tool for promotion and sales. It will also wind up saving you a small fortune in postage, paper, ink, and printing costs.

Though a good retailer is an invaluable associate, a good web site can help you to circumvent the retailer. It can introduce you to the world's biggest audience and help you capture a bigger profit margin.

Before the advent of the PC, we were at the mercy of retailers. They decided whether or not they'd carry our cards. They decided where our cards would be displayed in the store. They decided whether our cards even received placement in the racks once we shipped them. And they always expected us to take back whatever didn't sell, no matter what condition it was in.

Now we have the ability to attract customers from all over the world. These customers pay for their orders up front and returns have been minimal. After filling in excess of two thousand orders, we've had exactly two returns.

Our entire catalog is up on line, which means that we no longer pay to print catalogs unless we are dealing with the rare customer who doesn't have Internet access. Because our entire catalog is available on line, we have been able to attract the attention of writers for news outlets. Because of judicious placement in Internet search engines, we are able to attract customers who are looking specifically for what we can offer.

E-Postcards, electronic newsletters and on line diaries are also great promotional tools to bring traffic to your web site. The receiver of an e-postcard will have to come to your site in order to claim his card. This could lead him to browse your site or to send out more of your designs to other friends. Though e-postcards are sent free of charge, they bring in traffic which could lead to sales.

Invite visitors to your site to sign up for your free newsletter or to read your on line diary. Those who browse the web love to find new content and many will become hooked on a site that is updated daily or weekly. If your on line diary or newsletter is well written, handsomely laid out, and long on interesting images, you can wind up attracting hundreds of steady visitors to your site daily.

Your visitors will love to peek behind the scenes of your business. They'd love to see you at work. They'd enjoy seeing your studio or your offices. If you appear at an art show, take photos and upload them. If you receive a write up, pass it on to your readers. We have used Karen's on line diary, Wet Paint, to discuss politics, to talk about our family, to gush about favorite music, to review books, films and TV shows, to show sketches or to offer links of our favorite web sites. Even Karen's heartfelt reflections on our personal experiences on September 11th brought many visitors our way. When they called to order, they felt as if they knew us, and they chatted with us like friends.

If you decide to go with your own commercial web site, it's a very good idea to purchase a toll free "800" number for your business, and to have the ability to accept credit card sales. A good deal of impulse buying is done on the web, and the quicker you can close a sale on line, the more sales you'll be making. If you wait for your customer to send a check via surface mail, you've given them an opportunity to forget about you.

Keep in touch with everyone who has bought from you. Offer them the opportunity to subscribe to your e-mail newsletter. It's the cheapest form of well targeted mail available. Decorative Painter, Tera Leigh, offers one of the most beautiful and inspiring newsletters. Karen looks forward to receiving it each month. In the newsletter, Tera will run the gamut from inspirational articles, to art technique instruction, to book reviews, to recipes. You can see an example of her newsletter by clicking on the link at www.teraswish.com

Niche Markets - Give consideration to developing products for any passion you harbor or hobby or sport in which you indulge. Karen's years of training and dedication to the art of dance led her to develop lines of cards featuring dancers and scenes from ballets. They've been sold to local Dance Companies who resold them as fundraisers. Our love of buildings and architecture has brought our work to the attention of many Real Estate Agencies and Architects Offices, who buy from us directly. Think about the things that you love most and see if you can't dream up a line of cards that will inspire any enthusiast of the subject.

These niche markets can be successfully targeted with advertising in trade magazines and with good web site listings in Search Engines.

Press Releases and Brochures - Several times a year, it's a good idea to send out a small barrel fold brochure announcing what's been going on at your company. If there is a publication that you think might be interested in your cards, keep them informed about what you're up to. Repeated mailings can do the trick. Even if you get no response, it doesn't mean that your brochure hasn't been salted away for a future date. We've had a few responses to mailings and press releases close to a year after they were sent out. The more often your company's name is put out to the public, the more recognizable it will become.

Production With A Minimal Investment

Your biggest expenses in producing greeting cards will be for :

- Paper
- Printing
- Envelopes
- Packaging

The largest expense by far is for printing. A quality card stock may cost five cents per card. A standard envelope may cost three cents. The cost of packaging is divided over a quantity of cards and is therefore only pennies per card. Printing could be as much as twenty five cents per card depending on the type of printing and on the quantities.

Printing

For years I felt as if I was working for the printers who printed my cards. They represented my biggest expense. To bring the cost per card to a reasonable number I had to print a minimum of 2,000 cards each of 8 different designs for a total of 16,000 cards.

Inevitably I wound up with a large inventory of cards that didn't move or that moved very slowly. Out of eight cards, perhaps two would sell very well, four would sell moderately, and two would sell slowly. You never know which design will fall into which category. It doesn't matter which you consider to be the most beautiful. As time went on, I was storing more and more cards. Running clearance sales would help clear out inventory, but not enough. My supply closets were always full. Sometimes the boxes even spilled out into the halls of our home studios.

I realized that the answer was to find a way to print smaller quantities at more affordable prices and to print on demand. To do this I had to handle the printing myself. I began by doing a number of custom jobs with an inkjet printer. Although the prints were beautiful, the printing was very slow. At the time the printer ink was not water resistant and it faded quickly if left in the sun. These were problems, but the objective had been met. I printed only what sold. I could try many different designs without risking the consequences of being stuck carrying a large inventory of cards that moved slowly.

Next, I purchased a commercial grade laser printer. This solved the problems I had with doing the printing on the inkjet. The printing speed was greatly increased and the ink was permanent. The cards were more beautiful than ever and I was thrilled to have taken control of the printing process. Now the only stock that I have to carry is blank paper stock.

Suppliers & Manufacturers

As your business grows, you will begin to develop relationships with the vendors who supply your materials. When you are beginning, it's a good idea to search the local Yellow Pages or the Internet to learn about these vendors. Find out where they're located, what their pricing structure is, how reliable their deliveries are, and what kind of payment schedule you can work out with them. These are the people who are going to need your business and it's in their best interest to satisfy you. Ask questions freely.

Professional Print Shops vary widely. Before you begin printing your cards, meet with their sales representative on their premises and receive as thorough an explanation as you can get regarding their pricing structures and their facilities. The quality of your print job can make or break your product.

There are those who aren't interested in doing anything other than tremendous runs. They may have state of the art equipment and they may be seeking out jobs so large that a modest run for a beginning card company might garner a very expensive price quote.

Some shops are completely computerized and as such they have their own large overhead, which will be passed along to you in higher prices. When you are starting out it will be crucial for you to find a happy medium between the level of high quality you are seeking and the reality of the pricing structure that the printer will be charging.

There are shops that still run older, non-computerized equipment with excellent results. Their pricing may be much more attractive. However, they may be slower to fill your order because their process is more laborious.

Then there's your local neighborhood copy shop. Quality of work will vary wildly from one shop to the next. Be sure to steer clear of vendors who have bored, apathetic workers at the counter taking your order. Many of these places make their meat and potatoes by doing straight photocopying and word processing. They may accommodate you with a smaller run, but be sure that they can provide the high quality that you'll need.

You may consider handling the printing yourself, in house, when you're first starting out. If the investment in a printer seems steep to you, it may seem less so after you've priced printing runs. The prices on Commercial Grade Laser Printers, and even on Inkjet Printers continue to plummet. Though the consumables are the real expense here, you may begin saving money on your very first runs because you will only have to print on demand, after you've received your orders. You will not be stuck with slow moving inventory. Inkjets can provide you with stunning prints, but they run very slowly compared with commercial grade laser printers.

Paper Companies will be happy to provide you with samples. If you choose to hire a professional print shop, they will have their own selection of paper samples in house.

We handle all our own printing in house. The vast majority of our cards are printed on Glossy Coated 12 pt. Bright White card stock. If you are buying this type of paper in small runs, your prices will be higher per sheet. Shop around before deciding where you will buy and how much you will buy. Shipping costs must be taken into account because paper is very heavy.

Computers and Scanners have been a godsend. If you haven't already done so, it is well worth your while to learn programs such as Adobe Photoshop and PageMaker. They will save you tremendous amounts of time and money in laying out and rendering your artwork. They will enable you to quickly do dozens of variations on the same design. If you are a greeting card artist, you will have to be producing new designs constantly. Buyers will always ask to see what's new. Your productivity will be much higher if you take advantage of the technology available.

Envelopes are manufactured in standard sizes. Smaller note card envelopes are typically 4 3/8" x 5 3/4" (the A2 Style Envelope). Standard greeting card envelopes are 5 1/4" x 7 1/4" (the A7 Style Envelope).

Vinyl Boxes are great for packaging multiple cards, such as Packed Note Cards or Boxed Christmas Cards. Clear vinyl boxes, purchased in quantity, can showcase your card image and transform a handful of cards into a gift item.

We recommend that you purchase Shrink Wrap. When you deliver your individual or counter cards to a store, they will not necessarily go directly into the racks, especially if the buyer has bought several dozen of a single style. Often, the extra dozens are salted away in a drawer or a storage closet. If you shrink wrap your cards, they will stay protected and clean while in storage.

You'll also be needing Shipping Supplies. You will need corrugated cardboard cartons in an assortment of sizes. If you are shipping via UPS or the USPS, you will need to satisfy their shipping guidelines. It will be in your best interest to protect your products in transit. You will also need clear newsprint or another type of packing material, mailing labels, and packing tape. Again, all these items are cheaper if bought in quantity. I recommend that you do not skimp and buy off brands. The last thing you want is to have your packages fall apart en route to their destination.

We also use soft mailers for small orders. The ones lined with bubble wrap are significantly more expensive and less biodegradable, so avoid these.

Reference & Related Reading

On The Web

The Art and History of Greeting Cards
www.emotionscards.com/museum/museum.html

The History of Greeting Cards
www.emotionscards.com/museum/history.html

Swirly Girl Q & A
www.swirlygirl.com/QandA.html

Swirly Girl - Starting Your Own Card Biz
www.swirlygirl.com/gc_advice.html

TracyPorter.com
www.tracyporter.com/dreamers_and_entrepreneurs/index.shtml

On Line With Mary Engelbreit - For Artists Section
www.maryengelbreit.com/ForArtists/GettingStarted.htm

Bob Baker's Quick Tips for Creative People
<http://www.bob-baker.com/qt/index.html>

Books - Greeting Cards

Mary Engelbreit, *The Art and The Artist*

Invitations by Marc Friedland

How To Make Money Publishing from Home: Everything You Need To Know to Successfully Publish Books, Newsletters, Brochures, Greeting Cards, 'Zines, by Lisa Angowski Rogak Shaw

Make It Profitable! : How to make your art, craft, design, writing or publishing business more efficient, more satisfying and more profitable by Barbara Brabec

Books - General Business

Self Made In America by John McCormack

52 Weeks of Sales Success by Ralph Roberts

Ira's Peripheral Visions In The News

December 3, 2001 – Fujisankei News – Fuji Television Network Inc.

Ira and Karen Shapiro interviewed by Sean O'Hara. Includes a tour of IPV's home studios.

November 25, 2001 – L.A. Times – A Greeting With Meaning by Renee Tawa

In Brooklyn, longtime clients of Ira's Peripheral Visions aren't ordering custom holiday cards with subtle messages, said Karen Shapiro, a co-partner in the business. They want images of the Twin Towers still standing. "Everyone who places an order wants to talk for 20 minutes and tell their stories," said Shapiro, who lives eight miles from the smoldering site. "They don't want to gloss over things in a Christmas card. They want to remember their skyline the way they knew it. They want to remember what the towers represented, not to mention everyone who lost their lives."

November 1, 2001 – Kansas City Star – Surge in Patriotism Prompts New Card Lines by Joyce Smith

Perhaps the most poignant cards are those from Ira's Peripheral Visions in New York City. The company has been selling World Trade Center cards since the late 1980's.

"They were never big sellers, but after the tragedy people were calling and calling and calling, and everybody wanted to talk about it," said Karen Shapiro, a partner in the company who also went to architecture school right after the World Trade Center was built. "Everybody always criticized them mercilessly; no one sat around and said, 'The World Trade Center is so beautiful.' But now it's (as if) the buildings themselves are martyrs. And people want pictures."

One recent custom order for the holiday shows the New York City skyline with the message: This holiday season we remember and honor those who are no longer with us and cherish those who are.

March 13, 2000 – Times Have Changed And So Have Weddings – Associated Press

Karen Shapiro of Ira's Peripheral Visions Wedding Invitations says she's been getting requests for pale blue and lavender, with many wanting a custom look. She sees a lot couples married under the Brooklyn Bridge, who used a picture of the bridge on their invitations.