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## BRIAN GRAY: HOW TO MARKET A NICHE PRODUCE GLOBALLY

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Are you marketing your niche business on the internet? Take inspiration from [Brian Gray](#), who hand-makes fountain pens and sells them around the world. He puts his success down to focused, targeted social media marketing. If it can work for pens, it can work for you.

### How did you get into hand-crafting pens?

I used to enjoy woodworking and marquetry and I started making kit pens. But I wanted to design them myself, so I decided to manufacture my own components. It was a hobby, but I started a website and sold a few. Eventually it came into conflict with my full-time job in pharmaceutical sales. Then I got laid off three times and at that point I decided to try pens full-time.

### What made it take off?

Being at the forefront of social media. My brother told me "there's a new thing out there and it's called a blog" – this was 6-7 years ago before Facebook. As social media evolved I was right there at the start. For example, as soon as [Pinterest appeared I got on there](#).



Social media is simply a brilliant way of marketing – it's free and it doesn't take up a lot of time. And when you start to integrate different channels, it becomes more and more powerful. I put a pen picture on Pinterest, tweet about it and it gets picked up in my Paper.li – so I get triple bang for my buck. I have 9-10 different channels including my blog and [my video blogs on YouTube](#) and Vimeo.

### Is social media marketing essential for a niche business?

Without it I probably wouldn't have succeeded. I certainly would not be selling my pens locally. I have a worldwide customer base. The only continent I have not shipped to is Antarctica and I'm waiting for that Antarctic order...but I'm afraid the ink might freeze!

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I don't see social media as a way of specifically promoting my business for sales, but more as a community online. Anything that I can do to help that little community stay informed and grow is good. People may not actually know it's [the Edison Pen Company's Paper.li](#) but when they figure it out they realize that, hey, this guy isn't just here to sell pens, he's here to help the whole pen community.

Do you have other ways of marketing to people who don't go online?

Pretty much everything is online. I can reach tens of thousands of people with a couple of keystrokes. There's just no incentive to advertise in a printed publication.

What's the appeal of hand-made pens, ink and writing paper in our wired times?

There's something special about fountain pens: they're from another era, and people appreciate something that's a little bit different. My pens are well made, and the first time you write with a really good fountain pen you immediately see that there's a huge difference between that and a ballpoint or a pencil. You can write with a very light touch, it's a pleasurable experience

My pens range in price from about USD 150 to 2,000, but you can get a fountain pen for as little as 20 bucks and you will have the same experience, as long as the nib is tuned well.

Who are your customers?

All sorts, although there is a little more interest in Europe than in the US. I can't define the demographic exactly: there's a crowd in their 60s or 70s, but also college kids and people in their 20s and 30s who think it is really cool thing.

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