

DBA Design Effectiveness Awards Entry

For Publication

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Castle Fine Art



Thursday

CASTLE FINE ART

Executive Summary

Castle Fine Art approached us to design and deliver a new website for their 25 year old brand, to launch in parallel with a brand refresh and rename. With an established estate of over 30 galleries across the U.K, strong Art Consultant sales teams in their galleries, on email and phone, and a website that delivered a digital catalogue. They recognised to build on their existing brand equity, reach and customer service they could offer customers the opportunity to complete their purchase online, delivering more engagement and conversion to purchase.

Our story starts with insight; our understanding of the business, competitors and customers drove our design decisions to deliver an e-commerce website that has driven significant growth in revenue. E-commerce revenue has seen a 165% increase in 2 years, REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA, and now accounts for 20-25% of overall business revenue compared to 4-6%. The designed solution has not only increased

revenue, but also delivered a wider and deeper business impact by offering new ways of working, improving customer service online and offline, data capture for marketing opportunities, more flexibility, and ultimately increased resilience.

The online art market has seen a steady decline in recent years, with a general reluctance to embrace digital opportunities. Castle Fine Art has gone against this trend. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, and galleries closed, they could overcome this challenge, and take advantage of the demand for online art increasing, positioning themselves to embrace the industry's prediction that the pandemic could kick-start the long awaited art market digital transformation.



Context and overview

The background

Castle Fine Art with a current estate of 39 galleries across the country is widely regarded as the UK's most innovative retail gallery group. Since its inception in 1995, for the past 25 years they have delivered quality, creativity and style to their customers. Continuing to uphold their founding mission to make art accessible to all, they remain committed to their motto, 'Your World, Our Art®'.

A brand relaunch and rename from Castle Galleries to Castle Fine Art (work that was undertaken in-house) provided the perfect opportunity for a new website.

The brief

The original Castle Galleries website served as a digital catalogue that delivered information and leads, supporting their physical galleries, sales by email and over the phone. The business recognised that alongside their brand relaunch, there was a great opportunity to support customers purchasing art directly online.

Objectives

The objectives in the original brief were to achieve the following over two years:

To increase turnover attributed to e-commerce REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA (112% increase), with a focus on increasing conversion to purchase.

To migrate a 13.5k website to a new URL while maintaining organic traffic year on year.

To make the CMS easier to use, delivering operational cost savings and fewer issues.

To make a future-proof website and CMS to support ongoing business and customer needs.

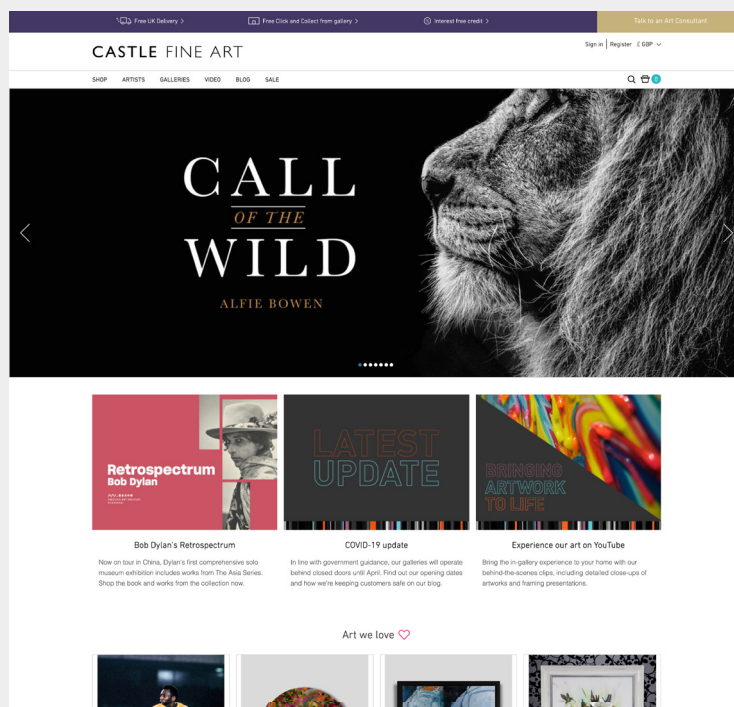
What we designed,
how and why.

Our design approach.

The process we followed was driven by our belief that effective design starts with strong insight. We started with a curious mindset and uncovered and understood the challenges with clarity. This provided our focus and we explored possible solutions with experimentation, refining the most effective for delivery.

During our initial discovery phase, we immersed ourselves by spending time with the business and in galleries – watching and interviewing the Art Consultants who support customers, interviewing the Marketing and Sales team and the in-house Creative Director. We conducted an online customer survey, analysed performance data and researched the market. From this, and alongside their new brand positioning and guidelines, our insights drove our design decisions.

Our strategy, creative and technical teams, supported by strong project management and collaboration with the client, worked in two week sprints to iteratively specify, design, build, prototype, test and refine.



Making a customer focussed online art gallery.

We learnt that there was a great opportunity for the digital experience to deliver the shared passion and personalised service the Art Consultants offer in their galleries. The previous website made no mention of Art Consultants, so we introduced a clear invitation to speak to them directly. This was a simple form at launch, and now includes an online chat feature too.

Combined they drive an average of 160 enquiries per month, 25% out of the 631 monthly website enquiries overall (excluding direct phone calls).

We also learnt that customers often have long-term relationships with a gallery or an Art Consultant, leading to ongoing engagement and purchases. We took this concept online and introduced user accounts so customers can collate their favourites – pieces of art and artists – for future reference. The user accounts also provide a record of orders and their status.

There are now 25k user accounts, providing data used by Art Consultants in galleries to guide their sales activities; with plans to use this growing dataset for more personalised email campaigns.

The client wanted the website to be an extension of the galleries. The physical galleries were being transformed to bring them in-line with the new creative direction. The new site had to feel connected to the physical spaces. As with the very considered retail spaces, the site had to provide the right aesthetic backdrop for the art – to feel like an online art gallery rather than a shop. We designed a clean, mainly white website to echo the white spaces associated with galleries while following the brand visual identity.

We knew that making a high value transaction online was a barrier for some, customers often performed their research online but used the phone or email to make the purchase. To support the purchase journey online, we wanted to offer as much of the equivalent flexibility and support given by Art Consultants as possible. The website provides choice by offering multiple currencies and payment options. There is a finance calculator on the product page to raise awareness of this option at the point of decision making, and to support their first step towards their application as part of their purchase. Other options give choices for viewing the size in inches or centimetres, framing, delivery and collection. We knew that customer service scored low from our online survey on the original website, it was the least liked aspect of the website. So, to make sure the customer feels cared for, there is a customer service area highlighting how customer experience is a priority, alongside delivering useful information.

Over the 2 years since launch, the Customer Service pages have received an average 1,450 visits per month. Customers are happy to spend more online, the average order value on the site has seen an increase of 30%, REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA. The number of users who rated their experience as excellent on the new site has risen by 26%*, the NPS score illustrating how likely a user will recommend the site to a friend has risen from 61 to 84*.

The filtering options were designed based on customer goals when researching their purchase and provide flexible browsing options for accessing Castle Fine Art's full catalogue. This has not only benefited the online customer, but also those in the galleries as Art Consultants. Previously they turned to an internal system and had to hide internal data such as the original purchase price from the customer by covering it with their hand. Gallery Art Consultants now use the website as a reference while serving their customers face to face.

*Online survey on original website in 2018 with 249 responses, compared to the same survey on the new website in 2020 with 46 responses.

Responding to the artists being a key influence for awareness and sales.

From our analysis of Google Analytics data and search behaviour, we knew that the artists themselves were a big attraction. Helped by the well known artists and celebrity names in their catalogue including Bob Dylan, Marvel and Ronnie Wood. We also knew that repeat purchases were often due to customers collecting the work of their favourite artists.

With this knowledge, we recognised there was an opportunity to increase brand awareness, engagement and purchase by raising the artists' profile online, driving traffic to the site, and illustrating knowledge and credibility.

We chose to give artists a high priority across the site with strong signposting, a clear presence in the site search and landing pages optimised for search engines. These pages include their art listed with options to filter and browse with an easy route to purchase, alongside their profile and unique content giving behind the scenes studio tours. Since launch, the artists' pages have accounted for 25% of all landing pages, and as landing pages they have driven 9.7% REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA of the overall website revenue.

Increasing international reach and sales.

There was curiosity across the business about the potential for international customers. The artists have existing, and potential, global following but international transactions were low and only seen on the headline artists such as Bob Dylan. Without global marketing and advertising budgets, the approach focussed on the on-site user experience, to ensure international visitors feel welcome and looked after. The site now offers currency options (GBP, USD, EUR) and supports worldwide delivery. The new site has seen a much broader global reach for the business (from South Korea to South Africa), and an increase in sales. Between 2017 and 2019 there has been a 118% increase in international sales, REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA, and 2020 revenue year to date is REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA.

From our time with the galleries we understood how different each gallery feels based on the experience they offer – the variety comes from their location, the physical buildings, the Art Consultants, and the art on display. We wanted to carry this into the website, while maintaining the brand consistency. The gallery pages make it clear the brand has a physical presence providing credibility and an invite to view the art in person. The pages go beyond just providing the basic information such as opening times and an invite to contact a gallery directly. Each gallery is able to tell their unique story through text, image and video. The user is encouraged to engage further by exploring related blog posts (those with the gallery tag are pulled through to the page), and each gallery has the opportunity to feature specific artists. The number of website gallery enquiries, when 2017 compared with 2019, has seen an annual increase of 345% (excluding direct phone enquiries).

Uniting 39 physical galleries,
1 online gallery and 1 brand.

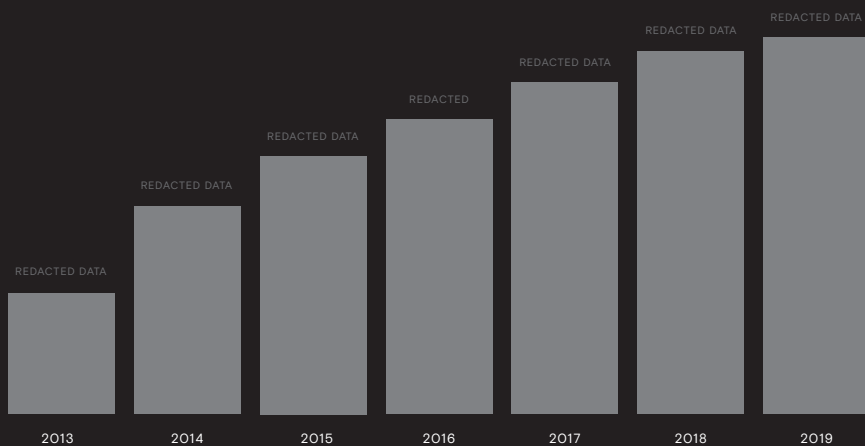
Overview of market.

The market growth rate for global online art sales has steadily declined in recent years, falling from 12.5% in 2017 to 4% in 2019 (2019 estimated value \$4.82 billion)*. This in part can be attributed to a drop across the art market in general, but it is understood that the stubborn reluctance from much of the commercial art world to properly embrace the digital realm and the opportunities it has to offer has contributed to the decrease in growth. Independent galleries have often turned to 3rd party e-commerce platforms such as Artsy, Saatchi Art, Artnet, Artsper. Or, to sell direct through social or on ebay, instead of investing in their own e-commerce platforms.

There is a consensus in the industry that Covid-19 could kick-start the art world's long-awaited digital transformation. The 2020 online art market is now going through some potentially transformational changes. Sotherby's has seen a 131% increase in the number of sales so far this year and a 74% increase in average price when compared to 2019.*

(*Hiscox online art trade report 2020).

Online art sales (\$million)



Global online art sales
(Hiscox online trade report 2020)

Methodology: this year global online estimate is based on publicly available sales figures, as well as sales estimates collected from a survey of the main online art and collectible sales platforms that are mentioned in the appendix of this report. These online art sales platforms do not represent the entire population of online art and collectible sales businesses, and therefore our estimates are likely to be on the conservative side.

Key Facts.

Launch date. 17—09—2018

Design fees

(Not including production costs)
REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA

Results.

Objective 1 – To increase turnover attributed to e-commerce REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA in 2 years (112% increase), with a focus on increasing conversion to purchase.

Castle Fine Art's business objectives needed turnover attributed to e-commerce to increase. The business attributes both sales on the website and the phone to e-commerce, as it is assumed that customers who purchase by phone will have used the website. They were aware of the potential to achieve this growth in different ways including increasing site traffic, but wanted the focus for our brief to be on increasing on-site conversion.

The turnover for the year from May 2019 to April 2020 was REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA, 25% above the annual target and a 165% 2 year increase REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA.

This can be compared to a 10% increase in turnover from sales made in galleries over the same time frame. The current year is performing even better and on target for 33%-50% increase on a £6m target which would illustrate a 371%-429% increase over 3 years (the Covid-19 pandemic is influencing this – see influences).

The figures below illustrate e-commerce turnover (website and phone) exceeding targets year on year. The reported years run from May 1st – April 1st.

There has been an increase in on-site conversion to purchase – more people than before who visit the site make a purchase on the site. When comparing the first full year after launch, Oct 2018 – Sept 2019 with the previous year, there is a 53% increase in conversion rate from 0.15% to – 0.23%.

Baseline. 2017/18

REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA

before the new site launched.

Year 1. 2018/19

REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA

41% increase YoY

(33% above the target REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA)

This year started in May 2018, the site launched in Sept 2018.

Year 2. 2019/20

REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA

88% increase YoY

(25% above the target REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA)

Year 3. 2020/21

REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA

78%-100% increase YoY

(On track to be 33%-50% above the target REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA)

In the year before launch, e-commerce sales contributed to 4-6% of company turnover alongside the galleries, e-commerce now accounts for 20-25%.

Within the business there was a concern that a stronger e-commerce route to purchase would cannibalise the gallery sales and therefore not support an increase in business revenue overall, but this has not been the case.

The website complements the Art consultant's role, they continue to play an important role by phone, chat and email. There has been a consistent trend since site launch, an average of 37% of website sales have been supported by an Art Consultant.

Graph removed for publication.
Website sales, March 2018 - Sept 2020 with those supported with and without an Art Consultant highlighted.

Contributing metrics

Customers are happy to spend more online, the average order value on the site has seen an increase of 30%, REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA.

The number of users who rated their experience as excellent on the new site has risen by 26%*, the NPS score illustrating how likely a user will recommend the site to a friend has risen from 61 to 84*.

Since launch, the artists' pages have accounted for 25% of all landing pages, and as landing pages they have driven 9.7% (REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA) of the overall website revenue.

The new site has seen a much broader global reach for the business (from South Korea to South Africa), and an increase in sales. Between 2017 and 2019 there has been a 118% increase in international sales, REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA, and 2020 revenue year to date is REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA.

The number of website gallery enquiries, when 2017 compared with 2019, has seen an annual increase of 345% (excluding direct phone enquiries).

Influencing factors

Previous to the new site, the business relied more heavily on offline marketing and the physical presence of galleries. The new website and its success has meant more online marketing has been possible. Paid social, search and display campaigns have been introduced driving 25% of the traffic and 9% of online transactions over the first two years.

The new site and related updates to the business systems has increased the online catalogue and its value by enabling original art to be sold online (not just reproductions).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, galleries have been closed, so the demand for online has increased. The website has enabled Art Consultants who are usually in galleries to service their customers remotely, with no decrease in their revenue, resulting in a strong 2020 for e-commerce sales.

The programme of new artists, launches and exhibitions has been running at a similar pace; four more galleries opened in the past two years.



(*Online survey on original website in 2018 with 249 responses, compared to the same survey on the new website in 2020 with 46 responses).

Objective 2 — Migrate a 13.5k website to a new URL while maintaining organic traffic year on year.

In the first full year after launch, Oct 2018 – Sept 2019, visits from organic traffic increased by 4% year on year, from 474k to 494k. The second full year, Oct 2019 – Sep 2020, year on year, visits increased by 19.6% from 494k to 591k.

Influencing factors

The increase in paid search impressions is likely to have impacted organic visits due to users clicking on a paid search impression even if the same page is ranked high in organic.

The search term 'art for sale' has had a relatively stable 5 year trend until 2020 which is seeing an upward trend, indicating there is an increase in intent for finding art for sale online during the Covid-19 pandemic (Google Trends).

Objective 3 — Make the CMS easier to use, delivering operational cost savings and fewer issues.

We have supported operational efficiencies by building a bespoke Content Management System. Features have been designed in response to understanding the Castle Fine Art team's ways of working and pain points. We integrated with their existing stock system and provided the option for batch loading content. Since launch QR codes have been introduced to support every product being tracked so real-time updates to the website can be made; if a one-off piece of original art is sold in a gallery, it will be taken off the website within a few minutes.

This has resulted in more clarity and fewer issues. The overall impact has contributed to an operational restructure resulting in admin staff cost savings REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA.

Influencing factors

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Art Consultants who are usually in galleries servicing their customers, have turned to the website and CMS to support their work, with no decrease against their target revenue.

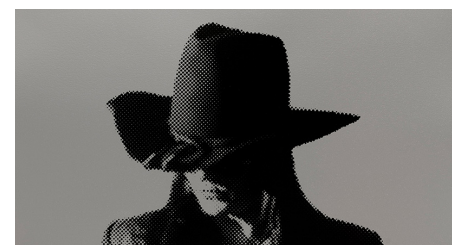
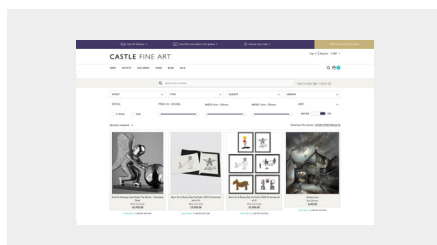
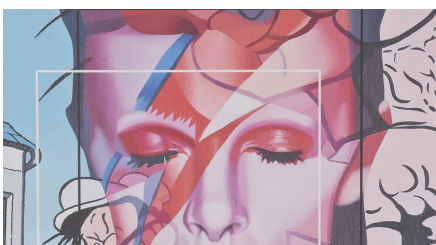
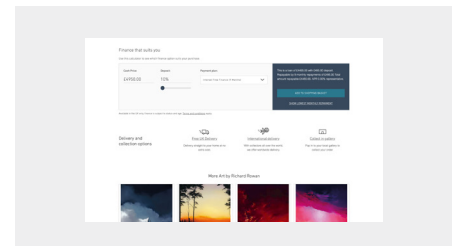
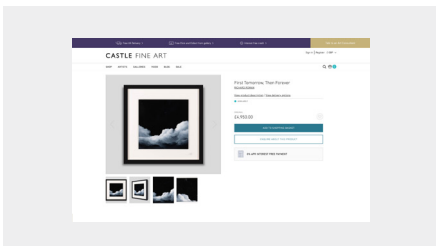
Objective 4 — Make a future-proof website and CMS to support ongoing business and customer needs.

The website and CMS has provided a platform for evolution with many new features being added since launch.

Updates have enabled the sale of original art, increasing the online catalogue, and further integrations with stock, delivery and fulfilment systems. There is now no need for printed versions of the brochure or the Fine Art Collector magazine as customers can be directed to fully interactive, regularly launched, digital publications. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the site has supported the presentation of video walkarounds for specific exhibitions. There are now 25k user accounts, providing data used by Art Consultants in galleries to guide their sales activities; with plans to use this growing dataset for more personalised email campaigns.

Influencing factors

The strong technical design and our guidance has enabled a new in-house developer to pick up new features more swiftly and at a lower cost than commissioning external support.





“Building the Castle website with Thursday was more like working with an extension of our own team than an external agency. They understood exactly what we were looking to achieve and helped us deliver on our longer term vision.”

Matt Lamb, Head of E-commerce