

Influencers Are Realizing That A.I. Might Not Be a Magic Money-Making Machine For Artists After All

The curious odyssey of Patryk Marketer.

Ben Davis, July 14, 2023



Screenshot of a listing for "Watercolour Magic Mystical Mushrooms clipart Bundle" on Etsy by seller Regnars Strazds, one of the listings Patryk Marketer said he targeted to generate easy ideas for clip art.

For the last few months, I have been following the adventures of a drop-shipping entrepreneur who goes by the name of "Patryk Marketer." A [video](#) by Marketer first popped into my feed in early April, featuring his claim that he had a surefire system to generate a passive income stream from A.I.-generated art.

In that first viral video I saw by Marketer, which gained half a million views, he was brimming with excitement about the money-spinning potential of A.I. All you had to do, Marketer explained, was get a site like Midjourney to dream up some cool images for you. Then, you upload them to Etsy and let the money roll in as online art-buyers discover your creations.

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“I think that the biggest pro is that there is unlimited potential,” Marketer told his viewers. “The more images you make and post on Etsy, the more money you can make... Profit margins on these items are relatively high.” Best of all, in his view, was that the income stream is “completely passive. You build something, you upload it to the Etsy server, and you don’t have to do anything at all.”

Marketer followed up with a seminar called “[How To Sell AI Art On Etsy A To Z Blueprint 2023](#).” This hour-plus video has been watched another 200,000 times, making him a [modest thought-leader](#) for people looking to make a career in the brave new post-human online art world.

Essentially, what Marketer was selling was clip art in bundles of 20 PNG files. The Marketer Method was to employ an analytics tool to find out what was selling in the digital graphics space, then to use Midjourney to create a slight variation on it, capturing a piece of the same market.

For instance, Marketer explained that he had discovered a demand for [clip art of mushrooms](#) on Etsy. He noticed that the most popular example of mushroom clip art was red, and so he used Midjourney to make a bundle of pink mushrooms to sell.

Marketer boasted that he had garnered 216 orders in March by making 23 Etsy digital art listings. That meant revenue of about \$490, which translated to a profit of about \$207 after subtracting Etsy fees and marketing costs.

They were modest results, but Marketer thought things were just getting started. “I’m gonna snowball this thing,” he told his viewers. “I am going to build it up and make this thing bigger and bigger.”

In the last six months, I’ve been alternately fascinated and horrified by the glut of shouty influencers and gormless social-media gurus preaching ways to “turbo-charge” your income with various A.I. “content hacks.” It really does feel like watching some kind of mind virus spreading. At least Marketer seemed genial and transparent, so I’ve been checking in with him every so often.

His progress from those first excited claims can be told via the evolving titles of his videos:

March 31: “[How I Got 200 Orders in My First Month on Etsy Selling A.I. Art](#)”

May 2: “[Selling A.I. Art On Etsy For 2 Months: Realistic Results](#)”

May 16: “[My Etsy A.I. Shop Is Failing ... What I Am Doing To Fix It](#)”

June 9: “[3 Months Of Selling Etsy A.I. Art ... What Happened?](#)”

July 7: “[4 Months Of Selling Etsy A.I. Art... There’s HOPE](#)”

and finally

July 11: “[You Won’t Make Money Selling A.I. Art On Etsy... Let Me Explain](#)”

Cue sad trombone.

After four months in the trenches, Marketer is ready to admit that a lucrative career as a digital artist may not be the low-hanging fruit he thought it was.

“Once you get into it, you find out that it is not as easy as people say,” he concedes in that most-recent video. “It’s challenging to make enough money to sustain your lifestyle.”

As it turns out, the kind of clip art that actually sells is highly trend-based, so you have to be constantly scanning the horizon and producing more things to get on top of the new trends. “The thing I have learned—it was a hard lesson—[is that] trends on Etsy change so fast, super-fast.”

Additionally, Marketer has discovered that the profit margins are not actually so high after all, since getting the A.I. to generate something saleable actually requires some effort:

When I say you won’t make money selling A.I. art, I mean that you need to put in work, active work. I thought this was going to be passive... The creation process of A.I. art that you will sell is actually pretty time-consuming—and when I say that, some actual artists might laugh at me, and I understand why. But because there [are] so many A.I. art bundles on Etsy right now, you cannot just make one clip art and list it. That means you have to spend a couple of minutes to maybe an hour to generate it.

It may be possible—and who could have guessed this?—that flooding Etsy with near-identical A.I. images might have diminishing returns.

(Marketer’s epiphany reflects a broader turn in the A.I.-art conversation in the YouTube content-verse—see illustrator Brad Colbow’s very-good recent video “[Why Your A.I. Art Isn’t Selling \(And Never Will\).](#)”)

Given the realities, Marketer now recommends that instead of pursuing an independent career selling A.I. art on Etsy, you get a day job and invest your income into running an A.I. art business on the side. He also suggests systematizing the process into steps that remove as much thought from art-making as possible.

With such a system in place, you can then hire “virtual assistants” to do the actual work of pumping out on-trend Midjourney clip art—Marketer says he pays two people \$300 and \$250 a month, respectively—with the aim of getting the hustle back to an approximation of that “passive income” sweet spot.

The upshot: As long as you adjust your expectations from “doing what you love” to “managing a sweatshop,” the A.I. art dream remains very much alive.