Updated February 2, 2015

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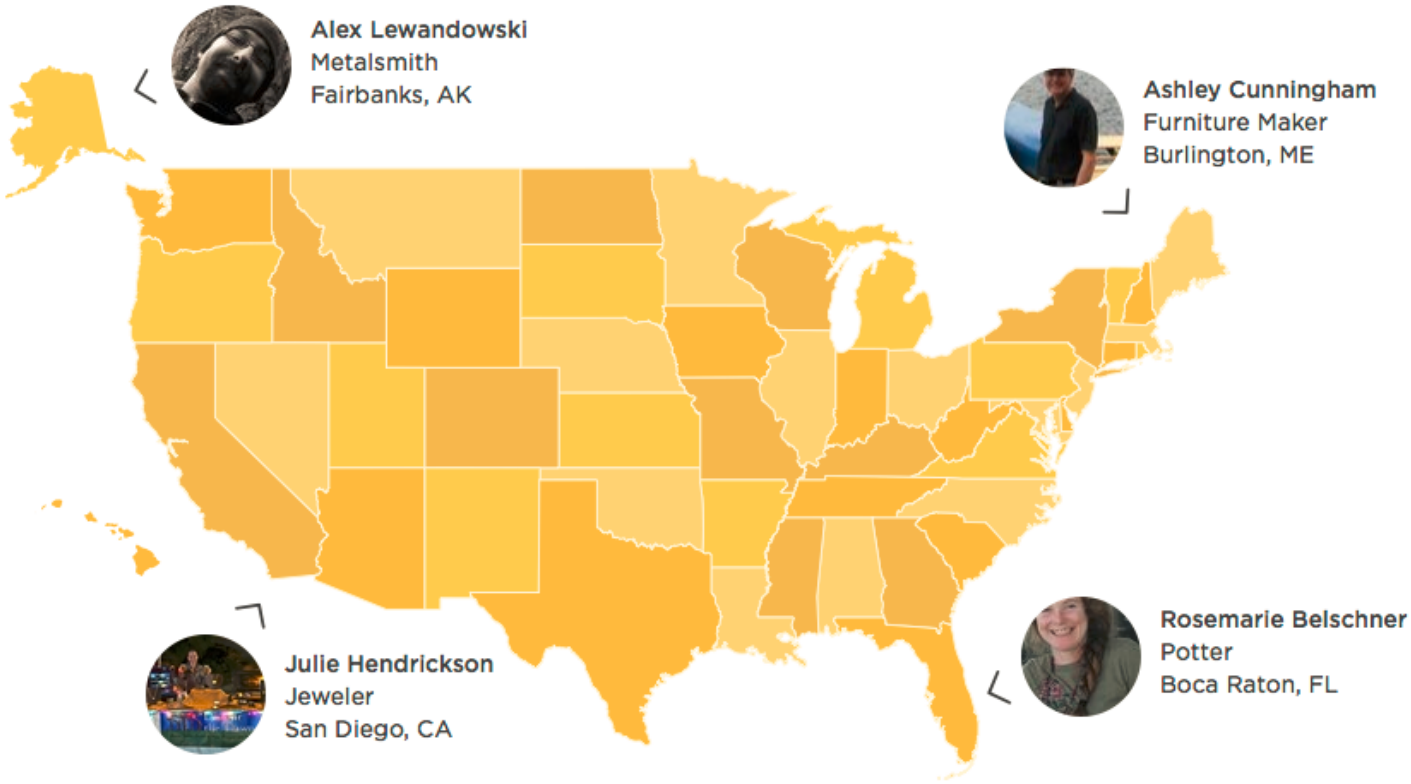
Welcome to CustomMade!

You're now part of a community of thousands of independent craftspeople and artisans stretching from San Diego to northern Maine, from Alaska to southern Florida, representing a wide range of specialties from jewelers to furniture makers, from metalsmiths to potters.



Here at CustomMade, our motto is "make a living doing what you love." If you're already a full-time maker -- great! We aim to round out your customer pipeline so that you can stay busy and stay profitable. If practicing your craft full-time is still a goal for you, we want to help you get there.

Every year, millions of consumers visit CustomMade. They submit thousands of project requests each week, driving business to our community of independent artisans and craftspeople. And we're growing, which means there's plenty of opportunity for makers like you.

So let's get started!

How CustomMade Works

The deal between you and CustomMade is pretty simple: CustomMade attracts customers and connects them with makers like you. When you win work from those customers, you pay CustomMade a 10% commission. There's also a small payment processing fee. (You'll find complete details here.)

Maker Professional Standards

With input from our community of makers, we developed our Maker Professional Standards -- a set of guidelines on how to succeed on CustomMade. You'll find best practices for things like crafting your CustomMade profile, responding to customer inquiries, and respecting the work of your fellow makers. We want you to follow these guidelines because it's the right thing to do...and because it's good for business.

You'll see the Maker Professional Standards mentioned throughout this document

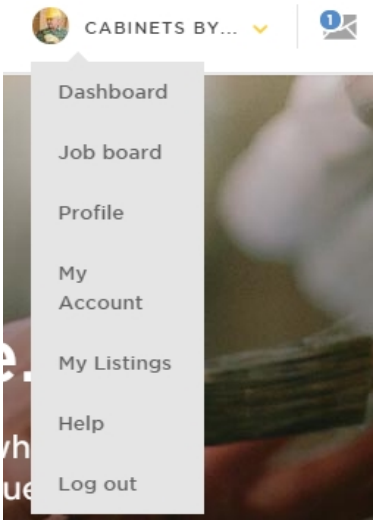
Please take a moment to read the Maker Professional Standards.

Getting Help

The quickest way to get help is through our Maker Help Center, which includes answers to frequently asked questions along with some helpful videos. If you can't find what you're looking for there, the CustomMade Support Team is here to lend a hand. Drop us a note at support@custommade.com. We'll get back to you within 12 hours. If you need immediate assistance, visit http://www.custommade.com/chat, where you can chat with one of our friendly representatives weekdays 9 a.m. to 11 p.m., and weekends 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Eastern Time.

Navigating CustomMade

When you're logged in to CustomMade, you'll see your company name at the top right corner of the page, along with an indicator letting you know if you have any messages waiting. Click on the downward arrow to the right of your company name to get to your account management pages, or click on the envelope icon to go directly to your messages.



Dashboard takes you to the main control center for your account. On the right, you'll see a link to the Job Board and your latest messages. On the left, you'll see links to your profile and portfolio, news or announcements, and account activity statistics.

Job Board brings you to the project requests that customers have posted to the maker community.

Profile lets you view or edit your public profile on CustomMade.

My Account is where you can view and edit your account information like your email address and password. You can also manage which Job Board opportunities you get email alerts about.

My Listings is where you can view and edit the items in your portfolio.

Help links to the Maker Help Center, where you can find all sorts of resources to answer your questions.

Log out is for -- you guessed it -- logging out of your CustomMade account.

Your Inbox

When customers or potential customers contact you, you'll see those messages in your inbox. You'll also get an email when you have a new message, and you can respond simply by replying to the email.

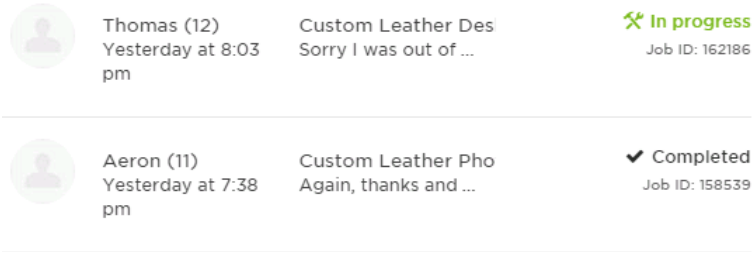
By default, you'll see all messages in your inbox, with the latest messages at the top of the page. Each message is marked by type, and you can sort messages by type by clicking on the links on the left.

Inquiry: These are messages from prospective customers that you haven't yet submitted a proposal to. The first message you receive from a customer will always be an inquiry.

Proposal: Here's where you'll find messages relating to projects where you've submitted a proposal. If the customer asks for a revised proposal, you'll see that message here.

In progress: These are messages from customers that have accepted a proposal.

Completed: These are messages from customers for whom you've completed a project.

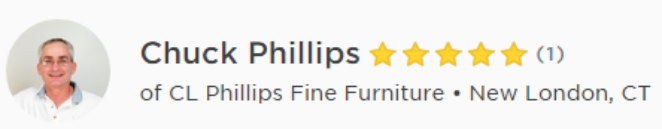


Your CustomMade Profile

Your profile is your virtual storefront on CustomMade. It includes a photo, some information about you and your business, and a portfolio of listings. Each listing represents an example of your work.

Your Photo

We strongly recommend using a head-and-shoulders photo of yourself for your CustomMade profile. Of our 50 most successful makers, 74% use such photos on their profiles. You can update your profile photo here.



Your "About" Section

Use this text to give potential customers a reason to do business with you. Tell them how you're qualified to do what you do, including any special education or training you have. Also talk about your creative process and how you go about turning a customer's idea into reality. You can update your "About" section here.

Your Listings

Your listings are the single most important component of your presence on CustomMade. Customers will find you when your listings turn up in search results -- both on CustomMade and through search engines like Google and Bing. Please consider these tips when creating or editing your listings:

- **Good photos are vital!** Customers can't get excited about what they can't see. Take the time to capture quality images of your work. It's an investment that will pay dividends. Learn more about taking quality listing photos here.

> "To be effective, you need the best images you can get. If you can't take them yourself, get a pro to do it."
>
> Maker Jason Holtz
> St. Paul, MN

- **Be descriptive.** "Silver Bracelet" is an accurate title, but your listing will get lost among all the other silver bracelets. "Hand-Crafted Sterling Silver Bracelet with Stamped Monogram" is a title that will make your listing stand out.

- **Sell yourself.** Your listings may be the first thing a potential customer sees about you. So try to work something into the product description that speaks to your skills and expertise.
- **Sell the process.** Buying custom should be fun. Let potential customers know what customization options are available and how they can shape the final product. Here's a great example from a listing for a metal key fob posted by maker Anthony De Caro: "Art in your pocket! Unique way to ID your keys. No two alike. Have your own idea made into a fob!"

You can update your listings or add new ones here. Learn more about creating a portfolio of listings that attracts customers here.

The Process

OK, on to the fun stuff: Finding customers, winning jobs, and delivering the goods!

Step 1: Connect with the Customer

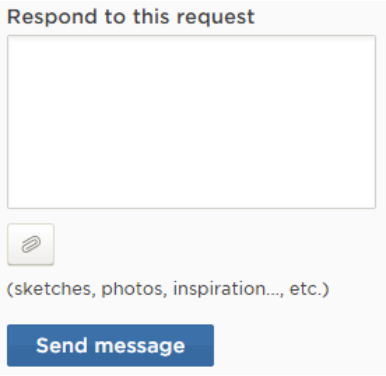
Broadly speaking, there are two ways that makers and customers connect on CustomMade. Either customers find you through your profile, or you find customers through the Job Board.

The Job Board

When customers come to CustomMade with a specific project in mind, they often post that project to the entire community of makers. You can see all of these requests on our Job Board. Now that your maker application has been approved, you should be getting email alerts with Job Board posts that match your skills. You can even filter these requests by location (learn more about managing your Job Board alerts).

When you land on the Job Board main page, you'll see the latest project requests across all categories and locations. You can use the links on the left to view a specific category (cabinetry, glasswork, furniture, etc.), or you can filter out all jobs except those that are near you using the distance drop-down at the top of the page. You can filter by both distance and category by clicking on a category page, then making a selection from the distance drop-down.

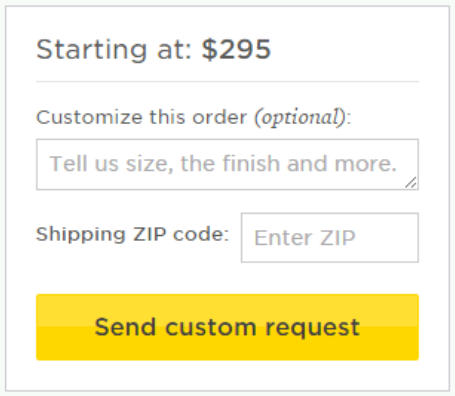
Clicking on a job lets you see the entire listing, including any details and photos the customer included. If other makers have already expressed interest in the job, you'll see them listed here as well.



If you'd like to contact the customer about the project, you can do so from the form on the job page. When the customer responds to you, that message will appear in your inbox, and you'll get an email notification.

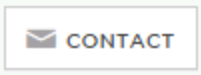
Listing Inquiries

Now that you've created some product listings, you'll show up in search results (both on CustomMade and in search engines) and your work will appear in CustomMade galleries (like this one for stools). If a customer clicks on your listing, he or she can contact you to create a customized version of that item. If you've enabled the "Quick Order" option for a listing, the customer can order the item as shown, or choose from specific customization or upgrade options for the customer to choose from. You can even create your own custom order form! Learn more here.



General Inquiries

If the customer is viewing your portfolio, he or she can click on the "Contact" button to contact you.



You'll find messages regarding listing inquiries and general inquiries in your inbox. You'll also get notified by email. You can reply simply by responding to the email or via your CustomMade inbox. This is the case for all messages you exchange with the customer throughout the process.

Communication Guidelines

While we prefer that all communication between you and the customer be done through CustomMade, we know that there are times when a phone call is needed to close the sale or review the project with the customer. So here are the guidelines we ask you to follow:

- Your initial message to the customer must be free of phone numbers, URLs, and other contact information.
- If you and the customer exchange messages and agree that a phone call, video chat, or other off-site conversation is needed, feel free to do that.
- It's never OK to communicate via email. Please use the CustomMade messaging system.

Step 2: Land the Job

Whether you contact the customer or the customer contacts you, the two of you will correspond to discuss the details of the project. This is your opportunity to convince the customer that you're qualified to do the job, will do it well, and will provide outstanding service. It also helps you determine if the job that matches your skills and will be profitable for you. When the customer contacts you, a timely response is vital. Our research shows that you're much more likely to win the job if you reply within 24 hours. Our research also shows that the most successful first contacts with customers include the following elements:

> Reply within 24 hours to all customer communications

- Good grammar and spelling
- An indication of your expertise or skills, like the number of years you've been practicing your craft, special certifications and/or schooling
- Specific suggestions about the project like a design concept, materials and estimated cost
- Photos of similar projects you've done or links to such items in your CustomMade portfolio
- Enthusiasm for the customer's idea

> "I try to let them know I like and appreciate their ideas, while at the same time taking the concept just one step further with a suggestion or example that enhances the concept."
>
> **Maker John Obelenus**
> **Huntersville, NC**

While writing a friendly, informative note to the customer increases the likelihood of landing the job, it's no guarantee. In fact, some customers won't bother to get back to you. Don't take it personally, and don't waste your time writing repeated notes asking for an answer. Just move on to the next customer. You'll find plenty of folks that are genuinely interested in working with you. Also, be careful about spending time on designs or drawings before the customer accepts a proposal. If you think doing so will help you land the job, that's fine. But understand that the customer is under no obligation to go through with the job or pay you anything until and unless the proposal is accepted.

> "Be prepared to not hear back from the majority of the potential customers you send messages to. Keep at it! Eventually you will get some responses."
>
> **Maker George Howard, Jr.**
> **Morgan, VT**

Step 3: Submit a Proposal

Once you and the customer agree that you want to work together, you'll need to submit a proposal. The proposal is a digital contract that is legally binding. If the customer accepts, you're expected to deliver what's outlined, and the customer is expected to pay for it.

You create the proposal through your CustomMade inbox. You'll see the option to the right of the messages you've exchanged with the customer

> Submit a detailed proposal so the customer knows exactly what they're getting. When entering the time it will take to complete the job, make sure you can finish by that date.

There are five parts to a proposal:

Project Cost: What the customer will be charged in total for the project.

Estimated Shipping Cost: The amount that you will pay a shipping or delivery company to deliver the item (if you will be delivering the item personally, it's OK to use this figure to cover the cost of your time, mileage, etc.). Be as precise as possible with the shipping cost. Any change to that number requires a revised proposal that the customer will have to accept. (CustomMade's commission does not apply to the shipping cost, just the base price for the project.)

Payment Terms: For most projects, the customer will make two payments, one when they accept your proposal, and the other when you mark the project complete. You can split those up 50%/50% or 66%/34%. There's also a 100% up front option, which is limited to jobs of $1,000 or less.

> "Give yourself plenty of time to complete the project. Clients are unhappy if they have to wait longer than they are told, but are usually delighted to hear that their piece is ready early."
>
> **Maker Jim Reedy**
> **Boca Raton, FL**

Estimated Time to Deliver: This is the number of weeks it will take you from the time the customer accepts the proposal until the item is complete and ready to ship. If that date slips during the course of the project, you'll need to ask the customer to accept a revised proposal with the new date.

Statement of Work: This is the most important part of the proposal. Outline exactly what you'll be creating for the customer, the materials you'll be using, the size or dimensions of the item, and so on.

If you find yourself unable to submit a proposal, it may be because you have too many jobs in progress. Learn more.

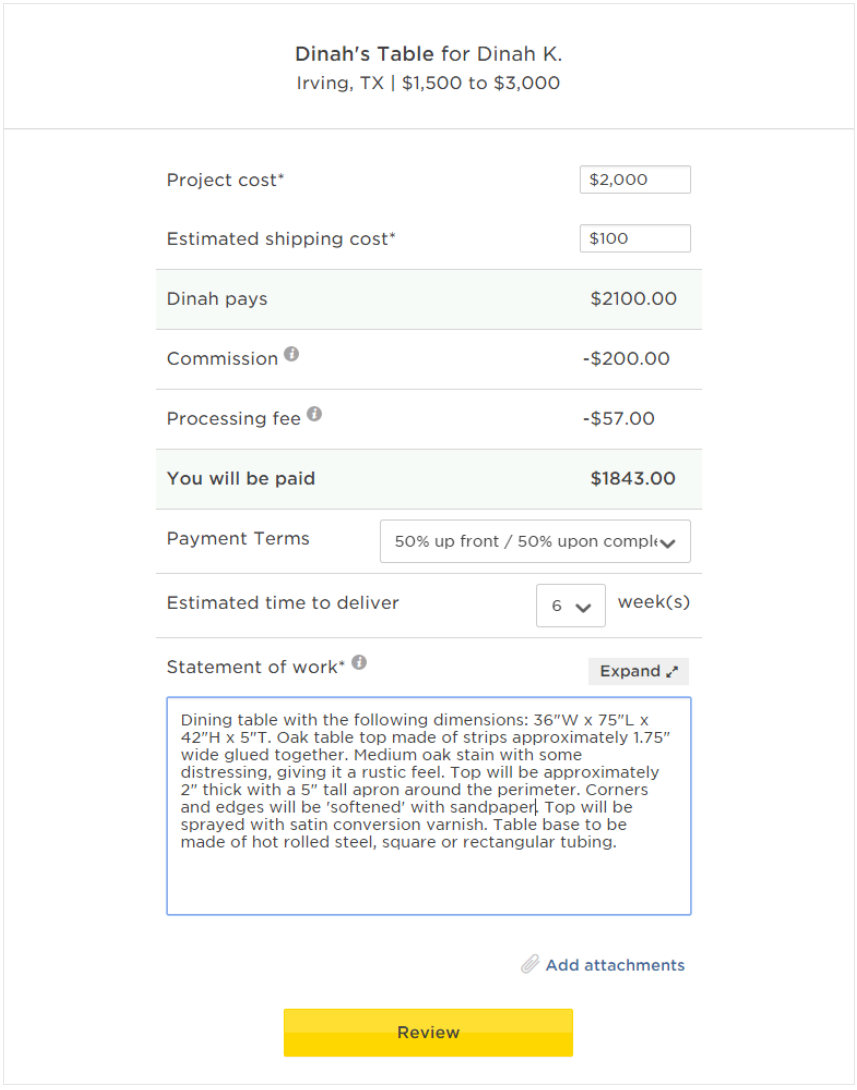
> I believe serious customers want a comprehensive proposal spelling out details, design elements and expectations from both the customer and the maker.

Maker Jim Reedy
Boca Raton, FL

In the unlikely event of a dispute, CustomMade staff will look first to the proposal to determine what the customer was promised. Protect yourself by including as many details as you can.

When the customer receives your proposal, he or she has three options: Accept the proposal, ask for a revised proposal, or send you a message about the proposal. Whatever the customer does, you'll get an email notifying you of the response, which will also appear in your CustomMade inbox.

In the case of Quick Order purchases, the details you enter in your listing take the place of the proposal. Once you get a Quick Order notification, simply drop the customer a note thanking him or her for the order and get started making the item!



Step 4: Start the Project

The customer accepted the proposal? Great! Time to get to work. It's always a nice touch to drop the customer a note thanking him or her for accepting the proposal and trusting you with their project. Once you do get started, you'll want to keep the customer informed every step of the way. It's always better to over-inform than under-inform, and it's always better to include photos than not. At a minimum, you'll need to update the customer weekly.

> Keep the customer updated on the project's progress on a weekly basis until a job is done.

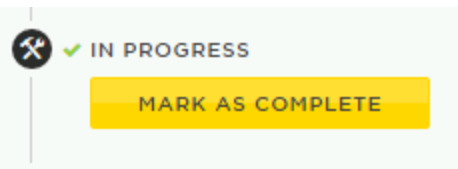
You may have questions during the course of a project, or need clarification from the customer on some detail or another. That's great -- you always want to get the customer's thinking before making a decision that will affect the final product. If those conversations lead to changes to the project that differ from what was in the initial proposal, you'll need to submit a revised proposal for the customer to accept.

> "I send the client regular updates of the progress once the project is started using shop photos and explaining the procedures I use."
>
> **Maker Mike Mathieu**
> **Midlothian, VA**

You'll also need to update the proposal with a new completion date if something happens during the course of the project that adds to the time it will take to complete the project.

Step 5: Finish the Project & Ship It

When you're done with the project, you'll need to log in to your CustomMade account and mark it complete. When you do that, you'll be prompted to write a note to the customer and attach at least one photo of the finished product. Multiple photos showing the item from different angles are best.

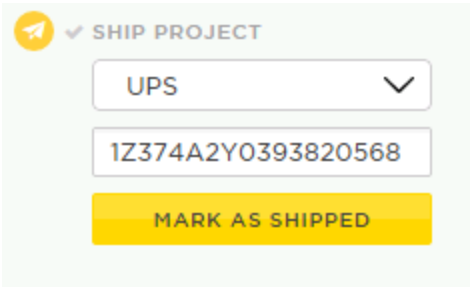


24 to 48 hours after you mark the project complete, we will process the final payment from your customer (unless it was a 100% up front job). Don't ship the item until you receive an email from us letting you know the charge went through successfully.

In the time between when you send your message and photos to the customer and when you ship the item, the customer may contact you with questions or concerns about the final product. If you need to delay shipment of the item in order to accommodate a last-minute request from the customer, let us know. The CustomMade support team can put a hold on the final payment until you're ready to ship. Just drop us a note at support@custommade.com explaining the situation.

> Ship the finished item within two business days of receiving payment. Insure any shipped item for 100% of the item's value.

When time comes to ship the item, you'll need to insure it for 100% value. Once you've arranged for shipping and have a tracking number, log in to CustomMade, enter the carrier and tracking number, and mark the item shipped. There's an "Other" option if you're using a shipper other than those in the drop-down menu. If you're delivering the item personally, select the "I will deliver myself option." Submitting the shipping information kicks off an email to the customer with those details.

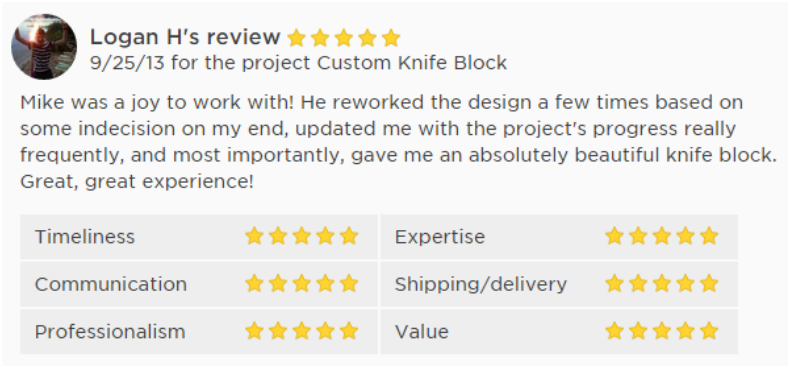


Step 6: Get a Review

A few days after you mark the project complete, the customer will be asked to leave a review. There's an overall review of one to five stars, and customers are asked to evaluate you and your work in six specific areas: timeliness, expertise, communication, shipping/delivery, professionalism, and value. Makers with five-star reviews are much more likely to win work, and the more five-star reviews you earn, the better you look to prospective customers. Before wrapping up communication with the customer, it's always a good idea to politely ask for a review.

> "Most clients are more than happy to give you a review if you simply ask nicely."
>
> **Maker Becky Armstrong**
> **Marshall, WI**

If the customer doesn't leave a review, CustomMade will send reminder emails. But a personal appeal from you always trumps an automated email from us.



Final Thoughts

Before we put this document together, we asked some of our veteran makers to share their experiences doing work through CustomMade. You've seen their comments throughout these pages. We leave you with some more wisdom from these talented individuals.

"Don't bid on something unless you can absolutely deliver. This isn't a place for you to learn how to make something at the customer's expense. Build your reviews with good work and expand as you go by adding to your portfolio."

Maker Pennee Parker
Westminster, MD

"Be excited, be honest, and listen to your customers and what they are asking you to do...ask questions!"

Maker Steve Kelly
Dowling, MI

"Be thorough and explain EVERYTHING to customers. Make sure they really understand the process."

Maker Karen Squillante
Port Orange, FL

"Be patient, and don't get discouraged by the shoppers. Just like retail, a lot of people enter your store and buy nothing. It's part of the process."

Maker Amy Gless
Lowell, MI

"Document all stages and show design details. Get approvals before proceeding. Keep the customer in the design loop."

Maker Kathleen Lynagh House
La Jolla, CA

We hope this Maker Handbook has given you the information you need to get going on CustomMade. If you need help getting started, the CustomMade Support Team is standing by at support@custommade.com.

Thanks for becoming part of the CustomMade community of makers!