

How to Make Your Business Better Now, Not Later

Erin Waters:

Hello there and welcome to another episode of School of Sellers. I am your host Erin Waters and today is our next part of our Back to Basics series where we talk about things that we wish we would have known as new sellers. But these are also great reminders and refreshers for all of my established seller friends who have been around on TPT for a couple years or maybe the whole time TPT has been around. This week's topic is all about things that we wish we would have done differently looking back at our TPT business from the beginning and thinking about the biggest mistakes we made and how we have learned from them and how we can hopefully help you avoid those same mistakes. We are doing the Back to Basics series because we are launching a brand new course for School of Sellers in May of this year and it is going to be for all of my friends who have been thinking about starting their own TPT store. Maybe you have your own store but you haven't really done a whole lot with it yet and you're really just looking for that push to get serious about things. If you want to catch the other episodes that we've done so far in our Back to Basics series and check out the Foundations course, you can go to SchoolOfSellers.com/Foundations and there you can find all of the Back to Basics series for our podcast videos, you can grab some free tools for sellers, and you can learn about our Foundations course. But without further ado, I'd love to get started with this week's episode and I have a very special guest to introduce you all to today.

Today we have a very special guest on the podcast. My friend Jen is a teacher seller and she is here to share all of her knowledge that she has gained over the years as a teacher seller. And today we're talking about things that we wish we would have done differently, kind of like looking back on all of our choices throughout the years on TPT and just reflecting on things we would do differently, things we would recommend for new sellers, things like that. So before we get started, Jen, will you just tell us a little bit about yourself, how long you've been on TPT, and any other interesting tidbits that you'd like to share?

Jen Regan:

So my store is called Two Little Birds and I started in May of 2015. I started my store when I had two kids. So that is the two little birds where that comes from and now I have four kids that are three, five, seven, and eight. So it feels crazy for some people that maybe like Instagram have been following me for a while that I started that long ago where they're school age now.

Erin Waters:

That's so cool. I feel like I've been along for that ride. Like even before you and I met through School of Sellers, I followed you and we were like kind of friends on social media. But it is wild to think that you started your store with two and then you doubled. And I love, so can you share your Instagram handle?

Jen Regan:

It's Two Little Birds TPT. So Two.Little.Birds.TPT.

Erin Waters:

Great. I think you do such a great job of balancing teaching content and personal content on your site. So I just, anyone who, you'll get a good laugh following Jen because she also has a really good sense of humor. I think that's what first drew me to you. So I love, you're one of my favorite Instagram accounts.

Jen Regan:

Ah, thank you.

Erin Waters:

Well, so let's talk about how we both started on TPT. I think probably I've shared my story quite a few times here on the show. So I want to hear specifically about how you started. Like what was going on in your life at the time that you started TPT? What did it kind of look like? And then we'll also talk about like now, like how things look for you now because I know it's a little different than when you started. So share with us the beginnings of your TPT journey.

Jen Regan:

So I started in May of 2015. And so kind of like backtracking a little, like 2014-2015 school year I was just coming off of an extended maternity leave with my second. So I had seven months off with her and then September I went back. And I really had a very tough transition back to work that year as a working mom of two that were under two. So TPT like was kind of like my savior in a lot of ways that year because I really started being a buyer of TPT and I would use that so that I wouldn't be taking things home and planning while I was home with my girls. As I started buying more, I also started realizing like I wanted to like search for like everything that I needed and like some like really key things that I felt like I needed, I was unable to find. And that's where I started kind of designing and like making things on my own. And then so it kind of like brought me out of a funk. Like I said, I was having like a really rough time that year. And in about May, like April I would say, I like came across teacher Instagram which like I don't know what else to call it. But I think like someone was doing a giveaway where you had to follow like a few other people or something and that really like kind of made everything come together for me. And then around May, I started my own teacher Instagram which led to starting my TPT store. And like a week after, like I know because like when you get your like update each year that you have to like renew your TPT, a week later, I found out I was pregnant with my third. And the creating and the Instagram and the connections you make with people in like TPT groups and on Instagram and stuff like really got me through that pregnancy at school because I was still working at that time. So that's how I got started.

Erin Waters:

I think that's so powerful to talk about because I think a lot of times when people think TPT, like our first thought is doing it to make money which like I'm sure that's a big part of it too for a lot of people. But recently in the School of Sellers group, we had posed a question about kind of like along the lines of like how has TPT changed your life or like impacted your life. And I remember your response was very focused on like all of the intangible ways that TPT has benefited you. And I think that like finding community and finding that support is so huge and a lot of times way bigger than any financial.

Jen Regan:

Oh yeah. Like I needed that so bad at that time. It like reignited something that after having a really tough year. So now like fast forward to where I am now, so after I had my third, I took maternity leave and worked really hard on my store at that time. I was actually just talking to my husband about this. I was like, how many times did I extend that maternity leave? He's like you extended it three times. So I had to like keep writing to the board, like yeah, I'm going to extend this again. And then on that leave, I got pregnant with my fourth and I had been working really hard that whole time. And then that was when we made a decision that I would leave my job and stay home and work on TPT and blogging and stuff while also being able to be there while my kids were young.

Erin Waters:

That is so cool. So you are currently home working on TPT but also manning the house because you have four little ones. So like that in itself is a full-time job. So when do you find time to work on TPT? Like when is your biggest time?

Jen Regan:

So it really used to be that I was like a night owl and I would stay up late and work. But that has really shifted now where I get up early and I try to get stuff done in the morning. I have two days a week where I have my littlest ones that are now three and five are at a preschool program. We're lucky that they are there and in person this year. So I use that time. Then I also try to not work like once like my older girls are home from school. Like I try to keep like working hours. So I do my best work in the morning I have kind of come to realize. So kind of working around the kids and finding time when I can.

Erin Waters:

I totally can relate to that. I'm also a morning worker. Well, because then you kind of get it out of the way and you cannot have all that leftover stress like on your mind, like thinking about all the things you didn't do.

Jen Regan:

Yes. And now like if I try to stay up late, I'm like, how did I used to do this like a few years ago? Like I don't feel like I'm like putting out my best stuff because I'm so tired by the end of the day.

Erin Waters:

You know what though? I think it has a lot to do with just like your different seasons that you go through in life because I'm the same way. Like for a while I was staying up late and that was working but now we're shifting. So that's actually one of the big reasons I asked you to be on the show today is because I think you are such a good example of someone who has run your business through so many different parts of your life. So I think that your perspective is really valuable especially for teachers out there who are still in the classroom or teachers who have kids at home and are just trying to do all the things. So I'm curious then, shifting to like reflecting back on all of the things that we have done in TPT, what is something that you wish you would have started earlier in your TPT business?

Jen Regan:

So I really feel like I wish that I would have been better about repurposing content. Like looking back, I feel like everybody always says like, you don't have to do everything. Like find one thing that you're good at and focus on that. And I feel like I had like laser focus on my email list which is a great thing to focus on and I'm really proud of my email list and the connections that I have with people there. But I like look back now and I'm like, I was so exclusively sending them content that I also like can repurpose to my blog and to social media. And while I'm focusing on the one thing that I know that I'm good at, I can also use that content in other places. It doesn't have to be that exclusive. So I feel like if I were to look back because I started my email list like four years ago, I wouldn't be so focused like just on that one thing. Because you can repurpose it and use it over and over again in different ways and I realize that now, that I was sitting on so much content for so long.

Erin Waters:

I think that's like normal though because it's our first inclination to want to always give like new and like unique things. But I think you hit the nail on the head when you said you're just sitting on all of that content. One of the lessons I definitely learned as a seller is I think we over assume what people are seeing from us. So like if we send out an email, we're assuming that everyone saw that email and that everyone who follows us everywhere saw that email.

Jen Regan:

I know.

Erin Waters:

If we sat and like really thought about it, we'd realize like obviously they didn't. But it's just this assumption that kind of stops us from doing things like the repurposing. So I think that's a great one.

Jen Regan:

Yeah, definitely.

Erin Waters:

Oh my gosh. I can definitely relate to that. So for new sellers, if you are someone who is like, if you have an email list or you're writing a blog or you're writing Facebook captions, like don't be afraid to take that exact wording and use it elsewhere. Because if you take enough time to like craft something creative and catchy, then you might as well use it in as many corners.

Jen Regan:

Yeah, absolutely. Definitely. And I also feel like kind of along with that, like I wish that like I would have used schedulers before. I was always using Tailwind for Pinterest and that just always made sense to do for Pinterest. And repurposing and scheduling like things on Facebook, like it makes it a lot easier when you're using a scheduler to put that content out there again and again. And when you look at your Facebook page, like barely anybody that's following your page is organically seeing it. So like you can put it out there multiple times. So using schedulers like that has also been helpful in repurposing stuff.

Erin Waters:

I agree with that, especially for something like Facebook where it's not like they're seeing every single thing come up in their feed. So it helps to kind of put the same stuff out there again and again and again.

Jen Regan:

Yeah.

Erin Waters:

That is so true. Yeah. I don't know how I really functioned before schedulers.

Jen Regan:

I know.

Erin Waters:

To be honest. Well, and it's funny now because I'm going back through, so for some parts of my business, I'm trying to start posting more stuff organically. But because I've been using the schedulers, everything is already created, it's already like there, and it's just like, it's amazing. So I think that's a great thing for people starting out and people that have been on TPT for years.

Jen Regan:

Yeah, definitely.

Erin Waters:

What's your favorite scheduler?

Jen Regan:

Well, so I don't think Tailwind's super easy for Pinterest but I just started using it for Instagram and I really, really like it because I'm using the smart bio. I switched to link in profile to use the smart bio for Tailwind and I think it's really nice to use as a scheduler too because it lays out like your grid. So you can kind of see how things are falling. I know like you don't want it to be like totally like laid out like perfectly. And it gives you like prime times to kind of post and where you can like fit it in. So I kind of go back and forth between using the app on my phone and doing it like on desktop. So that I think it's really, really easy to schedule and I had no idea like how easy Instagram was to schedule where like I used to be like I should probably post. I haven't posted in a while. And so I think that that has been really helpful.

Erin Waters:

Especially the smart bio because like I remember I used to like set alarms for like when I would have to go back and change my link in profile like once my post went live and that was just like such a headache. So that's like my number one reason for Tailwind I feel like.

Jen Regan:

Yeah. And I like with the smart bio how it has the links that you could click up top. So I did use like a tracker to see and the shop my resources one has gotten good clicks since I've started using that.

Erin Waters:

That's great to know because I know that there are definitely mixed opinions when it comes to using schedulers. But in my eyes, it's like the difference between doing it and getting it done or not doing it at all.

Jen Regan:

I know. Definitely.

Erin Waters:

So I think it's a good situation for everybody.

Jen Regan:

Yeah.

Erin Waters:

So now when we're talking about like mistakes we've made, I think it's important that everyone listening to know that obviously like making mistakes is part of the TPT process. So we can share as much as we try. We can share as much as we can but there's only so much we can do to help people learn from our mistakes. So if you are someone who has been on TPT and you're thinking like, oh my gosh, I've done so many things wrong, it's part of the process. You're not alone. We're just here to kind of help you a little bit more in kind of the things we wish we would have been helped with earlier on. So Jen, if you had to pick one thing that you regret the most, maybe one thing you wish you would have never done in your business, can you think of one thing that you're just like, you look back and you're like, oh, why did I do that?

Jen Regan:

I'm not really sure like one specific thing. Thinking back like to the beginning of like starting blogging and stuff, it was when everybody was like doing like linky parties and like that kind of thing. And I feel like that made me like treat blogging like not serious enough, like not content related enough. And I don't think that I had the right mindset about blogging because that was kind of the way blogs were back then. You know?

Erin Waters:

Yeah.

Jen Regan:

I don't know. Like one mistake like was if I could say like in general would be like not paying enough attention to my website and my blog. Like just being like I'm going to throw up a list of books for this holiday rather than, like I said, I was sitting on all this content that I send great emails every week, like putting that content towards my blog. So I guess really like the blogging, website content.

Erin Waters:

Well, I can guarantee you're not alone in that thought because I feel the same way. You'll probably hear me tell sellers a million times like try not to latch on to like the trendy stuff because that's not what's going to last and that's a perfect example. Like the linky parties and like the blog hops. But at the time, it felt like that's what everyone was doing. So it's really hard to kind of differentiate between what's trendy and what's going to push your business forward. But I think that the blog culture in general has changed a ton since we started.

Jen Regan:

Yes, absolutely. And also though I think when you're starting out it is important to make connections with people. Like many friends I talk to like that are like Instagram friends and are from TPT groups and stuff. So I think it's important to make a connection and I think back then that was like a way to make connections with people. But now there are so many Facebook groups and Instagram, you watch people's stories, you feel like them, and there are people that I message with back and forth on Instagram that those connections are really important to have like with other sellers. I think that that was important like starting out to like to make connections with other people and like you kind of are starting out at the same time and growing together and learning together too.

Erin Waters:

I agree. It's definitely a double-edged sword. So I think it just comes down to finding balance I guess. Because I agree. That first year, first several years are so formative I feel like. So I do think it's important to try different things but then kind of figuring out what works for your business but also is going to serve you from a social standpoint too. Like finding that perfect balance which is hard.

Jen Regan:

It is, yeah.

Erin Waters:

But I agree. The connections are huge in the TPT world. It just makes it all that more special in my opinion. So if you could say, like I wish I would have spent more time doing this and less time doing this, if you could just answer that in like one thing? Like more time looking back, I wish I would have done more this and less of this. What would you say your top things would be?

Jen Regan:

I would say more time focusing on not like the cute and you get so drawn in and it's so exciting at first. I'm doing this. I'm really like starting my TPT store and I want all the fonts and all the clip art. And so I would say like focusing more on like what I know I'm good at and what I know works like in a classroom and creating that content versus the small like little things and the cute fluff.

Erin Waters:

Yes. I think that's a really good point because most people, like when they start their TPT business, they're learning a set of skills that they've never been able to do before. So like everything seems exciting. But that is like a very specific like pivoting point I feel like in your business, like realizing like just because you can make whatever you want doesn't mean like you should make all the things that you think of.

Jen Regan:

Yes, yes.

Erin Waters:

But that can be hard. It gets so addicting especially at the beginning.

Jen Regan:

I go back and be like get focused. Like stop being so distracted by all the cute stuff.

Erin Waters:

That's probably where like our 500 unfinished projects come from on our computer because I know I have so many. Oh my gosh. But it is. It's that creative piece that really hooks people in and then it's all history from there.

Jen Regan:

Yeah.

Erin Waters:

Well, I think that's really good advice for people who are just starting out and just a good reminder for people who have been doing this for years and years. I know I still find myself doing that some days. It's like, Erin, just focus. Like pick something. Stop jumping around. It's not good for you. It never ends well. So let's kind of flip the conversation a little. I don't want to focus like just on mistakes and like regrets obviously. What do you feel is something you did really well from the beginning that you would encourage other sellers to also do?

Jen Regan:

So like I kind of talked about earlier, like I really do think that I did like nurture and build a really good email list. I have like a group of people that email me back every time I send an email and I do feel like I give good content in my emails and I have worked really hard at that. So I am glad I started that when I did. When I started my email list, like I was like, all right, I am sending on this day at this time every week and I have remained consistent with that since then through ups and downs and schools closing and things. Like I really feel that I've tried to stay consistent but also kind of like think about like how am I serving my email list, how can I be helpful, and what do they need. So I think one thing that I don't regret is spending the time on that list because I do have a very I think loyal email list.

Erin Waters:

And that's really cool to hear because I feel like a lot of times, that's what sellers save for like last. They start the store and the blog and the social media first. But I love hearing that starting an email list earlier has paid off because I think that will help a lot of people think like oh, maybe I should do that sooner than later. But there's something about email that's just intimidating I feel like.

Jen Regan:

I know. It is. It is intimidating. But also like again, repurposing content. I have been doing it for a while and I sometimes look back and I look back like okay, May is coming up. What did I send May 2nd, 2019? Like I'm going to send that again. Nobody remembers what I sent two years ago and I'm going to repurpose that and just update it a little.

Erin Waters:

Absolutely. I mean who is going to remember the emails?

Jen Regan:

Yeah. I know I remember like the first time I did it, it was like a light bulb went off. I was like nobody remembers what I sent. Like I could send the same thing next week they probably wouldn't remember.

Erin Waters:

And what a liberating feeling to like be able just to reuse and just be done. Like that is so good. So good. Oh my gosh. Well, this has been amazing. You have shared so many helpful tips. I have a little lightning round of questions I'm going to ask you. I didn't prep you for this but these are just for fun questions. So just say whatever comes to mind first. Okay?

Jen Regan:

Okay.

Erin Waters:

You ready?

Jen Regan:

Yeah.

Erin Waters:

All right. Favorite clip artist?

Jen Regan:

Oh gosh, that's so hard. Krista Wallden I would say. She always has something that you can find quick.

Erin Waters:

That girl's a machine.

Jen Regan:

She is.

Erin Waters:

Favorite font or font artist?

Jen Regan:

That's also really tough. And this is back, I have trouble. I really want all the cute stuff. I would say is it Golly Miss Mollie? Hers, the MJ font. Is that her?

Erin Waters:

I believe so. Yeah.

Jen Regan:

Because she has super cute fonts but they also all have capitals where you can make the first letter capital. Where sometimes you find a really cute font and you want the first letter of the sentence be capital and that's not always there.

Erin Waters:

And that's a great point for people choosing fonts because we just had this conversation for our 101 course about how like some fonts, you can have, like some fonts don't even offer the ability to like bold or italicize.

Jen Regan:

Yeah.

Erin Waters:

So you really have to pick like ones that have the options.

Jen Regan:

Yes. Kaitlynn Albani or Albani, I forget her last name, she's also a favorite because the same thing. Like she has a lot that offer like accents and capital letters and stuff.

Erin Waters:

I have a lot of her fonts, the KA, hers are the KA fonts?

Jen Regan:

KA, yeah.

Erin Waters:

Yeah. Oh, they're so good.

Jen Regan:

Yes.

Erin Waters:

Mac or PC.

Jen Regan:

PC.

Erin Waters:

Okay. Growing bundles, yay or nay?

Jen Regan:

Oh, I have two right now and when I'm done, I will nay for a very long time.

Erin Waters:

Oh, I feel that so hard. Favorite food?

Jen Regan:

Chocolate cake.

Erin Waters:

Okay.

Jen Regan:

Birthday cake.

Erin Waters:

Oh yeah. I could go for that right now. And then end of the day, no more TPT, what's your guilty pleasure, like watching or reading? Like what do you like to do when there's downtime?

Jen Regan:

I read every night, fiction stuff. Like I really love historical fiction. Been really reading a lot of like World War II era books and I read every night.

Erin Waters:

Awesome.

Jen Regan:

That's my thing. That's not exciting at all. Maybe were expecting something worth it.

Erin Waters:

No. Hey, that's my guilty pleasure. Reading in bed. Oh my gosh.

Jen Regan:

Yeah.

Erin Waters:

So nice. I like look forward to that moment every day.

Jen Regan:

So do I. So do I. I actually said that to my husband the other day. I was like, I know like it's not even dinner time yet but I really can't wait to keep reading my book. It's so good.

Erin Waters:

I keep telling my husband, he'll like go through phases where he'll like read and then not really be into reading. And whenever he's into reading, I'm like we're like Mike and Carol Brady, like reading our books in bed. I was like, isn't this nice? That's probably why he stops getting on his reading.

Jen Regan:

Yeah. Look at us. Look at what we're doing.

Erin Waters:

Oh gosh. Well, thank you, Jen, so much. This was so fun and I appreciate taking the time to come on the show.

Jen Regan:

Thank you so much for having me.

Erin Waters:

Jen, it's always a pleasure. Thank you to everyone who has listened in this week. If you want to learn more about our Back to Basics series or catch up on other podcasts that we have done over the last several weeks, you can go to SchoolOfSellers.com/Foundations. And you can also grab some really great free tools using that link as well. SchoolOfSellers.com/Foundations. Thanks again so much for listening and I'll see you here next week.

Welcome to the School of Sellers

What is the School of Sellers?

We are a group that is committed to helping teacher sellers in all stages of their business. We like to provide tips, tools, and resources that aid in building your business while making it feel doable every step of the way.

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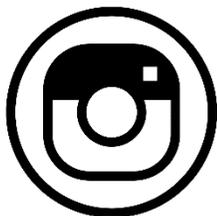
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