



BUSINESS

DANIEL GROSS | SUSTAINABEAST

PaintNite combines art lessons and alcohol at bars and restaurants

by Kelsey Meany | Aug 1, 2013 4:45 AM EDT

The recipe is simple -- take one part painting class, add one part bar, and shake. The result: a night of fun in which people paint their faces more often than the canvas.



"Drink Creatively," reads the motto claims above a vividly clear warning: "no experience required." [PaintNite](#) is just one of the many of the "add-alcohol" activities taking the nation by storm. Movie theaters like [iPic](#) bring the bartender and the popcorn right to your showing of "The Smurfs 2." At hair salon [DryBar](#) champagne corks pop while blow dryers roar.



Dan Hermann/Paint Nite

PaintNite's business model is as simple as it sounds: combine the services of a bartender with the artistic flow of an artist. PaintNite and local restaurants pair together in a "hand-shake agreement." Students (thirsty artists?) come to improve their skills while knocking back a few drinks.

When the class started last week at the New York City restaurant Revel, artist Jonathan Levy waned not to get the water used for cleaning brushes mixed up with the vodka-sodas, glasses of wines, and frothy beer. Apparently, it happens "a lot." Levy said that having a few drinks helps customers loosen up, and gets them to stop worrying about how unlikelike their palm trees look.

Levy, the artist behind ["Style of Nature"](#) artwork, had previous experience teaching children's painting classes – and joined PaintNite's crew to pick up some extra cash and publicity. "Teaching drunk adults is basically like teaching children," he said.

Levy taught the painting "Paradise Island," which depicts a sunset near the coastline – a picture described as one of the "easy" paintings to conquer on the site. Potential customers can pick a class based on location and difficulty. Locations stretch to almost 30 cities across The United States, Canada, and Europe including New York, Miami, Toronto, and London. Every week more than 50 local artists host events at more than 250 venues.

To join as an instructor, artists have to create many mock-ups of a single painting and divide it into sections so it's easier to understand for beginners, Levy said. Besides a portion of the cash given to the artist for the night, they also receive exposure, and a chance to improve their own work.

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like teaching children.”**

"There are a lot of happy accidents," Levy said. He works with an encouraging attitude – aiming to help the strugglers maintain structure throughout their painting while still allowing them to put in their own flair.

"The instructions are straight forward," said Daniel Hermann, head of strategy and founder of PaintNite.

Hermann, who is also president and founder of college laundry service Lazybones, Inc., started PaintNite with business partner Sean McGrail. The idea came about at a friend's birthday party and since then everything seemed to fall into place as they schmoozed over cocktails and wrote business plans down on a napkin. The company launched in March 2012 in Boston – where the team is based. Hermann, a University of Wisconsin at Madison and Babson business school grad, says PaintNite offers a creative twist on the standard bar experience – and allows participants to unveil a sense of personality.

"Women are usually a lot more willing to embarrass themselves," Hermann said. "It's such a female-heavy audience." Partnerships with restaurants are based on "handshake agreements" he said. The \$45 fee, in most places, covers a canvas, paint, smock, and everything an aspiring Picasso may need over the course of about two hours. Bars take home the money earned from food and drink, which is not included in the ticket price for entry to the events. The artist and PaintNite split a portion of the earnings from the night. Participants go home with their paints, pain-stained arms, and a pleasant buzz.