

# 1stdibs targets Europe after buying up Online Galleries

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Written by ATG Reporter (/about-us/authors)

1stdibs, the global online marketplace for high-end art, antiques and decorative objects, has wholly acquired Online Galleries, the British-based portal favoured by LAPADA, the BADA, SLAD and CINOA.

The deal, which is being announced at this week's LAPADA Fair in Berkeley Square - an event sponsored by 1stdibs - is the latest step in 1stdibs' strategic plan to expand its reach and become the destination of choice for collectors, buyers and designers.

The 230 or so members, including trade associations, who currently appear on Online Galleries, are being offered a preferential deal to sign up with 1stdibs by the end of the year, but the existing Online Galleries site will continue as now, said Carmine Bruno, managing director of Online Galleries, who has now become managing director of 1stdibs UK. There will be no interface between the two sites.

That shared vision, which laid the foundations of the eventual deal, focuses on high-end quality, not just in the art, antiques and luxury goods being offered online, but in the people selling them, as well as the ongoing re nement of the technology and systems being used.

Michael Bruno, who launched 1stdibs in 2001, now nds himself at the helm of what is billed as the "largest online luxury marketplace" in the world, hosting 1300 dealers in everything from ne art, jewellery and vintage fashion to high-end residential property.

Every dealer is vetted, has to be recommended by recognised trade professionals of a high standing, must operate from a bricks-and-mortar gallery and must be working full time as professional dealer. Many of them also have to undergo a gallery inspection by 1stdibs before being approved for membership.

Revenues come from membership fees, set-up costs and uploads.

Operating across seven countries, from the US and Mexico to major European centres including the UK, France, the Netherlands and Belgium, there is a waiting list of close to 1000 dealers wanting to sign up, says Michael Bruno.

"We could take them all in tomorrow," he says, but that might have a detrimental effect on quality control. Instead, the company spends a great deal of time assessing its existing offering and deciding which markets to build on, whether by collecting discipline or geographical location, and this informs the selection of recruits from the waiting list.

Carmine Bruno has taken a similarly controlled approach to expansion of the operation that was initially created by St James art dealer Peter Nahum ve and a half years ago. In Online Galleries' case, dealers must be members of one of the leading recognised associations.

"We have probably turned more people away than we have accepted over the years," he said.

As well as their mastery of the web, both Brunos come from an arts-based dealing background. Michael initially marketed classic antique furniture from dealers in the Marché aux Puces in Paris to US buyers, while Carmine worked as a dealer in mainly mid-century art in both the UK and US.

With the financial muscle of venture capitalists Benchmark Capital behind it, 1stdibs now has the money to develop its design and technology teams, as well as its software, all of which have been very much the focus of activity over the past nine months.

"Billionaires, millionaires and the ordinary intrigued buyer increasingly like to go online to look at things," says Michael Bruno. "We are going to make it easier to find things and buy things, and our challenge is to connect to the buyer's first impulse before they hit our website."

How he intends to do this is not yet clear, and he is enigmatic about what will happen next: "In a year's time you won't recognise us," he adds.

Money, technology, advanced support teams, the right standard of dealer and quality of object, as well as a global market reach are all assets that 1stdibs brings to the table in the deal, as well as the ability to move quickly. The company runs global advertising and promotion campaigns and has now developed a bespoke shipping service with Hedley's, with whom it has worked for 12 years, offering preferential rates.

"The challenge initially is to ship stuff from Europe to the US at a reasonable cost," explains Michael Bruno. "We now give a calculation on shipping costs for transactions based on container rates."

Hedley's use warehouses in Long Island City near New York to streamline the process.

## **European Market**

Online Galleries, as a comparatively small company that also custom-designs websites for dealers and trade organisations, has been unable to develop as quickly as it would like, according to Carmine Bruno.

The deal will change all that. In its turn, it brings the standards of dealer and stock necessary to maintain the level of profile 1stdibs insists on, as well as local knowledge of the UK and European markets. It represents more than 21 countries, offers more than 35,000 antiques and works of art from more than 5000 dealers, showcasing stock through CINOA-affiliated sites.

Perhaps most importantly, it will act as a stepping stone to speed 1stdibs' entry into the European market. By adding over 200 leading UK dealer members of Online Galleries such as Adrian Alan, Koopman Rare Art, Mallett and Ronald Phillips Ltd, 1stdibs has now more than tripled its European dealer community.

Michael Bruno revealed that his team were already looking at Italy as their next target.

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