Nicolette Mercantile

Notes on the business, and what to do next

Louisville, Kentucky
Prepared November 2026
from 25 reels, the Etsy shop,
and what comparable makers charge

The hats are good. The business is underpriced and under-told. Both are fixable this month.

I went through every reel on your Instagram (Sept 17 to Nov 5), your Etsy shop, and what other burned-hat makers and hat bars charge. What follows is what I saw, then the practical pieces: a pricing worksheet, a holiday and Derby plan, three reels you can shoot this week, a hat bar package, and a custom-order form.

None of this is about making different hats. It is about getting paid properly for the ones you already make, and letting people see them on a person.

Matt



The pink-on-denim hat, worn on camera. Your best-performing reel, and the only kind of shot most of the others are missing.

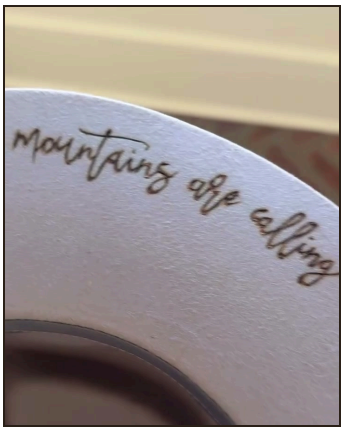
Department No. 1 What's working: the work itself

Plenty of people burn designs into hats. What you do that I didn't find elsewhere is everything around the burning: painted crowns, ombre fades, torch-scorched edges, hand-painted fawn spots, stitched X marks, and a hidden design under the brim that only the owner sees. The painted pieces are your signature. Lead with them.

The line work holds up close. Across the reels the burns are clean, with no scorched halos on the felt, and the under-brim lettering is even.



Mountains Are Calling. $220
Painted blue ombre crown, burned treeline, braided leather band.



The same hat, underneath.
"The mountains are calling and I must go," burned under the brim.



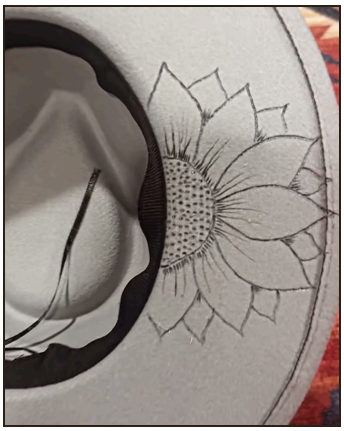
Sunflower, painted. $180
Marigold crown, scorched edges, crystal bee pin.



Fawn.
Torch-shaded brim with hand-painted spots and a lace bow.



Sun and Moon. $220
Full-brim celestial burn.



Steer skull, with a sunflower underneath.
From the "horse girl" reel.



Spiderweb, black felt. $180
Roses and a skull hidden under the brim.



Embrace Chaos.
Custom: turquoise stitching, words on the crown.

Department No. 2

What the 25 reels show

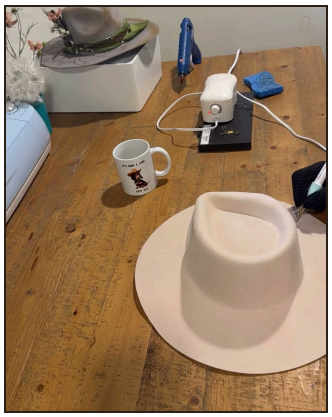
You posted 25 reels in seven weeks, about three and a half a week. Most small makers can't keep that pace, so the habit is already there. The reels just aren't doing any selling yet.

In every reel I checked closely, there was no spoken word, no text on screen, no price and no instruction for how to buy. Only a handful showed the hat on a person. The usual pattern is burning at the worktable, then turning the finished hat on a rug or the brick floor, set to a song.

Likes ran from 6 to 36, with a median of 11. The five that beat the median each did something the others didn't:

Reel	Likes	What it had
Pink on denim	36	Painted, a face on camera, worn at the end
Belknap Fall Festival prep	35	A real event and a date
"Imagine being a 12-year-old horse girl"	29	A buyer, a gift moment, a kids option
"Help me pick a band"	25	A question that invites people in
"Burnin up"	22	Fast cuts on the beat

The plain turn-the-hat reveals sit at 6 to 12. People respond to a story, a person, or being asked something.



How most reels open. A plain hat, cords and a mug. Nothing yet to stop a scroll.



What should come first. The finished hat on a person, outdoors.

The same four fixes, every reel

1. Open on the finished hat, worn, for one second. Then show the process.
2. One line of text on screen: *Hand-burned & painted wool hat · custom orders open · from $250.*
3. End with it on a head, outdoors if you can.
4. Keep it to 15 to 30 seconds. Your 13- to 23-second reels are your tightest.

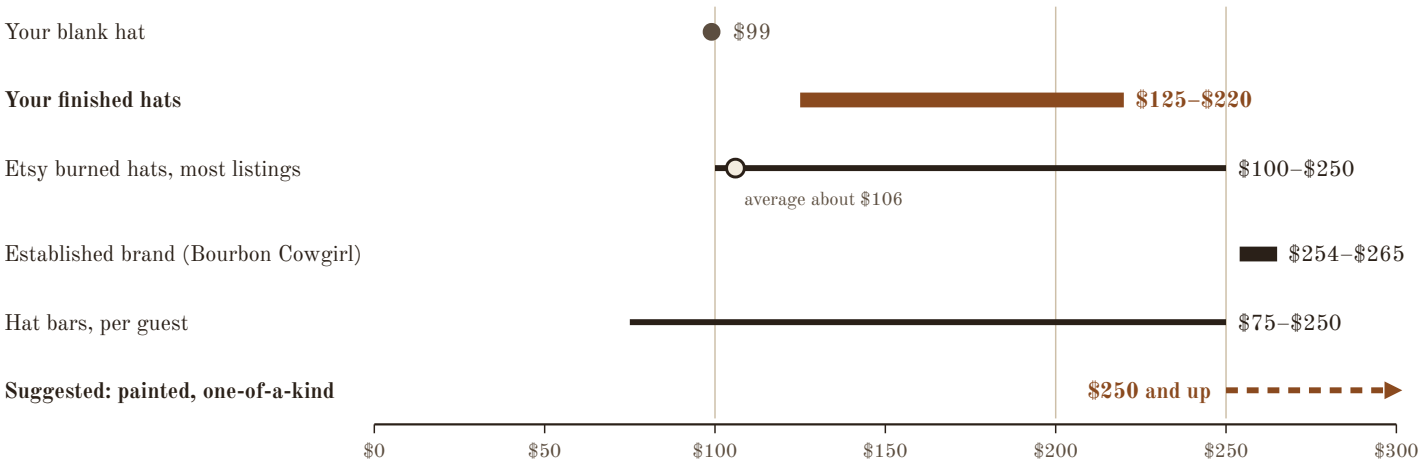
Smaller things: drop hashtags like #mountainsarecallingandimustgo that reach hikers instead of buyers. And keep the songs in Instagram; licensed music can't go into an Etsy listing video.

Department No. 3

Pricing: you are charging for the felt, not the work

Your shop lists a blank hat at $99 and finished hats from $125 to $220. Put those side by side and the burning, painting and trim are priced at roughly $25 to $120. That is a few hours of skilled, one-of-a-kind work for less than the hat underneath it.

Here is where you sit against what others charge, using prices from real listings, with my suggestion at the bottom.



Sources at the end. These are listing prices, not proof of what sold, so treat them as a range to stand in, not a rule.

What to change

- Price the painted, one-of-a-kind pieces at $250 and up. They are the hats nobody else makes.
- Price burn-only hats from about $180, and custom work from $250 with a deposit.
- Stop listing the blank and the leather hat. They anchor buyers to $83 and $99 and say nothing about you.
- Don't discount to move inventory. Wear it, photograph it on people, and let the price stand.

Then do the worksheet once, honestly, with your own numbers. It will tell you whether $250 is generous or still too low.

What Etsy keeps

On a US sale: 20¢ to list, 6.5% of the price (and of any shipping you charge), and 3% plus 25¢ for payment processing. Call it about 10% plus 45¢.

If a sale comes through one of Etsy's off-site ads, add 15% more. On a $250 hat that is $24.20 in normal fees, or $61.70 if it was an ad sale.

Fee rates from published 2026 seller guides; confirm on Etsy's own Fees & Payments page.

The worksheet (ONE PER HAT STYLE)

Cost line	Example	Yours
Blank hat, delivered to you	$40	
Band, feathers, pins, lace	$15	
Paint, tips, torch fuel, glue	$5	
Box, tissue, shipping	$20	
Your hours × your rate (4 × $30)	$120	
Cost before Etsy	**$200**	

The example numbers are placeholders to show the math. Replace every one with yours, and time a few hats with a timer, including trimming and photographing.

Sell at	Etsy fees	Left after the $200
$180	$17.55	—$37.55
$220	$21.35	—$1.35
$250	$24.20	$25.80
$295	$28.48	$66.52

With those example numbers, a $180 hat pays you nothing for your time and then costs you $37 on top. That is what “priced like a hobby” means in dollars.

Department No. 4

Lead with custom work

Your own caption on the “Embrace Chaos” reel says it best: “Custom, baby. Your vision burned into a hat.” That is the business.

Etsy is crowded, and a four-month-old shop with five sales won’t get much search traffic for a while. A hat with the buyer’s own words under the brim is something people find through Instagram and word of mouth. It is also the easiest thing to charge a premium for, and the buyer has paid a deposit before you spend anything on a blank.

Right now 23 finished hats are listed and waiting for the right person. Keep making some ready-to-wear pieces, because they are your portfolio and your market-day stock. Make custom work the thing you talk about.

Every hidden under-brim design is a personalization you can sell: a name, a date, coordinates, a ranch brand, a line from a song.

The bags



Coffee-sack bag. $98



Coffee-sack bag. $98

The upcycled bags tell an eco story and the hats tell a western-art story, and right now nothing ties them together. They don’t appear on your Instagram at all.

Two ways to make them pull their weight. Burn your mark, or a small design, into the leather handle tabs so every bag reads as Nicolette Mercantile. Or partner with a local coffee roaster: their sacks, your bags, sold in their shop with both names on it. That gives you a shelf you don’t have today.

Department No. 5

The holiday window, then Derby

Now to Christmas

You can't take a dozen custom orders today and finish them all by December 24, so don't try. Sell the custom hat as a gift instead.

- **A gift certificate for a custom hat.** A printed card in a small box with a ribbon and a burned felt swatch, so there is something to unwrap. The recipient books a design session in January. Sell it on Etsy and by DM.
- **Ready-to-wear hats as gifts** for anyone who wants one under the tree. Post them as gifts, worn, with the price on screen.
- **Small Business Saturday is November 28.** Post a gift-certificate reel that week.
- **Set a last-day-to-order date** for ready-made hats based on this year's USPS holiday cutoffs, and put it in your bio.

Derby: Oaks April 30, Derby May 1, 2027

Derby is the biggest hat moment in your own city. Two things to plan around.

- **Felt is hot in May.** Derby day is mostly straw and fascinators. Your lane is Derby-week parties, evening events, and people who want a hat they'll still wear in October. Lighter felts and a small capsule of race-season designs (roses, horseshoes, silks colors) fit that.
- **Book Derby-week hat bars by March.** Party hosts and companies plan early.
- **Watch the trademarks.** Churchill Downs is protective of its marks. Keep "Kentucky Derby," the Twin Spires and similar marks out of listing titles and designs, and say "race day" or "Derby season" instead. One current listing is titled "Kentucky Derby Wool Hat." Worth a quick check before spring.

The next 90 days

When	Do
This week	Do the pricing worksheet. Reprice the painted hats. Remove the blank and leather listings. Rewrite the bio. Turn on Etsy personalization.
Nov 16 to 28	List the gift certificate. Shoot reels A and B (Department No. 6). Gift-certificate post for Small Business Saturday (Nov 28).
December	Two to three reels a week, every one with text and a worn shot. Last-day-to-order post. Pitch three venues for January hat bars.
January	Gift-certificate design sessions. Run the first hat bar. Sketch the race-season designs.
February	Book Derby-week events. List the race-season capsule. Look back at what sold and what got DMs, and do more of that.

Department No. 6

Three reels to shoot this week

Each is under 30 seconds and built from what already worked for you. Prop the phone at head height for the worn shots, and shoot outside in shade or near a window.

A. “Your story, burned in”

0–1s	Finished hat, worn, turning toward camera.
1–4s	Close on the under-brim words. *Text: “She asked for her grandmother’s farm.”*
4–16s	Fast cuts: sketch, burner tip with smoke, paint, torch, trim.
16–22s	Back on a head, outdoors. *Text: “Custom hats from $250. DM me your story.”*

Use a real customer’s story, with permission. This is the reel that sells commissions.

B. “Every hat has a secret”

0–2s	Hands flip a hat over to reveal the hidden under-brim design. No process first.
2–10s	Two or three more flips from past hats: the sunflower, the roses and skull, the mountain quote.
10–15s	One worn. *Text: “What would you hide under yours?”*

Asks a question, so it earns comments the way the band poll did. Reply to every one.

C. “Pick one”

0–3s	Two finished hats side by side on a plain surface. *Text: “Which one are you wearing to Thanksgiving?”*
3–12s	Each one worn, five seconds apiece.
12–15s	*Text: “Comment 1 or 2. Both on Etsy, link in bio.”*

Instagram bio

Now

Hand-burned, 100% wool hats. Each piece one-of-a-kind ✨ Made slow, worn proud. DM to inquire ⚜ Louisville, KY ships...

Suggested

> Hand-burned & painted wool hats, made in Louisville.
> Custom orders: tell me your story, I’ll burn it in.
> Hat bars for your party. Shop ↓

Leads with what you make, then the two things you most want people to ask for.

Hashtags

Swap the mood tags for ones a buyer searches: #customcowboyhat #burnedhat #handpaintedhat #customhat #louisvilleshopsmall #louisvillemade #shoplocallouisville #bachelorettehat #giftsforher. Keep #pyrography for other makers.

Etsy shop fixes

- First photo on every hat listing: worn, on a person. Flat shots after.
- Turn on the personalization box and “request custom order.”
- Three shop sections: Ready to wear, Custom, Bags.
- Add a sizing note: how to measure, and which sizes each blank comes in.
- Fill in the About page with how you work and a photo of you at the bench.
- Ask every buyer for a review and a photo wearing it. One review is your biggest gap on Etsy.

Department No. 7

The hat bar package

Hat bars are where groups spend real money. At $150 to $250 a guest, one twelve-person party can bring in more than the Etsy shop has so far. Louisville already has them (Flea Style downtown, and The Hat Shoppe on Shelbyville Road, which brands hats), so the demand is proven. Your edge is that you burn and paint, not just trim.

Your constraint is your own time, so be honest about it before you price. A full design takes you hours. At a party, guests need to choose from quick designs you can burn in 10 to 15 minutes each, and bigger custom pieces finish at the bench afterward.

A menu to test

Option	Includes	Per guest
Trim	Wool hat, band, feathers, pins	$95–$125
Trim + burn	Plus one quick design from your menu, burned live	$165–$195
Full custom	Designed with you at the party, finished at the bench, delivered in two weeks	$250+

Minimum 8 guests. 30% deposit to hold the date. Travel fee outside Louisville. Prices sit inside what other hat bars charge; adjust after your first two events.

Where to pitch

- Boutiques that already sell western or boho clothing, for an in-store Saturday event
- Wineries, bourbon bars and breweries looking for a weeknight event
- Bridal shops and wedding planners, for bachelorette and bridal-party bookings
- Salons and spas, for a girls'-night package
- Companies planning a Derby-week party or a team outing

The pitch, in three sentences

> *I'm a Louisville maker who hand-burns and paints wool hats. I'd like to bring a hat bar to your space for an evening: your guests pick a hat and trim, I burn a design in front of them, and you get a full room. I handle setup and ticketing; you keep the bar.*

Department No. 8

Custom order form

Send this to anyone who DMs about a custom hat. It saves a dozen back-and-forth messages, and step 9 protects you: a burn can't be undone, so get approval on the sketch first.

1. Name, phone, email	How you'd like to hear from me.
2. Needed by	A date, and whether it is firm (wedding, trip, birthday). Custom takes about [__] weeks.
3. Head size	Measure around your head just above the ears, in inches. Or tell me S, M or L.
4. Hat color and shape	Cream, gray, camel, brown or black. Flat brim or curved.
5. The design	What should it say about you? Send photos, places, flowers, animals, symbols.
6. Under the brim	Words, a name, a date or coordinates. Up to about 40 characters.
7. Paint	Burn only, or a painted crown or brim? Which colors?
8. Band and trim	Leather, bandana, lace, beads, feathers. Anything to avoid?
9. Sketch approval	I'll send a photo of the pencil sketch on your hat. Nothing gets burned until you say yes.
10. Price and deposit	Custom from $250. Half to start, the rest before it ships or at pickup.

Back matter

Sources and notes

Prepared for Nicolette Mercantile, Louisville, Kentucky, November 2026. Photographs are stills from Nicolette Mercantile's own reels and Etsy listings.

1. Your reels: all 25 on instagram.com/nicolettemercantile, posted Sept 17 to Nov 5, 2026. Like counts as of Nov 7. Instagram didn't show view counts.
2. Your Etsy shop: nicolettemercantile.etsy.com, 32 listings, 5 sales, one review, as of Nov 7, 2026.
3. Etsy burned-hat prices: makerwords.com, "burned hats for women" category summary (average about $106; most listings $100 to $250).
4. Established brand: Bourbon Cowgirl custom burned hats, $254 to $265 (bourboncowgirl.com).
5. Hat bars: Two Roads Hat Co. (Nashville full custom $250; Salt Lake semi-custom $199), Hoyle Hat Co. corporate from $175 (teambuilding.com), Arts Brevard hat-burning workshop $75, Carly's Custom Hat Bar.
6. Louisville hat bars: GoToLouisville, "8 local spots to find an iconic Derby hat"; coverage of The Hat Shoppe.
7. Etsy fees: 2026 seller guides (checkoutpage.com, craftybase.com); confirm against Etsy's Fees & Payments policy.
8. Derby dates: kentuckyderby.com, 2027 (Oaks April 30, Derby May 1).