

Craft Shows

I love doing craft shows. They're fun, exciting, educational, and inspirational. You meet lots of people that share your interest in quality hand-made work. You get to see some truly beautiful work and meet the people that did it. Your creativity is freshly energized with a barrage of new ideas, and you make some great network connections. Then, if all that isn't enough, - you make money selling your work.

But, not all craft shows are equal. Some are stupendously good, while others are pretty poor. You won't have any advance guarantees which it will be. I've been surprised many times doing shows. Some shows that I expected to be terrific, turned out to be a waste of time. Other shows that I was completely unenthusiastic about, were some of the best ever. Although you will always have a few of these surprises, there are a few guidelines that will help you guess what a show will be like.

Seasonal

Christmas shows are best, and the closer they are to Christmas, the more you will sell. It's not that summer shows are bad - some are great. It's just that at Christmas, people are spending a lot of money buying a lot of gifts. Outdoor can be dangerous at any time of year. There's always the possibility of rain or wind.

Admission

Shows that charge admission for people to get in, will usually have more sales than those that let people in free. When customers pay to get in, they more likely came looking to buy quality crafts than just to pass time looking around.

Rent

At higher rent shows you will usually sell more expensive stuff than at lower rent shows. Shows that charge a lot to display space usually have a better assortment of high grade work and will attract the kind of customer interested in that. Very often sales at a low rent show is so poor it was not worth the effort to go - while a high rent show can sell enough to be exceptionally profitable. It's just like retail shops. High rent locations produce a higher volume of sales. It doesn't matter how much the space rent is, so much as how much you sell from that space.

Juried Shows

Because "juried" shows are harder for sellers to get in, they usually have a better mix of high grade work. Customers come to these expecting to find high quality expensive work. These shows also attract a fairly higher ratio of customers to lookers. Church basement and school auditorium shows usually just get customers looking very cheap goods.

Festivals

Shows that are attached to some kind of festival (like music, harvest, etc.) are usually poor. Especially if the craft displays are only a secondary part of the show. People come to these for the entertainment, not to buy crafts. But, these are the kind of shows that are most likely to surprise you.

What to take

It depends. I've done shows where only \$10.00 and \$20.00 items sold - others where everything over \$100.00 sold out in 2 hours - and I spent the next 4 days kicking myself in the butt for not bringing more. But, whether you expect the show to be "high-end" or "low-end", you should always take a few "show-off" pieces. A few samples of your work that say, "Look what I can do". These will encourage sales of less expensive stuff - and you will be surprised how often they sell.

One of the great things about doing shows is the information you collect from other exhibitors. If you're interested in whether or not some show is good, ask someone who has done it before. Networking with other sellers can provide invaluable information. To a large extent, I built my business on the contacts I made at different craft shows - and I have constantly benefited by all I learned doing them. I loved the shows and miss doing them. With DeBrady Glass expanding into pattern sales, we'll soon be doing the commercial trade shows - I'm very much looking forward to it.