



CRAFT FAIR SUCCESS!

25 Tips and tricks for a great “first craft fair” experience

By
Kristine Vicente
Checkerberry Lane Studio
www.checkerberrylane.com
www.checkerberrylane.etsy.com

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-INTRODUCTION-

As an Etsy seller, I recently came to realize that to make my business more effective, I needed a local following through a local presence. Craft fairs are one of the best ways to achieve this goal when your product is handmade, so I set out to find a few craft fairs that I could participate in this year that wouldn't break the bank with their entry fees, in an effort to get my business more locally recognized.

Once I found my first fair, sent in my application and got accepted, I set about scouring the internet for any information on craft fairs and tips for being successful, since I was brand new to this method of selling. I really wanted this first experience to be a good one and I knew I would need to do some research to make that happen! I was lucky to find loads of information and spent a lot of time doing internet searches on “craft fair ideas”, “craft fair tips”, “craft fair display”, etc. to get as much information on this topic as possible.

What I'm sharing here are some of the best tips and tricks I found over the last few weeks (in many locations across the web) condensed into one list to help you get ready for your first craft fair experience, hopefully helping you to make it a huge success! This by no means encompasses all of the information available to you out there, but if you don't have a lot of time to spend “scouring”, this is a great list of ideas to help you have a successful “first craft fair” experience.

-BEFORE THE FAIR -

1) **Decide what “products” you're going to offer –**

This many seem obvious to you, especially if you are only producing one “item” such a soap or candles, but even if this is the case, you'll need to determine which scents to offer. For other crafters such as woodworking, sewing, needlework, or in my case—paper-crafting, this determination is not as obvious. Product development can be time consuming as I found out prior to my first craft fair, so before you even send in the application for your first fair, figure out exactly what you're going to offer and create an example of it for yourself. This will help you in a few different ways—

- a. You'll have an idea of what materials you'll need to stock up on
- b. You'll know what “packaging” materials to add to your order list
- c. You'll know how much time it takes to make one of your product so you can made the decision about how many you'll realistically be able to produce for the fair and what to charge.

This information will be extremely helpful when you go about the task of creating a production schedule and when you place supply orders, which brings me to the next tip...

2) **Put together a production schedule and start working it--**

Knowing ahead of time what you're going to be offering for sale at your craft fair is helpful because when you put together your production schedule you'll be able to include everything you're planning to make--- so it all gets made, hopefully on time. When I say “production schedule” I don't mean anything fancy---it can be a hand-written list of products you're making alongside dates when you're targeting to have them completed and ready for sale. Having even a rough plan in place can really help you to see what your work schedule is going to look like

leading up to the fair date and it can help you reach your goals so you're certain to have enough products for sale.

3) **Secure assistance for the day of the fair—**

As soon as you receive acceptance to a craft fair, try to line up some assistance for the day. Even if you can only get a friend or family member to help for a few hours to assist you in setting up it can make a big difference in your overall experience. Here are a few reasons to ask for help...

- a. "Many hands make light the work" my grandmother used to say, and she was right! Having the extra help to get the car unloaded and your booth set up can take some of the pressure off and get your day started on the right foot so you aren't completely exhausted before the fair even starts!
- b. Having someone there to man your booth while you check out the other vendors and help with sales while you take a bite of lunch or use the bathroom can also be a huge help
- c. An extra person to help finalize a sale and bag up the goods will help you minimize the wait and provide the best possible service to your new customers!

4) **Design and "assemble" your booth—**

When I was trying to come up with a booth design for my products I looked at what felt like hundreds of photos on the internet. I searched for images of booth displays and product displays of all kinds to get table dressing ideas, container ideas and riser ideas... I looked for ideas on ways to display my sign/banners and the way that people arranged their table(s). All of it was helpful! Do as much visual research as possible before you design your booth *so that your display really enhances your product*, because that's the whole point! Especially at larger craft fairs with 50+ vendors, people may only glance at your booth and if there is not something about it that's eye-catching or if fair patrons can't tell what you're actually selling immediately, chances are they won't even stop at your booth.

5) **Branding & Product Packaging** – Branding plays a big part in anything you sell. If you are trying to build a local following, if you're planning to do a couple of fairs this year or if you're hoping to get your business off the ground, your booth & product packaging should coordinate with each other as well as your online presence if you have one. This can be as simple as having your business cards match your booth banner. Taking it a step further and having your product packaging reflect your brand as well can create serious brand recognition. When I opened my Etsy shop in 2010 I created a banner for my shop and then had business cards made using the same font that I used on my banner. I think it worked OK for a while, but when I decided to join the craft fair circuit, I developed a whole, new, re-branding of my shop and incorporated a damask yellow pattern as well as 2 new fonts to my shop logo. I tied my shop banner on Etsy to my business cards and even found a coordinating blog template. I also picked up some yellow damask tissue to wrap orders in + some labels in my logo to put on the box when someone made a purchase through my Etsy shop. This helped to cement brand recognition. Now that I'm doing craft fairs, I've also incorporated my shop logo into the labels on my products and even the table dressings, hoping that when people see yellow damask, they'll think of my shop! Even if they don't, I feel good knowing that my brand is carried through and that everything coordinates. I believe that through creating a brand standard for my products I've brought the quality of my entire shop concept up a few notches. There is more to creating a brand than just the logo & fonts. Etsy.com has some wonderful in-depth articles on "branding" should you wish to read more on this topic.

6) **Advertise** – Most fair organizers are putting the fair together as a fundraiser of some sort. There are a few out there who coordinate these fairs to earn a living but many are put on by non-profit church/organization groups so their advertising budgets are low if they exist at all! As a participant in the craft fair be someone who "spreads the word"—through email, facebook,

twitter, by putting up signs where appropriate to do so... this helps get the word out about the craft fair to make attendance swell. The more folks who know about the fair and attend will increase your potential for sales, plus, as you grow a following, there may be people who want to come check out a fair where you are participating, so spread the word!

- 7) **Bags & Business Cards** – Thank goodness I did some research before I did my first craft fair because I would have completely forgot to bring customer bags! It turns out these are important, not only because it provides a way for someone to carry what they just purchased from your booth, but because the bag itself can act as “free advertising” FOR your booth! My bags are white, frosted handle bags with a bit of yellow damask tissue inside. They also have my logo label on the front, so when people make a purchase at my booth I put their purchase in this adorable bag and then they walk around the rest of the fair with people checking out “that cute bag” and the booth it came from! You don’t have to go broke buying consumer bags, but a nice, clean, new bag with your business sticker on the outside is a great way to advertise your product. Business cards are also a great way to market your business. Keep a stack or a bowl full of them on the table so people who are interested in your product know how to contact you to either place an order, *re-order* or check out your blog. I also tuck a business card in the box when I get an Etsy order so my customer knows how to contact me, especially if they haven’t already made my shop a favorite.
- 8) **Checklist**–
The last page of this Success Guide contains a couple of checklists of what to bring to the craft fair so you don’t forget anything. You should have a custom list that you use every time you participate in a craft fair so you don’t forget to bring anything important. These two lists will get you started!
- 9) **The day before the fair** – Don’t forget to take care of these “house-keeping issues” the day before your craft fair:
 - a. If possible, set up your fair display. Take a good look at it, make any necessary adjustments, create any pricing signs or item descriptions you may need and then TAKE A QUICK PICTURE OF IT. This can be very helpful to have as a reference when you’re setting up your display the following morning!
 - b. At the very least, do an inventory check to make sure you know how many of each item you will be selling at the fair. This makes it much easier to figure out how well you did when you’re packing up after the fair.
 - c. Get Change—I saw everything from advice on \$100 in change to \$200 in change when I was researching this topic. Since I don’t yet accept credit cards I knew I’d need a lot of \$1 bills so I got 50-1’s, 10-5’s and 5-10’s for a total of \$150 in change.
 - d. Make sure you have good directions so you know how to get to the fair location and you know where to park when you arrive. Also, check the set up and start times again so they are fresh in your mind. You don’t want to be late!!
- 10) **What to wear** – Dress comfortably for the weather, but dress to impress. If it’s a hot, sticky day or if it’s raining and you’re going to get caught in the rain as you unload the car, make sure you have a change of clothes with you. It’s nice to freshen up a bit after the hustle of set-up is behind you and things calm down. I keep my fair outfit clean and simple. I wear black, knit slacks, *comfortable shoes*, a white top—either a knit, v-neck or a white blouse + a black cardigan if it is chilly during the fair. I also wear a name tag I made for myself with my first name and my company logo. Because I sell some felt items, I also created a yellow rose in felt to clip to my name badge. This is a clean, professional look, but I’m nice and comfortable too.

-DURING THE FAIR-

- 11) **Plan to arrive early.** It never hurts to be a bit early—not only do you get better parking sometimes, but should you get lost on the way for some reason, you probably won't be really late when you finally arrive.
- 12) **Photograph your display** – Once your display is all set up just right, take some good photos of it. These photos can serve as application shots should they be requested of you on your next fair application or if you choose to be part of a juried craft fair. These are also great for publicity shots of your booth and for advertising on your blog (if you have one). These photos can also help you to remember your booth set up should your craft fairs be set farther apart on the calendar.
- 13) **Meet & Greet the neighbors** – After you've set up your booth, changed your clothes and photographed your booth, it's time to properly greet your neighbors and then check out a few of the other vendors (as many as you have time for). They are likely to reciprocate when they see how friendly you are! You can get some great ideas for booth layout and product display from patronizing other vendors, plus it's good to check out the competition in a friendly way.
- 14) **Patronize the fair** – if you have assistance/support at your booth by bringing a friend or relative along to help out, make a point of being a fair consumer!! Although you are there to make money, it can be very good for business to patronize other booths and make a purchase or two. What you put out into the universe, you receive back.
- 15) **Look busy but available** – You'll be excited when people enter your booth space and it's tempting to hover. Hovering is likely to make your customers uncomfortable so instead of looking like you're going to pounce on them, try to look busy with your products by “checking inventory” or rearranging your merchandise a bit when people are in your booth. **BE FRIENDLY.** Engage them with a smile, eye-contact and a warm hello and then let them browse without staring at them. They will probably compliment you and maybe ask questions so you'll be right there to respond. Always remember to thank them when they make a purchase and provide them with a business card for re-orders.
- 16) **Cash Box v. Apron** – This topic garnered mixed reviews. I think it really comes down to what you're selling, the layout of your booth and which “money storage method” you prefer. I found the cash box approach to work fine during my first craft fair. I had a little area set up for “checking out” so the box stayed put behind a little screen and we just worked to make change out of the box keeping all of the money together. Some folks prefer a money apron because the money stays on them at all times and they can take payment for a purchase even if they are out in front of the booth area (no need for a check-out station). Maybe try both and see which method you prefer.
- 17) **Custom Orders** – As a creative person selling things you've hand-made, you will very likely get requests for custom items. I think the best way to handle this in a fair setting is to exchange contact information with the person requesting the custom order and follow-up with them immediately after the fair. This keeps you from getting caught up in a lengthy discussion when other customers may be waiting and gives you time to think through the request when you have the time and attention needed to check supplies and consider your schedule.
- 18) **Don't pack up early** – When I was gathering tips and tricks prior to my first fair I read this tip in several places and consider it sage advice. You're going to be tired. You're going to want to get home (especially if the weather hasn't been great or your sales have been less than you were hoping...) but **DO NOT** pack up early. For one thing, you paid money to attend this fair so you

should stay until the last hurrah, even if you're tired and every part of you just wants to go home. Many fair vendors have made comments that when the fair was closing up, they stayed open and available as long as possible and were able to garner some last minute sales because of the fact that they didn't close up shop early, even as their booth neighbors were closing up around them. There will always be folks who come late to the fair and they will really appreciate that you're still open when they are trying to get through the fair to see as much as possible and take home some beautiful, handmade goodness! Something else to consider is that the fair organizer expects *all* vendors to stay until the close of the fair and not close up earlier than the stated end time. As a courtesy to the organizers you really should honor this agreement.

- 19) **Give Thanks** (to the fair organizer) – As the fair is closing down and you start/finish packing up, make a point to seek out the fair organizer and thank him/her for the opportunity to participate. This is a very polite response to the close of the fair and could make you more memorable when your application crosses their desk the following year. Even if you didn't do well and have no interest in participating in the same fair next year, this is a professional and courteous way to close out the experience.

-AFTER THE FAIR-

RIGHT AFTER...

- 20) **Packing up.** Take time to pack up carefully and do an inventory check as you pack up what's left so you won't have to dive into those boxes again anytime soon. You will probably find it very helpful to track information re: what sold and what didn't sell at particular fairs, as well as how much product sold specifically in each product category. It's easier to take down this information while you're packing up than it is to look through the boxes tomorrow.
- 21) **Celebrate!** You did it---your first (or second or third!) craft fair! Treat yourself to something special even if it's just a hot bath and some take-out. You've worked hard to get ready for this fair and should enjoy the completion of your goal and also your success!

THE NEXT DAY OR SO...

- 22) **Think about your experience and take some notes**---Evaluate-- what sold? What didn't sell? Did you get any display ideas from other vendors at the fair? What worked well? What didn't? How were your sales compared to your expense to participate? Answer those questions in a notebook and keep a record. This information will be helpful for the next fair and a year from now when you need to decide if you want to participate again in the same fair location.
- 23) **Follow up on Custom Order requests + new email addresses** – Remember those folks you exchanged contact information with during the fair because they had a custom order they wanted to discuss? Today is the day you want to reach out to them, thank them for stopping by your booth and follow up on their custom order request. They will appreciate the fact that you are so prompt and did not forget them. Today would also be a great time to add those new names you collected to your email distribution list and send those folks a thank you for stopping by your booth, along with the date of your next fair if you have that information.
- 24) **Send thank you notes**-- to anyone who helped you get ready for the big day. Whether they helped with product ideas, physically helped you create for the fair, helped you the day of the fair either in your booth or with childcare... think about the people who helped you make your craft fair experience possible, and send a note ☺!
- 25) **Start planning**-- for your next craft fair! It's never too early to start the plans for your next fair based on your experience from this one.

I hope this list of tips and tricks will help you to make your first (or next!) craft fair a huge success!

- FAIR CHECK LISTS -

FOR THE “BACK OFFICE”:

- Cash Box or Apron + \$150 in change – 50-\$ 1’s, 10-\$5’s and 5-\$10’s plus coins if your prices are not even dollars
- Your Sales Tax Certificate
- Calculator(s)
- Pens/notebook
- Sharpie Marker
- Scotch Tape, Packaging Tape and Duct Tape
- Advil/Tylenol + small first aid kit or some band-aids and tissues
- Needle & white thread + scissors + safety pins
- Protein or granola bars (or some healthy snack) and bottled water
- Clipboard + email sign-up sheet to notify customers of upcoming fairs you’ll be attending
- Business cards + a container for them
- Garbage bag(s)
- Customer bags (plus labels for the bags)
- Name badge(s)

FOR THE “SHOP”

- Table(s)
- Table dressings
- Booth back-drop
- Water-proof booth tent – (+ sandbags and tie-downs if it’s a windy or rainy day)
- Your product inventory
- Containers and risers for your display
- Banner(s)
- Lights + extension cord (if you have them)
- Chair(s)
- Small price signs + item description signs