

## Craft Fair 101: Your first show

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In 2003, I wrote a very lengthy, conversational online article about doing the first Renegade Craft Fair. Five years later, here is a Cliff Notes version. The original article can be found at: <http://www.loosetooth.com/Art/Work/craftfair101.htm>

### Inventory

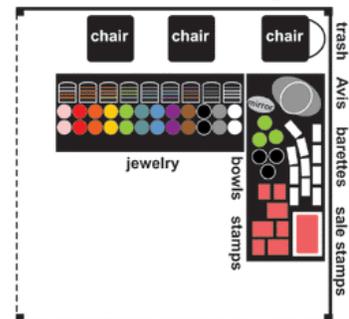
You've gotten accepted to a show, and you should have a good sense of what you are selling. How much to make? Very good question. I wish I had a very good answer. I can offer a few pointers:

- If you're not doing one-of-a-kind items, make multiples of a set of designs (i.e. six copies of the green one, six copies of the blue). Keep a clear record of your inventory so you can track what sells best.
- Manage your own energy as you manage your inventory. For years, I went completely overboard with inventory. I'd be completely burned out before I had to do the work of running my booth. And I had loads and loads items left over. While that makes the next show easy to do, it can be disheartening if you have low sales. Set yourself up with a product making schedule that has you doing a chunk of work every week up to that first show, hopefully avoid that terrible crunch week right before.
- If you're worried you have **too little** inventory, think about how you can best display your work so it doesn't look sparse. I've seen folks do very enticing displays of jewelry hung on a few branches, or potters who can arrange a few pieces on blocks at different levels and a handful of pieces look fantastic.
- Consider having items at different price points. Especially with the holidays, organized shoppers have a price ranges for coworkers that's different than their price range for parents. Having some low price items may temp impulse shoppers.

### Showing Your Wares at Their Best

Displays can be easily overlooked in the stress of your first show, but they are vital! Think of your display in these easy steps:

- 1 Know your booth size. Most outdoor shows give you a 10'x10'. Doublecheck with the organizers to see what your "foot print is.
- 2 Figure out how you'll set up your tables. Think of how to draw people in with the placement. Consider how your setup will flow with your neighbors (yes, hard to know until you get there).
- 3 Cover your tables. Think of the best colors and texture to show off your wares.
- 4 Containers to hold your wares.
- 5 Think of levels. Laying your work out on a flat table works, and it also evokes garage sales. Think of stands, bowls, blocks to put your work on. Can you make some items vertical? Some hanging? Some sitting on the ground? A great way to learn is to go to other shows and see what others are doing. At the 2007 DIY Trunk Show, I thought our ground of vendors did a stellar job at their displays!
- 6 Items that support your brand: banners, business cards, postcards, giveaway items, pricetags, packaging. All of these details make an impression and help people remember you. Think of consistent colors and design across items.
- 7 Lighting. Few shows give you outlets for lighting, but consider bringing lights with you to spotlight your work.
- 8 Be adaptable. Bring extra containers to adapt your display. Pack for weather contingencies.



*My booth's layout in 2003*

## Cost of Doing Business - Supplies

That first year, the Renegade booth fee was \$50, but I spent about \$600 all told. It was an investment in future fairs. If you are testing the waters with this one show, figure out how to pare down this list and borrow items. Here's a list of what I brought:

**Inventory!** Make sure everything is tagged and priced. Photographing your inventory to recreate popular items later.

**2 Tables** Rent or buy? I bought two plastic "blow mold" tables from Walmart. 30" by 6'. \$106 They folded in half and fit into cars. Strong and sturdy. Five years later, I like renting tables to avoid the hassle of carrying those heavy suckers.

**1 Tent** They are a big expense, but if you're joining the show circuit, it is a given. EZ-UP brand tents are super. Some shows dictate white tents only. Thanks to fellow CCMers, Leah, I borrowed her tent for most of my outdoor shows.

**Display Stuff** See above

**Banners** I use two banners: a \$150 vinyl banner and a handmade, cloth one. The former hangs outside my tent, the latter in the tent. It helps orient people.

**Twine** for hanging banners

**Tablecloths** Most tables look shabby, so tablecloths are a must. Buy cheap plastic ones to skirt the table (and hide your boxes). Fabric is best for the table tops. Choose colors that best highlights your wares.

**Chairs** I stand most of the time, but chairs are a very comfortable for your helper, a friend who stops by or when you finally drop during a slow time.

**Tape** I bring duct, masking Scotch and clear packing tape.

**Bulldog Clips**  
Great for hanging banners, clipping down tablecloths.



**Snacks, Beverages & Cooler**  
You won't know your eating options –or- how much time you'll have to eat. Bring less messy drinks and nibbles with you.

**Aprons** Preferred over a cash box, to have what you need at your fingertips. I've made mine for holding change, buttons, pens, receipt books.

**Cash** plenty of singles, fives and tens. If someone hands you a big bill, you can ask if they have anything smaller. Avoid a mid-show currency exchange run!

**Receipt Books** I like the duplicate copy kind.

**Ball Point Pens and Markers** for impromptu signs and writing receipts.

**Paperwork** Get the proper business, tax or vendors permits or numbers in order, and **give yourself time to do so.**

**Garbage bags** Be sure to clean up your mess!

**Bags** for purchases. Not many folks need one (ask first), but it's good to have around. Minimum order on bags are high, so consider splitting a order for others.

**Other packing materials** if you have fragile stuff

**Extra price tags**

**Calculator**

**Scissors**

**Mirror** for trying on jewelry or accessories

**Radio** Don't be a nuisance, but some quiet music can move the day along.

**Mailing List Sign-Up**  
Encourage folks to sign up. Shows are about onsite sales, but they are also good for future sales and marketing.

**And so important!**

**Customer Bait:** Buttons, Business Cards and/or Postcards. Make sure they have your logo, contact info, URL and hopefully a product photo on them. Bring loads to give away. If people walk out of your booth without a purchase, make sure they have something in their hand with your name on it.



Loosetooth.com pins made by Busy Beaver Button Co.

**Friends to help** Its so, so good to have a friend to help. Both for the grunt work of setting up and taking down, but also for the company to make the day go faster. Feed your booth helpers, give them free stuff. Granted, you could pay them, but you can't guarantee that you'll make money that day, so someone willing to work for stuff or out of friendship is the best!

## Finally, Beware and Enjoy!

Fundamentally, craft fairs are a lot of prep work and always a crap shoot. Work: making and collecting inventory, designing an enticing space, protect your work from the elements, collecting the uninventoried stuff and then the schlepping to and sitting at the show. The crap shoot: is it your kind of crowd? are they buying? are your prices right? are they too many others selling what you're selling? how's your works' quality by comparison? your display? The Chicago Craft Mafia can tell you – a show that's a boom for her can be a bust for me. You have dreams of totally selling out your inventory and dancing to the bank. Just keep perspective!

**Remember, enjoy the show!** It's the best way to learn from other vendors, get real feedback on your work, get questions, custom orders, hopefully lots of sales. Keep on open mind and a smile on your face. Best wishes from the Chicago Craft Mafia!

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### Read more at ChicagoCraftMafia.com. The Chicago Craft Mafia is:

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