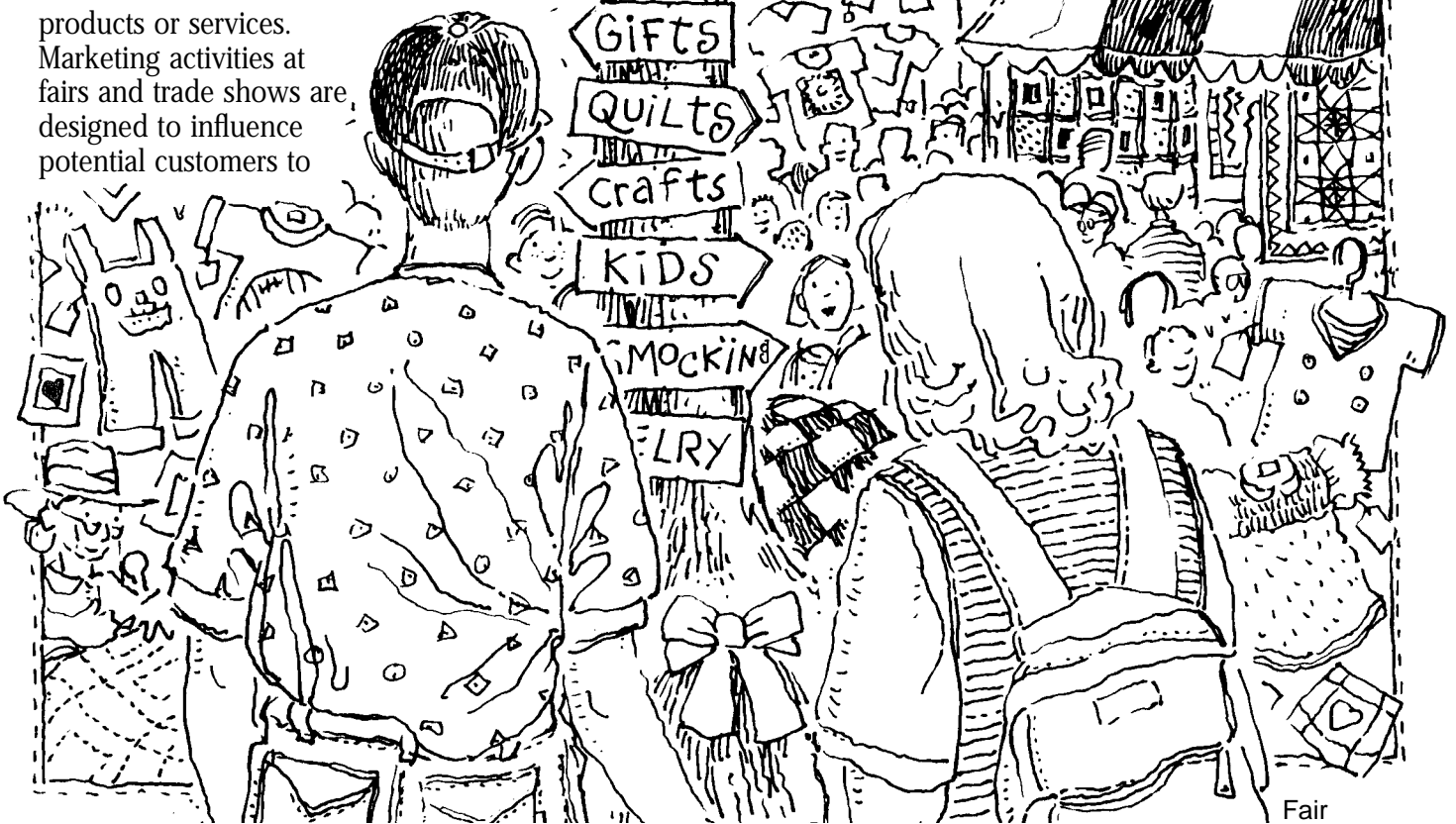


Marketing Your Sewing Business At **FAIRS & TRADE SHOWS**

Many sewing businesses make creative, high-quality products and market them through fairs and trade shows. Fairs and trade shows are usually two- to five-day events that allow business owners to meet a large number of potential customers face to face, sell many products in a short period of time, and receive valuable feedback about their products or services. Marketing activities at fairs and trade shows are designed to influence potential customers to

purchase a product or service by letting them know how the product or service will benefit them.

Whether a sewing business is new or established, participating in fairs and trade shows can be a successful venture. Making the most of fairs and trade shows is not easy. However,



Fair

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Marketing At Fairs And Trade Shows

- Fairs**
- Advantages**
- Products are displayed and sold
 - Large number of impulse buyers attend
 - Easy to gain entry
 - Entry fees relatively low

- Disadvantages**
- May involve stressful travel, especially if your primary form of marketing
 - Must have goods on hand to meet customer demand
 - May be difficult to balance travel and production time

- Trade Shows**
- Only samples of products are needed for display
 - Large orders may be placed
 - Attendees are serious buyers
 - Gain wide exposure for your business/products
 - Learn about the marketplace
 - Maintain ongoing relationships with others in the industry
 - First application might not be accepted
 - Participation can be costly
 - First show might not be a financial success
 - Increased production capacity might be required

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with careful planning, fairs and trade shows can be used effectively to increase a customer base, compete with businesses in the same market, and learn more about the marketplace.

This publication contains planning ideas and tips for successfully marketing a sewing business at fairs and trade shows. It first describes the distinct characteristics of fairs and trade shows. Next, it discusses the basic steps that help business owners decide which event is best for their business. Finally, it gives tips about what to do before, during, and after an event.

What Are Fairs?

Fairs are retail events that local or regional groups organize to bring people together for a common celebration, such as a "Founders Day" or a spring festival. Oftentimes a fair is held in conjunction with pageants, contests, and other activities. Some are charity events while others serve to increase public appreciation for handcrafted items.

Fairs are open to the general public; as a result, many different types of people attend. Serious collectors of handcrafted items, families looking for entertainment, and buyers for art galleries might be found at the same event. Some fair organizers limit the merchandise to handcrafted items

only while others offer a mixture of handmade, one-of-a-kind, and mass produced items. Broad categories of merchandise are usually represented, such as art and collectibles, clothing and accessories, furniture, and home furnishings.

What Are Trade Shows?

Trade shows are organized at the wholesale level by promoters. Therefore, only owners of shops or their representatives can attend. Some trade shows are open to the public for a brief period, however.

Rather than offering merchandise in several broad categories, a trade show is organized around a specific category such as holiday wear, children's clothing, or gifts. As a result, buyers are exposed to great depth in the merchandise displayed. This is quite different from a fair, which offers breadth but may have little depth. Wholesale buyers are serious buyers who represent many consumers. They travel to trade shows from great distances, even across country. Therefore, this type of marketing event offers a wide channel of distribution and exposure to every product available in a specific industry.

To maintain the integrity of a trade show, a promoter carefully regulates participation by the vendors and attendees. (A *vendor* is a business

owner who produces products and sells at trade shows.) Vendors are usually not allowed to sell items during the event. They attend trade shows to display merchandise and take orders only. The orders taken are shipped to purchasers later. Occasionally, promoters allow vendors to sell merchandise during the final hours of a show.

Vendors who participate in trade shows must have the production capacity to begin to meet large orders immediately after an event. Because of this, many entrepreneurs start with fairs and move to trade shows when their production capacity increases.

Decide Whether To Participate In A Fair Or Trade Show

Several basic steps can help you determine whether participation in a fair or trade show is right for your business. Start by gathering information and evaluating the situation. Next, consider the major benefits to your business. Then, evaluate your personal characteristics.

Gather Information And Evaluate The Situation

Consider whether the event can help you achieve your business goals. If you do not have business goals, this is the time to establish some. What are business goals? Goals are concrete statements about where you want your business to be in six months, one year, or five years. First you need to determine how far in the future you want to plan. Then identify specific goals. Next, decide what you need to do to reach the goals identified. Will marketing at a fair or trade show get you there?

Decide which fair or trade show to participate in. Some events are more successful than others; therefore, collect as much information as you can from various sources.

- Write or call the show organizer or promoter to request basic information about the event. Investigate the

track record for the event. How long has it been in existence? Does it attract a large buying crowd? Older events attract larger crowds and give you a greater chance of success.

- Talk to as many vendors as possible. Ask which events they attend and why. You will not only learn which events are best but also which ones you will want to avoid.

- Attend several events.

Check location. Fairs located on main thoroughfares or in places where people meet regularly attract more people than events in secluded areas.

Find out if other events are going on in the area. When events occur at the same time, there is a chance that crowds will be affected. A competing event can have a positive or negative effect. Competition can draw participants away from an event or attract participants who otherwise would not have attended.

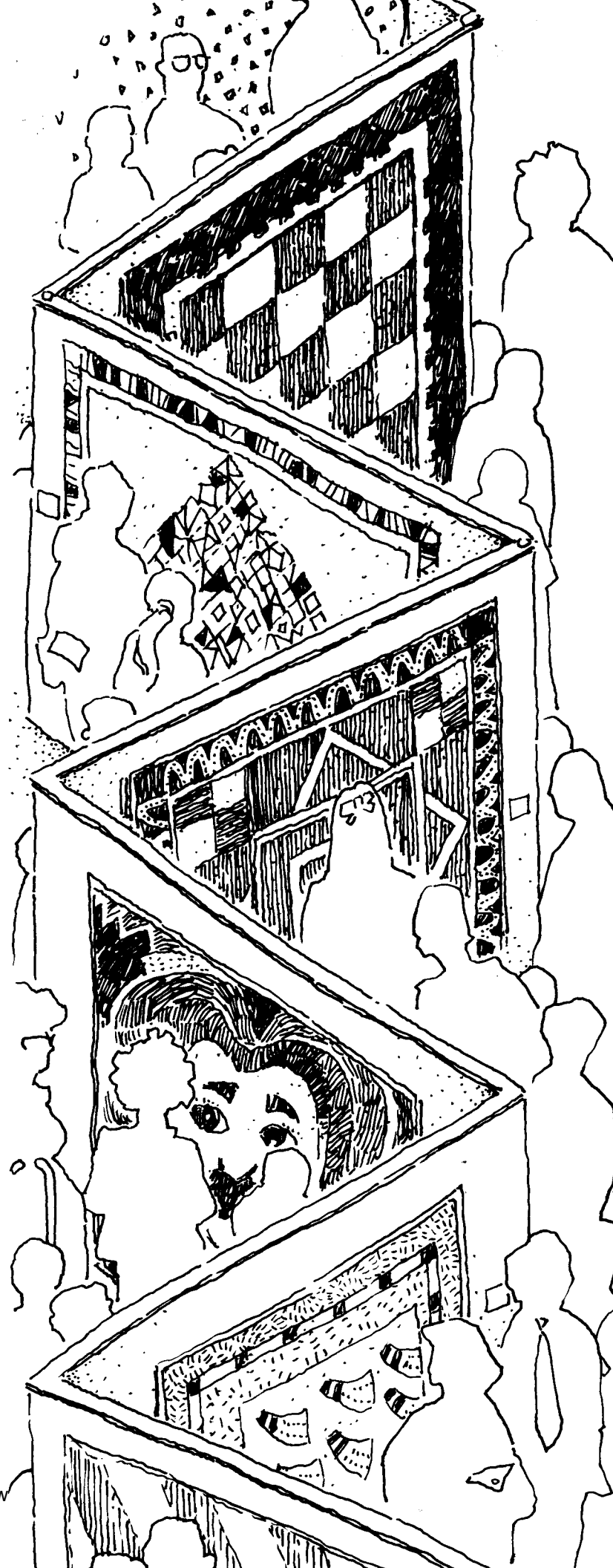
Check on the sponsorship. Sponsorship makes a difference in the kind of crowd. For example, fairs sponsored by craft associations draw people who enjoy crafts. Fairs sponsored by charities may attract people who are not particularly interested in crafts but come for other reasons. As a result, the number of buyers might be limited.

Find out whether a fair is *juried*. This means that a panel of judges is convened to evaluate each entrepreneur's products and decide who should be invited to participate in the show. Organizers try to select a variety of products of the kind and quality that buyers want. They also try to provide different price ranges or price points. An unjuried event usually does not have rigorous admission procedures. To participate, an entrepreneur needs only to submit an application form with the required fee.

Determine the cost of participation. What is the booth fee? Do you have to be a member of the sponsoring association? How much is required as a deposit and when is the balance due? Can you get money back if you have to cancel? Is the cost of draperies, tables, chairs, and electricity included in the application fee or do you pay extra for them? Is there a cost for union labor to unload and set up the booth? What will travel, food, lodging, parking, shipping, and recreation cost?

Consider Benefits To Your Business

Fairs and trade shows offer several major benefits. You will need to decide which ones are most important for achieving your goals. The benefits that are most important to you will serve as a basis for evaluating your success after the event.



Trade Show

Benefits include:

- Developing a positive image among a group of entrepreneurs like yourself.
- Establishing new relationships with entrepreneurs and wholesale buyers.
- Gaining wider exposure for your products.
- Gaining new information and learning about trends in the industry.
- Testing new ideas.

Evaluate Your Personal Characteristics

Evaluating your personal skills is the third step in the decision-making process. How would you answer these questions? If you can say “yes” to most of the questions, you are ready to begin planning for your first fair or trade show. Think of ways to strengthen weak areas.

- Can you maintain a high energy level?
- Do you have the self-discipline to work long hours?
- Are you tenacious?
- Can you make personal sacrifices?
- Are you resourceful and able to solve problems creatively?
- Can you think quickly and adjust quickly to the environment?
- Can you make decisions quickly?
- Do you have a positive, friendly attitude?
- Are you honest and fair with yourself and others?
- Do you inspire confidence?

What To Do And When

Planning is the next stage. Plan your activities before, during, and after the event.

Before The Event

Plan well in advance. Request an application form and send it in before the deadline. When possible, attend the event the year before you plan to participate, especially in the case of trade shows. This gives you a chance to see how the event is run. Some trade show promoters give guest passes upon request. If you cannot acquire a guest pass, ask another vendor to allow you to work in his or her booth as a volunteer.

Find out about booth restrictions, including size and furnishings. You will need to know the dimensions of the booth in order to plan effectively. Ask organizers and promoters whether there are maximum and minimum height restrictions for shelves and fixtures. Ask whether tables, chairs, and partitions will be provided. Fairs often provide tables and curtains or other partitions with registration. At many trade shows you will have to rent furnishings from a source approved by the promoter. The expenses must be planned in your budget. You might not be allowed to unload, set up, and take down your exhibit; instead, the promoter may hire union laborers to do these tasks.

Plan a booth that shows your products in the best light. What arrangement will make your booth look organized and professional? Remember to display enough merchandise to make the booth look interesting. At the same time, avoid the appearance of clutter and disorganization. Where possible, incorporate lighting and color to complement the natural beauty of your products.

Design a booth that is sturdy, flexible, and portable. All fixtures and shelves should be secure and stable. Pre-wire display cases and shelving with electrical circuits and have them certified by an electrician to ensure safety.

Acquire professional-looking literature, such as brochures, price lists, order forms, and business cards. These should be readily accessible to

attendees who are interested in your business. Literature is particularly important if you are busy with one customer when another customer comes by. Customers should be able to find answers to basic questions in the literature and use it for future reference. Literature should be attractive and in keeping with the professional image of your business.

Lay groundwork through advance marketing.

• Some trade show promoters might provide you with a list of registered buyers who will attend. Weeks before the trade show, send invitations to buyers who are likely to be interested in the type of products you sell. The invitation should indicate where your booth will be located and the kind of products you will have on display. If you have to create your own list, use the following sources, as appropriate: the Yellow Pages, business guides, craft organizations, and the American Craft Retailers Association.

• Fairs do not require preregistration of attendees, so you might not be able to target individuals who should receive an invitation. However, if you have customers who live in the area, let them know that you will be at the show. Encourage current customers to visit your booth.

Arrange for your travel and transportation of supplies. Make transportation and lodging arrangements as early as possible.

• If traveling by car, check with a travel club to find out which route is most efficient. You might like to ask the travel club for information about interesting cities along the way. You will need to plan extra time in your trip to be able to take advantage of the sites, however.

• Fair and trade show selling will fill your days, but your nights are likely to be free. Plan evenings after the show. You may be able to arrange meetings with vendors, customers, or business associates in the evenings. To enjoy local attractions,

contact the Chamber of Commerce in the town where the event will be held to request information about hotels, restaurants, and interesting places to visit.

During The Event

Create a professional image.

Wear clothes and shoes that will be comfortable during many hours of standing. Because some buildings will be warm and others will be cool, wear layered clothing so you can adjust to the temperature.

Meet as many people as possible.

- Have a friendly, festive attitude. The more people you meet, the more sales you are likely to make. Always stand up while potential customers are standing unless you are working with another customer.

- Approach every customer to find out whether he or she is serious about your product. This is called "qualifying the customer." To qualify customers, ask questions that require an answer other than "yes" or "no." For example, if selling clothing, ask the potential customer to tell you how he or she would use the item. If the potential customer is a retail buyer or shop owner, ask how he or she thinks the item would sell in his or her shop.

- Ask for a business card from each potential buyer you talk with. Make notes on the back.

Be willing to talk about your product if a potential customer shows interest.

- Describe the materials used and explain how the product is made. Prepare a well-planned presentation that covers all relevant points.

- Encourage potential customers to handle the product. Be ready to demonstrate the product, particularly if its use is not obvious.

- You might want to provide a small card that describes the product and how it is used. The card draws people to the object and requires them to spend a few minutes at your booth. In addition, if you are busy

with someone else, a sign gives people something to read while waiting to talk with you. Your professional literature helps also.

Have at least one other person to help you in the booth. At all times, one person should work directly with customers while the other should keep an eye on the booth. You might take turns doing these tasks. If you cannot avoid having an individual in the booth alone, do so during a slack period, when few people are stopping at the booth.

Take care of pricing and financial details.

- Clearly mark each item with a price for the convenience of potential customers.

- If you accept a check for merchandise, ask for identification such as a driver's license number and an address.

- Do not cash checks for an amount greater than the purchase.

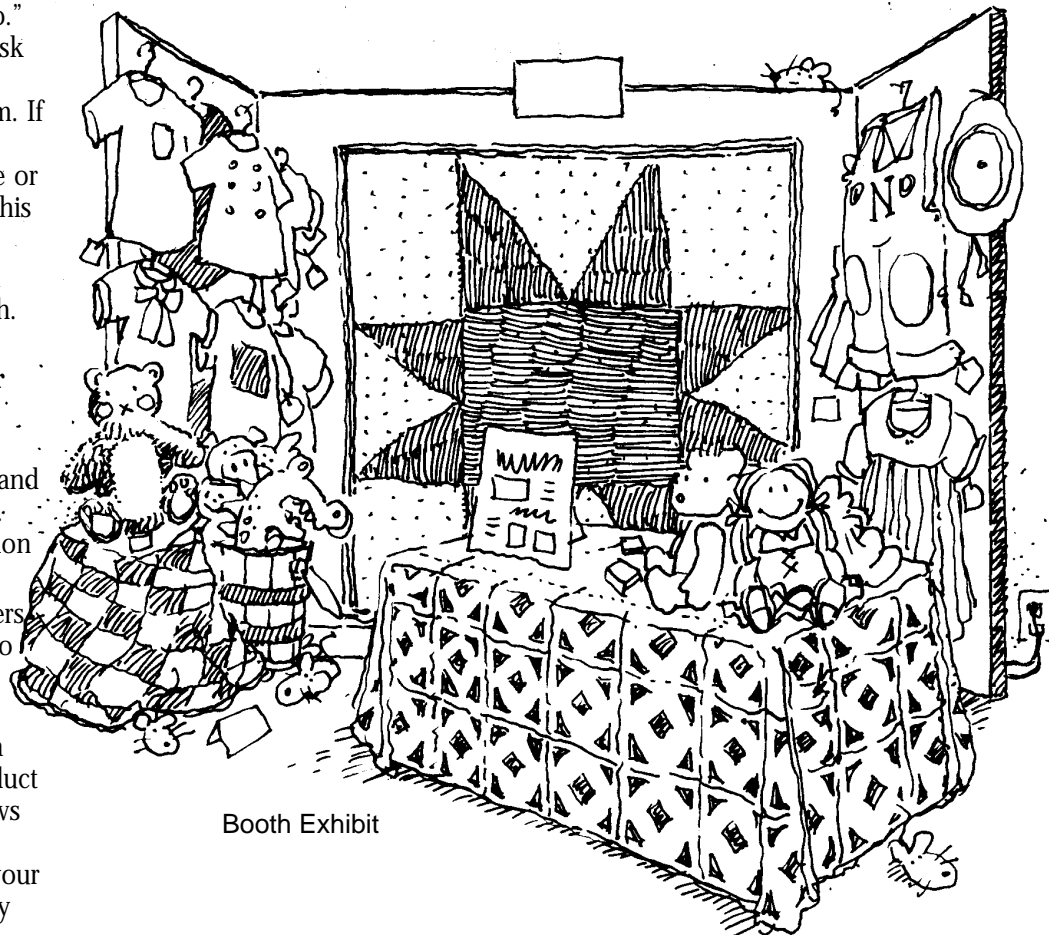
- As soon a check is received, write "for deposit only" on the back. This gives you a measure of protection against loss or theft.

- You may want to establish a policy of refusing out-of-town checks altogether. Collection might be difficult and expensive. If you decide to do this, make it a standard policy that applies to all customers.

- If the products are expensive, you might decide to accept credit card charges. Acquire the necessary equipment from a bank. The credit card company will charge you between 5 and 10 percent of each sale.

- Don't forget to collect sales tax.

- At trade shows, you will take orders with the promise to ship after the event. This can be risky because buyers may or may not pay promptly when billed. For your protection, develop a simple application form to help you evaluate each buyer (See Sample Buyer Application form on page 7).



Booth Exhibit

- Don't hesitate to ask for and check references. Remember, good references do not ensure reliability. References only provide a basis for deciding with whom to do business.

- Obtain the required sales tax permit(s). Before the event, acquire a sales tax license. The Alabama Department of Revenue issues state sales tax licenses and provides information on collecting sales tax and procedures for sending in tax payments. Call 334-242-1170. Also check with your local city clerk's office to find out if you need a city sales tax permit.

Close the sale. Don't be shy. You are there to make sales, and the attendee is there to buy. Ask, "May I take your order?"

After The Event

Evaluate the results to determine whether you made progress toward your objectives. Consider the contacts, sales goals, profit, new ideas, and information gained. Did you realize the benefits you identified earlier? If so, to what extent? If not, why not? Should you do something differently?

Follow up with contacts by letter or telephone to confirm the orders placed. Indicate what was ordered, its cost, and when delivery was promised. Using business cards you collected, send notes to prospective customers who did not place orders. Thank them for visiting your booth, and invite them to keep you in mind if they have a need for your product in the future. The follow-up contact might pay off later.

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Sample Buyer Application

Buyer's Name _____

Business Name _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Business Phone and Area Code (_____) _____

Owner's Name _____ Years in Business _____

Financial Credit References:

1. Reference _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

2. Reference _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

3. Reference _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Customers with whom you have done business:

1. Name _____

Address _____ Phone Number _____

2. Name _____

Address _____ Phone Number _____

3. Name _____

Address _____ Phone Number _____

Your signature gives permission to check your financial references.

Signature

Date



HE-729

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For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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