

Stalls and Sideshows

Many events rely on stalls and stands to provide interest and colour, and they can be a great source of revenue. Village fetes, church fairs and other fundraising days often consist of little else! As long as the variety and quality of activities and items offered for sale are well considered, visitors will feel they have had an enjoyable day or afternoon out.

The following is a guide to designing and preparing your stalls in order to maximise your proceeds as well as general hints and tips.

How do I Make a Stall?

Suit your colours and surfaces to your produce. Green or brown for vegetables, a bright tablecloth for cakes, hessian or bare wood for plants, pink or powder blue for baby clothes, black or red for shoes, etc. This all helps to give your stall an identity of its own and helps customers subconsciously gravitate towards the types of products they are interested in.

If you do not have your own tables, you might be able to borrow some trestle tables from the local community centre, school or church hall. These are ideal as a longer than average table length is required for most stalls. Remember, however, that if you damage them you will have to pay and they may not be so helpful next time. If you cannot find them from free sources, you can hire tables from marquee firms or some tool hire companies.

For a more sophisticated appearance try hanging a banner or flags flying between poles nailed or tied firmly to each end of the table or pushed into the ground. For a bottle stall or stand selling lots of small items use risers (small blocks or shelves) to display your products to advantage. This can help a small display look more substantial, especially as stock gets low towards the end of the day. Make risers from bricks or weighted boxes covered in coloured paper or cloth. Use Velcro to stick packaged samples to a back board. Some stalls look better with a background – embroidery, jewellery or other delicate items are enhanced by this treatment.



Remember to provide yourself and your helpers with something to sit on. You will also need a float of money and something to put it in; a couple of plastic boxes will do (one inside the other). Put notes in the bottom box so they will not blow away or be obvious prey to the opportunist thief.

Pack an emergency bag including scissors, paper, pens, drawing pins, staple gun, sticky tape, safety pins and dress-maker's pins (as appropriate) the night before. A couple of large stones are often useful as paperweights. Make a large cardboard sign to give your stall a title such as 'Tombola', 'White Elephant', 'Cakes' etc so that customers can see from a distance what you are providing.

Make sure you have a basic tool kit. There has never been an event yet that didn't need some kind of major repair made or some ingenious device erected just before opening time.

Where do you put the stall?

The most well organised fetes plan their site layout well in advance, consider erecting a site plan at the entrance so that stall holders and visitors can see at a glance where everything is.

At a large show, stall holders should be given the number of their pitch in advance and the site laid out carefully to allow vehicles behind each row. They will then be able to drive straight onto the site, find their pitch and unload their products all without bothering anyone.

If it is your role to plan the stalls there are some basic rules to follow, the most important being to keep your stalls close together and tightly packed. Just because you have been lent a 5 acre field by the local Parish Council doesn't mean you have to use it all! It is much more attractive to have a busy, exciting corner than a large field covered in lonely little stands requiring a Sherpa to guide you between them!

Take some tips from the big stores and supermarkets. Put a few bright, popular stands near the entrance to encourage people through the gate. Try to keep the site in bunches of like with like, similar to a department store. People enjoy one activity and look around to repeat the experience immediately. If they don't like what they see they can move swiftly through!

Save refreshments to the end of the site. Encourage your visitors to walk past as many activities as possible before sitting down and enjoying a cup of tea. Consider putting items that are heavy to carry (vegetables, plants, etc) close to car parking areas so there is less distance to carry them. Consider putting children's activities close to the refreshment areas so parents can sit and have a break whilst keeping an eye on the kids!

Finally, consider a competition for the 'best dressed stall' to give an incentive to stall holders to make their stalls look good!

Stall/Sideshow Suggestions:

Lucky number – Agree with a colleague which number is the 'lucky number' and make a note of it. Players play for each chance to guess the lucky number. You will need a grid with numbered squares with a space for the player's name. Biro and float with prize or prizes. The winner is the one who guesses the lucky number.

Guess the number of sweets – Large jar, known number of sweets, record pad and biro and prize (if not the jar of sweets themselves). You charge for each guess and the correct or closest guess wins. It is useful to take names and contact numbers/addresses for every entrant.

Guess the weight of the cake – Large cake wrapped in greaseproof paper (fruit cakes work best) with record pad and biro. Record each guess as with suggestion 2.

Door Keys – You will need a clear fronted box with a Yale lock and two keys, a box filled with as many Yale keys as you can get hold of, plus a prize that fits the box. Charge for a chance to pick a key and try the lock. The unlucky ones replace the keys in the box for others to try their luck. The more keys, the harder it is. To keep interest you may want to have fewer keys and more prizes.

Lucky Dip or Bran Tub – tub or barrel full of bran, sawdust or straw, or make it revolting and have a slime dip (mix water with the bran). Wrap the prizes (plastic for slime tubs) and you may want tubs for different ages depending on the prizes. Each entrant pays a fee to dip for a prize.

Treasure Island – Make a map of a treasure island, have flags or grids to mark 'guesses' as to where you have 'buried' the treasure, plus a prize. Entrants mark their name and contact details on the flags or write them in their grid coordinate. Charge per guess.

Knock 'em off – self supporting shelf or table, about 30 tins (covered or brightly painted), bean bags, throwing line or tape plus backing board or catch net (football nets are great for this). Stand the cans in pyramids of six cans each. Charge for four bean bags to use to knock the complete set of six off the shelf to win a prize – thrown from behind the throwing line.

Extracted from: Tried & Tested Ideas for Local Fundraising Events, 3rd Edition, Sarah Passingham, Directory of Social Change.