

LUBBOCK COMIC BOOK EXPO

SELLER'S GUIDE 2009

Updated: April, 2009

Comic Books? Check! Table? Check! Markers & Autograph Cards? Check!
Now what?

THE HOUR DRAWS NEAR

As the Lubbock Comic Book Expo comes nearer, the anticipation and last-minute preparations escalate to a flurry of excitement and sometimes panic. It is at this time, however, that you should begin to put together your sales and marketing strategy for the show. This is by no means a definitive guide, but should be seen as a friendly guide. Your strategy and approach may vary greatly from the ideas mentioned here, and in the end you must be able to adjust and adapt to changing conditions.

This guide will cover the subjects listed below.

- Introduction to Sales
- Size Up Your Competition
- Define Your Success
- Give 'Em Something to Talk About
- Sales Techniques
- Pre-Sale, Post-Sale

As you read this, make note of the ideas you think you could use and notions that you may want to consider more carefully. If you get an idea, write it down as quickly as possible and consider it later. Enjoy!

AN INTRODUCTION TO SALES

Welcome to the wonderful, challenging, frustrating – yet – rewarding world of sales. The Lubbock Comic Book Expo is going to be an exciting and fun experience for everyone involved. Whether this is your first venture in a comic book convention or your hundredth, every convention offers the opportunity to network, promote and sell.

We've all bought something recently. Whether it's the marker on your table or the groceries you turned into breakfast, each item you've ever bought followed the most basic sales principles. It is important that you understand these sales principles.

Although the ideas may be simple, understand the principles for what they are will enable you to adjust and adapt as necessary.

It's all about VALUE

What is one dollar worth? It's face value says it's worth \$1.00 US, 100 pennies, 20 nickels, 10 dimes, 4 quarters, or a variety of combinations thereof. Depending on your work and salary situation, \$1 may be worth 10 minutes of your time, 6 minutes, or maybe less. For some people a single dollar may not be worth their time at all! According to Wendy's, \$1 is worth five chicken nuggets, a junior bacon cheeseburger or a small frosty. The point is, though we can all define the "face value" of a dollar, the "actual value" can vary greatly from person to person and product to product.

What this means for you, is that your customer must be convinced that the value of your book, print, sketch card(s), etc.. is greater than the "face value" price you've established. If you're selling a comic book for \$2.00, then it is **vital** that your customer believes that the \$2 in their hand will bring them less satisfaction than the satisfaction they will receive once they have your book. There are a few techniques and tips later on that can help increase the "perceived value" of the items you're selling.

Understand that the price on your book has little to do with your actual sales. The price(s) you've set are a gauge that your customers will use to make their decision. The real factor in your actual sales is the value you give your products and convey to your customers.

In that sense, you have to be careful what information your prices convey. You can buy a double cheeseburger from McDonald's for \$1, or from Texas Roadhouse for about \$8. If price was what **really** mattered, no one would ever buy a double cheeseburger from Texas Roadhouse. So why do they?

People buy the Roadhouse burger for the same reason they shop for clothing at the mall. While the prices at the mall and at Roadhouse are significantly higher than they are at other places, people continue to buy from them because they perceive that the items they consume from these places are of significantly higher value than their cheaper counterparts. As such, what you choose to charge is not as important as how your customers perceive your charges.

How this affects you:

1. Your customers don't care how much you invested in your product(s), table, etc.. Don't try to justify your prices (especially to your customer) as "offsetting overhead costs". Your customers aren't there to pay for your printing, story or art – they're there to buy something if you can show them how they'll be better off with it – than without it.
2. Keeping #1 in mind, understand the importance of supply and demand. You, the vendor or exhibitor, have a surplus of inventory. Comics, art, sketches, etc.. You

have a value, you alone know what your bottom line is – in the end, however, you have more inventory than you **want** to have. What you **want**, on the other hand is someone else's money or someone else's inventory. Since most of your customers are not likely to barter with you – we'll focus on money. Your customers, on the other hand, have a surplus of money, and a shortage of your products.

You want what they have – and they want what you have (otherwise they wouldn't be standing in front of you – or even at the expo). Once you understand this basic concept, you can then build on to #3.

3. Negotiate and adapt. Your products have value – there is no doubt to that. Your customers also value their money. Don't overstate or overestimate the value of either. Examine your products and view them in light of the other products available at the Expo. If your product is overpriced – your customer may feel cheated after the sale. If your product is underpriced you may be conveying the message that your products are inferior products. (Inferior to other items for sale at the Expo, and to any other item they could purchase at the Arts Festival or outside of the show altogether)

In the end, you and your customer are avoiding a zero-sum game. Each of you should end the transaction with the genuine feeling that each got the better end of the deal. After all – their \$1 is much more attractive to you than one of your excess comics. To your customer – your comic book is much more enjoyable than the wrinkly dollar in their wallet.

SIZE UP YOUR COMPETITION

While it may be difficult to view the Lubbock Comic Book Expo as a competition, it is vital to understand what you are doing at the show. There are many reasons to attend and exhibit at the expo. When it comes to salesmanship – you must understand that you are competing for your customer's time, attention and money.

The competition isn't so much with other exhibitors and vendors of the Expo, though you are all vying for a limited amount of money that your customers are willing to spend. Your competition, instead, should be viewed from a larger vantage.

Your competition is with **every** other vendor that will interact with your customer that day. You are competing with the vendors at the Lubbock Arts Festival. You are competing with the food vendors at the Civic Center. You are competing for your customer's time along with every other possible activity available in Lubbock that day. Remember, your customers value three things: they value their money, their time, and their attention.

Your competition is significant. Since this is the first Comic Book Expo at the Arts Festival, it is difficult to forecast the effects of hosting the Expo with the Arts Festival. Some things, however, are certain:

Larger Crowd – you will have exposure to a much larger crowd than was available at the past Lubbock Comic Book Expo. Each person is a potential customer. You have plenty of people to “experiment” on. Don’t worry about getting it right the first time, if all goes as planned, there will be plenty of people ahead to practice your salesmanship. The large audience is also the reason for the next certainty.

More Competition – 20,000 people tend to attract the attention of vendors and exhibitors. You and those around you are competing for a limited pool of money. While this may seem daunting, you should understand the positive merits your competition bring.

First of all, your customers are going to be there **expecting** to purchase. Rarely does one walk into a Walmart simply to enjoy the ambience. The same applies here. Sure, there will be some window shoppers who attend the show as an opportunity to get out and see something different. You must sell to these people as well. They may not be spending their money – but you can help them spend their time and attention with you. It could be an investment in your future.

Another important thing about the venue is that the customers attending the show are expecting to spend money. I’m repeating this because it’s critical. You’re not panhandling or peddling your wares – you are a vendor/exhibitor at a venue where people expect to purchase. If one person doesn’t buy – there are PLENTY of people who will. It’s your job to help them purchase.

You are Unique – no matter how many vendors are out at the Expo or at the Arts Festival, there is no one like you. You are unique. Your products may be similar to others’ but you are definitely one of a kind.

As such, it’s up to you to sell yourself and your products. Tell people why you’re special. Find a creative and unique way to set up your table and products. Dress in a way that tells your customers something about you.

Don’t let your competition be a source of fear or intimidation. It simply is what it is.

DEFINE YOUR SUCCESS

Your customers may not have any interest in the amount of work, time or money it took to put your books, table or other products together – but you sure do.

When the show is over, you need to have a concrete way to determine how the show went for you. “Fine”, “Fun”, “Alright”, “Awesome”, “Great”, “Meh”, “Pretty Good”, or “So-so” are possible answers, but they don’t give you any real feedback on what went right

and what could have gone better. For that, you need to establish your goals and define what a successful show will mean to you.

Bottom Line – if your measure of success is based on profit/loss, then you must be careful to control every expense that goes into the show. Price your items in a way to be competitive with others, but in a way that will allow you to break-even at the end of the day. If this is your first show, then it's difficult to know what to expect. Talk to fellow exhibitors and vendors and find out what you can expect.

This may be a new venue, but a general rule is the 80/20 rule. In a group of 100, 20 will be active and involved while 80 will need to be guided along. In sales, this can translate to a 20% rule. For every 100 people that walk by your table, 20 or so will be inclined to stop and look, ask a question or two, and perhaps buy something from you. Your salesmanship and pre-sale efforts can help boost the percentages, but as a baseline, the 80/20 rule is a good start. If you can expect 20% sales of some sort, figure out how many people are expected on the day of the Expo, and adjust.

Be careful not to over-extend. Price breaks are great with volume purchases, but it is ALWAYS better to sell out than it is to hold over inventory.

Networking – if you aim to network and promote yourself and your book, with overall income as a secondary or tertiary concern, then find a way to quantify your success. How many people did you speak to? About how long were your conversations? You may want to invest in a counter (clicker type) to keep track. How did your personal contact translate to sales?

For the networker and promoter, this show is an investment in future success. You may have lower-priced or free promotional merchandise at your table. Your table should be designed to draw people in, while allowing you plenty of open space to speak freely and perhaps sketch or otherwise have an visual display you can talk about with your potential customer. Encourage questions and ask questions in return.

Who was interested in your work? What are their demographics? Were there any referrals? Read the Post-Sale section for more ideas on how to quantify your experience.

GIVE 'EM SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

People love freebies. People hate junk. What distinguishes your free promotional material from “junk”?

When you are considering promotional materials, have the following questions in mind:

Is it relevant? If you expect to sell someone the first issue of your comic, don't give them promotional materials for something they've just purchased. It's a total waste.

Is it timely? If you have the first issue of a book, and don't expect the second issue to be available in less than 2-3 months (ideally 1-2 months), don't give promotional materials advertising your second issue. The flyer will have been long forgotten and/or disposed of by then.

Is it useful? Useful promotional products cost significantly more money than basic promotional materials. As such, there may be little incentive in giving away "Action Peeps" keychains or bottle openers. On the other hand, your customers may appreciate something you appreciate. If you're an artist – a small tutorial handout that shows people how to draw your character may be a worthwhile handout. If you're a writer – a handout with a link to your own writing message board may encourage feedback while allowing you a forum to interact with your customer and future fan.

Will it start a conversation? Many times, customers appreciate free items (or affordable ones) that they can show off to others. Free sketches, sketch cards, autographs, prints, posters, etc.. are comic book mainstays for a reason.

SALES TECHNIQUES

Market to Kids, Sell to Parents:

While not all your customers may be children, you will probably run into the opportunity to sell to children. **DO NOT SELL TO CHILDREN IF AVOIDABLE.**

Promote and market your books to children. Talk to them and get them excited about your book. However, if at all possible, sell to their parents.

Earn Parent's Trust - Chances are children's parents won't have a clue or any interest in comics – especially the ones you're selling. There may be some who will, but for the majority of parents, their kids don't make very responsible or informed purchases. This is your opportunity to inform their parents about the merits of your book – and by extensions comic books in general. You probably won't proselytize any parents, but at the very least they will be aware that YOU are a responsible vendor.

Let Parents Decide What is Appropriate - One of the last things you want to do is to sell someone child a book that their parents deem inappropriate. Their parents may be dead-on or crazy as a bat, but in the end they are the child's parents. Giving the parents the authority to decide if your book is sellable to their children is a good move, and also goes a long way to promote and show your (and the Expo's) responsibility and concern.

Scarce, but not Barren:

There are two messages you want your table to send your customer. On one hand, you want to show diversity and options. If you have multiple titles available or multiple issues of a single title, display them in a way that tells your customer "there's a lot to

choose from here”. Free materials should also be spread out a bit to show availability. Placing promotional materials in two stacks on opposite ends of the table will help convey “variety”.

On the other hand, you want your customer to feel like they’ll be missing out if they don’t purchase from you.

Don’t splash your table with every issue you brought to the show. Having a stack of even 10 issues sends a signal to your customer that there is no immediate urgency to buy your book. They’ll continue walking by – and why not? – after all, you’ve still got plenty of books – there will be time to stop by later. There may be time, there may not be money.

Learn from the masters of “scarcity”. Every year, firework sales for the 4th of July go through the scarcity cycle. As time draws closer to the 4th, well-stocked firework shelves will begin to show signs of decline. Some of the more popular fireworks will be limited to 2 – 6 packages on the shelves. Firework fans, in fear of not being able to buy “Blast-Master Artillery Shell 12-packs” will be more likely to buy one or more of the “last three”. They will leave the stand, happy with their purchase and “prudence”. Yet, an hour later, the shelf will likely have three more “last” 12-packs.

Keep your books under your table. Have one issue of each type available for people to thumb through, and one or two for display purposes. When your customer actually commits to the purchase, however, hand them a “fresh” copy from the appropriate box underneath your table.

Be careful, however, to not have too little on your table. Not enough comics or other items on your table take away a customer’s “options”. Your customer may avoid your table (unless they are particularly attracted to what you have to offer) if they feel that thumbing through one of the four total books on your table will put them in an awkward position should they decide not to buy. In that case, they’ll have decided not to buy before you’ve had a chance to sell.

Scarcity puts the balance of power in the vendor’s hands. This could be a slight or significant advantage, but an advantage nonetheless.

Be Authoritative:

No one knows more about your book than you do. In the same manner, no one knows more about you than... well – you do. Have a “pitch” ready for yourself and for your products. For instance – if you are selling a comic, be prepared to answer any question your customer may have about it. At the same time, have a prepared “pitch” explaining your book, the general concept behind it, and why it is worth reading. The “pitch” should actually be several (3-4) different pitches – each building on the previous. The first should be 10 – 20 seconds long – just long enough to hold the attention of a passer-by. The last pitch should be about 2 minutes long – and only for serious customers or people

who are seriously interested in learning about your book. The intermediate pitches can vary in length – (ex. p1 – 20 seconds, p2 – 45 seconds, p3 – 1 ½ mins., p4 – 2 mins.).

Also keep in mind, that you are selling yourself as well! Have a “pitch” ready for yourself. Be prepared to tell your customers:

- Who you are
- Why you are at the Expo
- What your interests and products (what type of creator are you)
- What makes you unique at the show

Become a Resource – not a Salesperson:

Although people love to buy – they don’t always appreciate being sold to. People love and appreciate knowledge and help. “Become known as a resource, not a salesperson... *How valuable are you to others?*”¹ You may not have the product(s) that your customer is looking to purchase. That, however, doesn’t mean you can’t sell to them. Find out what they’re interested in. Help lead them to the right person they need to meet in order to find what they are looking for. For this to work, you must be aware of your fellow vendors and exhibitors. Know what is available at the Expo and be ready to guide people to the right person they need to find. You may want to arrange a referral program with other vendors or exhibitors. Know a little about the vendors and exhibitors as well, so that you can establish some rapport and authoritativeness along with your referral.

PRE-SALE, POST-SALE

When does a sale begin and end?

CELEBRATE EFFORT – NOT VICTORY

“Too many times salespeople and their leaders only celebrate the sale. And while that’s important, it is equally important to celebrate the work that went into making the sale happen. The work ethic, better stated, your work ethic, will lead you to more sales than any other element in your sales arsenal.”²

The sale begins today. Right now. You may not have any idea who is going to be at your table, but you should begin planning and preparing for them right now.

Begin planning on your customers. How will you set up your table? Will your storefront be designed to sell with minimal interaction, or will it be designed to make the most out of every conversation and interaction – even if it means you may have to “ignore” potential customers while talking with the one in front of you? Will you have an assistant to handle transactions? Do you have a cashbox with enough loose cash to make change easily and quickly? Will your prices be clearly visible?

¹ Gitomer, Jeffrey. Jeffrey Gitomer’s Little Red Book of Selling. 2005 Bard Press: Austin, TX

² Ibid.

Work today to make your customer's experience as comfortable and enjoyable as you can.

When does the sale end? The sale doesn't end until you or the buyer decide it's over. Just because they've bought your products (or not) and have left your table doesn't mean they're not your customer any more.

Keep your relationship with your customer going. Get their e-mail address and name (if they agree) and consider a newsletter or personal e-mails. Build a relationship with them that they probably don't have with any other comic book creator. Make an effort to use their name and greet them if you see them at the Expo later in the day.

Ask your customers for their evaluation. How do they feel you did? What did they like? What didn't they like? What do they wish you would have done or offered? You can guess the answers to these questions – or you can simply ask them, and learn from them.

While developing a relationship with your customer, you are also accomplishing much more. You are developing your brand. Whether you realize it or not, every interaction you'll have at the Expo develops, strengthens or reduces the power of "Your Brand". Your brand will follow you around as long as you have a career. Build your image, and in time – that initial sale will be a tiny stepping stone on the way to success.

Above all, have a good time. What's the point, after all, if you're going to be miserable?

If you make a sale, you can earn a commission. If you make a friend, you can earn a fortune. – Jeffrey Gitomer

Enjoy the show!