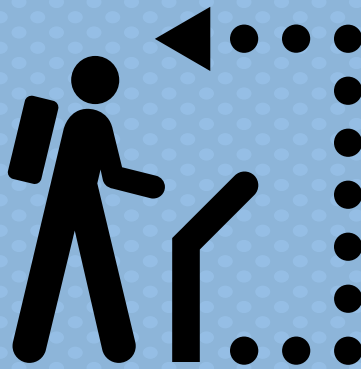


BAM! Complete Guide to Exhibiting

by Robert Baird



#6

A guide to exhibiting at
performing arts conferences

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Introduction

So many conventions, so little time. How is one to make sense of the world of Arts Presenting and its conventions? This Primer is intended as “words of advice” from a veteran of the convention circuit, and hopefully, will be helpful to neophytes and seasoned veterans alike. If you are new to exhibiting at conventions, give the instructions in this Primer some serious consideration; if you are a veteran of exhibiting at conventions, use it as a refresher or reminder checklist. Happy conventioning!

First things, first

Why is it good to attend a convention?

1. It is a gathering of arts presenters, arts administrators, artists, suppliers.
2. As an exhibitor, you are making a statement about your firm and your clients: we’re here, we’re serious, consider us. You are creating an image.
3. You will draw attention to your business and your artists.
4. You will make new contacts and build relationships with the people who will book your artists.
5. You can introduce new artists on your roster or new artist programs or activities.
6. Face to face contact with those who make decisions on booking artists is crucial.
7. There are many opportunities for promotion and networking in the various activities at a convention.

Decisions, decisions, decisions

Which conventions to attend? Which artists to promote? What about displays? Shall I have a giveaway? What can I give to attendees? How can I best use my time? What do I hope to achieve? One needs to do some **Research** to provide some tentative answers to these questions.

Research

1. Find out the **dates** and **locations** of the conventions you will consider attending. See:
BAM! Complete Guide to Conferences – Canada
BAM! Complete Guide to Conferences – U.S.A.
BAM! Complete Guide to Conferences – International
(Available for download at www.bairdartists.com)
2. Go to each convention website and note the various opportunities for **promoting** your artist(s): Exhibit Hall, Showcasing (Juried and Independent), Sponsorship, etc.
3. Note the **networking** opportunities at the convention: Workshops, Meals, Volunteering, being Mentored, etc.
4. Ascertain the costs involved for each convention. (Registration, meals, accommodation, flights, etc.)
5. Ascertain which, if any, of your artists might wish to apply for a juried showcase, invest in an independent showcase, provide sponsorship, or attend the convention.

Starting the convention process: getting a booth

1. Register to exhibit at the convention and choose your exhibit space. Most conferences have a Booth Lottery and divide exhibitors into groups, depending upon their exhibit history at the conference. Those who have exhibited over the greatest number of years get first choice of booth space.
2. You will normally have the option of three booth choices. I usually choose a booth in the right side of the exhibit hall (since most people tend to go to the right after they enter a hall), not at the beginning of a row and with an even number. (I know it's weird, but it's what I do!)
3. Booths come in different sizes and at different prices. Choose what you can afford.
4. Some people choose their booth based on who their neighbors will be: being near a major exhibitor may be desirable for some because they will draw traffic, or may be undesirable for some because all of the traffic will go to them and not to you.

Booth decor

1. Booth spaces come with basic furniture, usually an 8' table, 2 chairs, and a wastebasket. Carpeting may or may not be included. A normal booth is 10' wide and will be delineated by drapes hung on pipes ("Pipe and Drape Booth")
2. An Exhibit Service company will contact you with information on exhibiting services. Decide if you want to purchase additional furnishings electricity, carpeting, additional furniture of various kinds, or any kinds of equipment - televisions, monitors, computers etc. (at an additional cost.) Also be sure to look for items available from the company that might improve your booth (plants, displays, etc.)
3. You should have a professional display in your booth, and this can vary from something you create yourself to a purchased display unit. Purchased display units come in various configurations and at various costs. Use photos. The important thing is to have a professional look.
4. If you have something new to show then ensure that it is strongly emphasized so it will generate interest and people will want to find out more.

5. Three points to consider: Make it clear (Explain your company, artist roster, activities); keep it simple (don't clutter up your booth); focus on what is unique (Selling points and benefits to differentiate your company from other exhibitors).
6. Do NOT place your table at the front of your booth space, blocking entry into the booth. Place the table along the side of your booth or at the back. You want people to come INTO your exhibit space.

Giveaways

To give or not to give? A giveaway should entice people to your booth and remind them of your company and/or the artists on your roster. You can certainly give away candy or chocolates, pens or pads with your company logo and contact information on them, or even more elaborate giveaways. One of my artists uses chocolate as a theme for mailings and has given away chocolate CDs, various wrapped chocolates, etc.

You can bring some homemade baking and give that away. (But note that some exhibit venues have food restrictions). You can put the homemade baking in a company mug and give that away. You can find any number of promotional firms that will manufacture various giveaways with your company name on them. Investigate this area of promotion and do what you think is appropriate. Here are some strategies to consider:

1. Bigger is Better

Give away a large item that attendees can't fit it into their complimentary show bag and have to carry it around for all to see and envy. When others see the item they will want to stop by your booth to get one of their very own. Bigger is better works best with colorful and lightweight items.

2. Product Hook

The product hook is a giveaway that samples your artist's work (CD or DVD). The goal is to give the attendee a taste of what you have to offer and leave them wanting more.

3. Desktop Reminder

The desktop reminder is an item the attendee will take back to the office and display on their desk. Examples include clocks, pens, paperweights, paperclip holders, etc. All would prominently display your company name, logo, or website - anything that will stay in their minds because they look at it EVERY DAY!

4. Candy is Dandy

Food items and candy are a very popular giveaway. Miniature chocolates and candy bars are great. Attendees are tired and sweets can provide a needed energy boost, or they can save it for a pick-me-up treat during the next session. (You could also consider having healthy snacks available).

5. Snack-Time

More substantial food items will draw attendees to your booth and give you the benefit of chatting while you serve them or they serve themselves. Examples would include a vegetable or cheese and cracker platter, or a popcorn machine. (Check with conference organizers and make sure you are allowed to do this.)

6. No Giveaway!

You may choose to not give any items away because of the expense, and you want to give the impression that you are very serious and don't have any time for candy and toys. Go for it!

Finally, it is important to understand the difference between price and value. You could spend a lot of money on an item that ends up in the trash, while your neighbor gives away an economical, unique item that ends up on the desk of every attendee. Choose wisely - think before you give.

Considerations for registration

1. Stay at the conference hotel. You can usually get a good rate and, while you might save a few bucks staying at a cheaper one a few blocks away, staying at the hotel where everyone else is staying allows you to network more effectively.
2. Take advantage of meals offered during the conference. The cost will be offset by the networking opportunities during the meals.
3. **Volunteer** to help with the conference. Being a Workshop Assistant, Greeter or People Mover will provide yet more networking opportunities

4. Register for the Mentorship Program. As a “newbie” you will be assigned a Mentor who can help you through the conference, answer any questions you may have, connect you to people, etc.
5. If you can afford it, provide **Sponsorship** for the conference. This can be as simple as one of your artists providing a delegate bag-stuffer, or subsidizing one of the conference events, sponsor a lunch, host a Cocktail reception, brand the bags or supply the lanyards (this can range from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars). Sponsorship will give your firm a high profile at the conference.

Getting to first base

1. Find out who will be attending – convention websites will often have an ongoing list of registrants or will sell you a list of registrants several weeks before the convention.
2. Make a list of presenters you’d like to connect with and find out what they program and see how you could fit into their programming. Contact them and try to set up a meeting. (This can be difficult but keep trying.)
3. Contact registrants, either en masse, or individually (to make appointments, or extend a personal invitation to see your artist showcase, etc.) through phone, email and/or mail.
4. Do a special pre-conference mailing, inviting attendees to your booth. Include information on artists’ showcases, giveaways, sponsorships, etc. Give recipients a reason to either open your mail, or read it instead of throwing it away. Keep your message short and targeted. Include a call to action
5. Send a Press Release to local media informing them of your exhibiting at the convention. Just be sure your Press Release is “newsworthy”. (News about your firm, one of your artists, something new or innovative, etc.)
6. Invite local Press to your exhibit and try to arrange a Press Event at your booth to encourage them.
7. Use the web and your website to promote your attendance at the convention. Try to get links from the organizers website to yours and vice versa. Also look into banner advertising, news pages, online journals for Press releases and hyperlinks.

Details, Details, details

1. Check booth set-up dates and times.
2. Schedule shipping of your booth materials to exhibit hall (if necessary).
3. Make sure that you have sufficient promotional material to stock your booth. (Business cards, Artists' Press Kits, CDs, DVDs, Flyers, EPKs, Photos, Promotional Giveaway, etc.)
4. Be sure that Exhibit Hall times are noted on your schedule.
5. Have a system for handling leads and enquiries. (I use a form – Appendix 1 – to which I attach each booth visitor's business card and make a quick notation on what transpired during our conversation).

Doing the deed

Working the booth is your primary function at a convention and you have to be at the top of your game to do this.

1. Dress well.
2. Fresh breath is important (Bring mints).
3. Make sure that your name badge or tag is visible at all times. Adjust it so that it sits higher and can be seen when you sit down to a meal.
4. Know your stuff inside and out – your company, your artists.
5. Attract people to your booth – be welcoming, energetic and motivated.
6. Give and get business cards. Have your business cards handy in a pocket.
7. Make detailed notes about follow-up to every person who visits (sending them requested materials, answering questions they raised, thanking them for visiting the booth, etc.)

“Do’s” of convention exhibiting

1. Prepare 3-6 engaging questions before the show.
 - a) How has the increase in travel costs affected your programming?
 - b) How important are educational workshops in your community?
 - c) How familiar are you with (name of artist, program, benefit, etc.)?
2. Create the right first impression. Smile.
3. Encourage visitors to want to spend time with you. Build rapport.
4. Be friendly and non-threatening. Open body posture and eye contact.
5. Remember the 80/20 Rule... Listen 80% - Talk 20%.
6. Ask questions that stimulate thought and encourage conversation.
7. Ask open-ended questions - beginning with who, what, where, when, why or how.
8. Relate questions to the Presenters’ needs and to the benefits of hiring your artists, or to a specific situation.
9. Avoid trite questions, such as: "Can I help you?"; "How are you doing today?"; "Are you enjoying the show?"
10. Practice, practice, practice.

“Don’ts” of convention exhibiting

1. **DO NOT** sit, read, smoke, eat, drink or fall asleep in the booth.
2. **DO NOT** ignore prospects by forming a cozy cluster and chatting with colleagues or other booth personnel.
3. **DO NOT** use your cell phone while visitors are around.
4. **DO NOT** leave the booth unattended (although I occasionally do this).
5. **DO NOT** be late for booth times.
6. **DO NOT** close off conversation by crossing your arms.
7. **DO NOT** stand with your back to the aisle.
8. **DO NOT** say "Can I help you?"
9. **DO NOT** lean on booth furniture.
10. **DO NOT** drink alcohol or eat garlicky or spicy foods during the day.
11. **DO NOT** use heavy cologne, aftershave or perfume.
12. **DO NOT** use inappropriate language, complain about the show or about being at the show.
13. **DO NOT** wear new shoes or high heels. Be comfortable.
14. **DO NOT** badmouth your competitors.
15. **DO NOT** let the booth get cluttered, untidy, and unorganized.
16. **DO NOT** be unprofessional.

Setting goals

Write down some goals for each conference. These goals will help to focus your activities at the conference. Examples include:

1. Collect 50 business cards (or 25 or 10)
2. Meet privately with 2 presenters
3. Set up 2 off-site meetings at a local venue, smaller presenter, etc.
4. Get 2 artists booked for the following season
5. Attend at least 2 educational sessions

6. Collect at least 10 business cards from attendees in the lobby, bar, or coffee shop
7. Follow up with all booth visitors within 3 business days

Getting involved

1. **Be an active participant, not a passive observer at the convention.** Ask questions and make comments when the format allows it. This will add to your knowledge and, most importantly, it will open up new avenues of conversation with your colleagues after the session.
2. **Be on your best behavior at all times.** It goes without saying that you need to remember that you are not really off duty because you have left your home base. Enjoy yourself, but avoid risky behavior like the plague—this type of behavior will get back to your boss or your clients and can often jeopardize your job, family and future.
3. **Attend workshops and educational sessions.** These provide excellent opportunities to meet new people, engage in interesting conversations, learn new things and contribute your knowledge and experience.
4. **Sign up for Dine-Arounds.** These provide an opportunity to experience a new restaurant, meet some new people and have a fun time, networking with colleagues.
5. **Give and get Business Cards.** Wherever you are, whenever you are, give the card and get the card. It gives the recipients and you a tangible reminder of the people met and contact information.
6. **Collect brochures from arts venues.** There are usually display tables where presenters will place their season brochures. These can be invaluable aids in seeing what kinds of programs they offer, what people are programming, information on the venue, staff, etc.
7. **Attend the Opening Reception and Closing Night Party.** Again, these are perfect networking opportunities. There is usually an additional cost to attend but it is well worth the investment.

The elevator speech

This is the **most important** thing you will have at the conference. Hone your 30-second "elevator speech" (i.e., a speech that is no longer than an elevator ride) for moments during conferences when someone asks you: "So, what do you do?" Practicing your 30-second elevator pitch ahead of time helps you look professional during these conversations and lets the other person know exactly what you do before moving on. The speech is also important for booth visitors. You only have 30 seconds in which to gain their interest. Make it captivating.

The party's over

1. Follow up all leads immediately after the show. Send the information requested, Press Kits promised, etc.
2. Follow up the follow up with a phone call. It can take up to 9 calls to connect with a prospect. Don't give up too soon. Leave no more than 3 messages (or 3 emails).
3. Follow up the event with a mailing to attendees (Conference organizers will usually provide a list of attendees following the conference.)
4. If the show resulted in any new developments for your business or artists, alert the Press (Press Release) and include such news in your post-conference mailings.
5. Did you meet your goals? Summarize the results of the conference – new contacts, tangible results, possible future bookings, etc.
6. Make a note of things to do differently, better or more of next time.

BAM! Baird Artists Management

CONTACT INFORMATION

Attach Business Card Here

NAME _____

ORGANIZATION _____

TITLE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE/PROV. _____ ZIP/PC _____

BUSINESS PHONE _____ HOME PHONE _____

CELL PHONE _____

email _____

WEBSITE _____

INFORMATION REQUESTED:

- PRESENTER'S KIT (INCLUDES DEMO CD) for
- MEDIA KIT
- MASTER CLASS & WORKSHOP BROCHURE
- OTHER _____

- Send by email
- Send by regular mail

NOTES:

Check out the other titles in the

BAM! COMPLETE GUIDES SERIES

BAM! Complete Guide to Acronyms
BAM! Complete Guide to Arts Education – Canada
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BAM! Complete Guide to Being an Agent
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BAM! Complete Guide to Young Audience Performance – Canada
BAM! Complete Guide to Young Audience Performance – U.S.A.

All Guides are or will be available for download
from the BAM! Baird Artists Management
Consulting website: www.bairdartists.com



Robert Baird, President of Baird Artists Management, is now available for consultation and advice regarding Canadian and U.S. regulations and information for performers, agents/managers and performing arts venues. Mr. Baird has been in the performing arts for over fifty years and has had distinguished careers in education, publishing and musical theatre. He served on the Board of Directors (2008-2010) and was President (2011-2013) of the North American Performing Arts Managers and Agents (NAPAMA). He was Treasurer and Vice-President of Festivals and Events Ontario (FEO) and served on that Board on various committees (2010-2013). Mr. Baird received the Arts Northwest Coyote Award and the Performing Arts Exchange Mary Beth Treen Award in 2012. He is Chair of Team Agent Network (TAN) and APAP Showcase Coordinator.

Robert is a regular columnist in *International Musician: The Official Journal of the American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada* (Circulation 100,000+ Monthly) where he writes a monthly column entitled "Crossing Borders". The column focuses on what artists need to know to get into Canada or the United States. He also writes a monthly column entitled "Artist Manager's Toolkit" for *International Arts Manager*, based in London, England.

Take advantage of Robert's expertise, knowledge and guidance with:

- Visa Requirements for Canada**
- Work Permits for Canada**
- Crossing the Canadian Border**
- Bringing Merchandise into Canada or the United States**
- R-105 Withholding Waiver for Canada**
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