



IMPROVING WOODWORKING SHOWS

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"Having spoken with vendors, it is clear their margins are so low that giving price breaks at shows is not good business. They are successful doing business over the Internet and see little reward for spending a weekend away at a show. When I first went to shows, it was about the tools, and with time, my focus has changed to be more about skills. Some shows focus at too low a skill level. If a wood show advertised a woodworker of note was going to complete an entire project during a 3-day show, people would attend. The work could then be raffled off at the end. Also, the involvement of local woodworking clubs, and wouldn't an instant gallery be something to think about?"

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News and Views from

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by Ellis Valentine

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"I don't go to shows to see tools, and certainly not to buy tools. Not big ones at least. I go to stores for that. I go to shows to see what's new, and to learn things. New jigs, new tools, new ways of using old tools, new projects, new ideas, and demonstrations. I like going to shows for all the stuff you couldn't get from catalogs and showrooms."

"One thing I'd suggest is promotion. I haven't seen one ad in the newspaper. If it wasn't for the flyer from Peachtree Woodworking and mentions on the messageboards, I wouldn't be attending my first show Friday."

"The last show here, I paid \$10 to have the opportunity to be sold something. Shouldn't they foot the bill to attract more people? And the big iron: wouldn't it be nice to actually kick the tires? At a minimum, we should get more demos of the tools for sale. Pricewise, since I'm paying to attend the show, I expect, no demand a better deal than I can get from the local store."

"I'm afraid your statement of demanding a better show price just cannot happen. A 10x10 booth is about \$1,500. When you add all the show expenses of travel, hotel, etc., the good deals at the shows are over. The Internet has leveled the playing field. You have to sell every day at your best price, or no business. There is no margin to give any better show price."

"I research my potential purchases thoroughly before going to the show, and I usually know more about the product that I'm inquiring about than the sales person. If dealers at a show want to sell me something, they'll have to demonstrate that they know their product and that they have experience using said product. If machinery dealers want to get my pesos, they'll have to earn them."

"Around here, \$10 would be a cheap show. Single tickets range from a bit more to a lot more, then double if I want to bring my son, or five times that to bring the family. Heck, I can take my son to AMA Supercross, but paying for a show

where they aren't offering anything more in learning and demos, and where the food prices are as bad as a baseball game...forget it."

"With fewer vendors attending shows, I can't justify going to window shop. One thing I'd like to see is sales tied in with demos. I would love to go to a pen turning demo, learn the technique, and have the opportunity to buy a package right there. I can see two packages: one with a lathe, one without. I went to a demo by Marc Adams. He was doing biscuit jointing and had a custom jig that lined everything up for him. I would have paid for a separate class to discuss this jig and get a plan for it. I would certainly pay \$25 to get a better understanding of a tool I seldom use. One problem is that the shows are like a flea market. There is not enough marketing material to look at. Aisles are blocked by people watching demos, and it is hard to move around. Booth demos could be planned better; left side of aisle gets the on hour time slots and right side gets the 1/2 hour time slots. Cross aisles should be non-demonstrating booths. It's not that hard."

"I'm tired of paying to shop. The show in Sacramento charges ridiculous parking fees. Many of us are retired on a fixed income and have to make a decision to buy the supplies we need or give the money to the gate keeper at the local expo. Guess which one wins." "Though it seems that we should be focused on the end product and what our project looks like, to some extent woodworkers seem to be interested more in the tools and how to use them. I think this is reflective in how we see shows. Certainly, we all like to snag a bargain and play with the newest toys, but if we're really looking to improve our skills, we should be coming to the shows more for the seminars and lessons than the opportunity to go shopping."

"I have been going to woodworking shows for over 20 years. Vendor attendance has always fluctuated. A well-known vendor indicated that a lot of vendors had become fed up with political BS with show organizers. As good vendors fell by the wayside, attendance dropped. Lots of businesses look at everything but themselves when things start to go bad. Blaming the decline on the Internet is just not intelligent in my opinion. There has been explosive growth in woodturning in recent years, but there are no vendors in that area to speak of. I'm dying to see a SawStop saw for real, but there won't be one at the Milwaukee show this year. When a product that exciting comes along, the show organizers should pay them to be there. Interest in woodworking is at an all-time high, so I have to conclude any drop in attendance is due to factors that should be well within the control of show promoters."

"I drove 100 miles Saturday and Sunday to get to the Columbus show, primarily to listen to the speakers, and secondarily to place an order with Lee Valley-about \$350-inspired by their free shipping deal. Thirdly I went to browse the booths. I don't expect to find steals at these shows, but \$50 is too much for seminars. One suggestion:wider aisles, particularly when two vendors are demonstrating across from each other, and spread out the loudspeakers so one does not compete with the other, I would also suggest a seminar tour, independent of the show. I would spend money on that."

"More classes! We will pay! I usually take 6+ classes when I attend The WoodWorks shows."

"In my opinion, there is little innovation in the woodworking industry that doesn't fall into the category of gimmicky. Magazines do a better, unbiased job of testing, and I'm more inclined to believe their claims than a manufacturer's representative. If I want to see a demo, I'll go to Woodcraft or Rockler."

"I'm going to my first Woodworking Show in Seattle in April. I can't wait. I would love to walk away with something that I made at a seminar. For me, I can read all the books and listen all day, but there are things that I need to put my hands on to understand."

"I would like to see a paid turning symposium. Several different instructors teaching rotations, coupled with an open vendor area and an instant gallery to show work."

"I truly believe the right formula is for a woodworking show to emphasize education and the up-close demos by master woodworkers in their field. Showcasing local woodworker's work is a good idea, and parent/child workshops make for sharing a project. In past years, I've driven over five hours one way, several times, to attend this format at WoodWorks and was glad I did."

"Maybe show attendance would increase if woodworking shows were combined with another popular hobby like scrapbooking. Take it one step further and have something for the kids-workshops to build a birdhouse, a playland, or

arcade area. That way, it becomes a family event. Give the big tool manufacturers a chance to plant some seeds for future customers. Having everything under one roof would get the younger crowd there. Maybe offer a shop full of tools to guess the exact amount of biscuits in the back of a pick up. Going to shows has always been about inspiration and learning."

"Last Fall was the first time that I haven't gone in five years. The vendor-sponsored demos are the best. Folks come and do a 60- or 90- minute demo and answer questions, show methods, and sell a book or three. These are things that I don't get at the local woodworker's store. I usually bring home a little something. But that tool chest is getting full, and there are projects backed up in the shop and in the yard." "There are at least four points of view here: the show promoter, the vendor, the attendee, and the presenter. I was one of the latter for six years. There ain't no free lunch for anybody. The parking fee goes to whoever owns/manages the parking lot, not into your promoter's pocket. The admission fee doesn't begin to pay for the hall that the event is in. The vendor's fees have to be recovered in sales with a profit, or the vendor isn't going to come back. The dates for shows are locked in at least a year in advance, and games or community events aren't always known at the time. Every business person, including those of us who are presenters, must make money to stay in business. I can tell you that all vendors keep statistics telling them whether they want to do a certain show. You vote with your feet by not coming, and so do they. If you want a more commercially-oriented show, go to Atlanta or Las Vegas. It will cost you more, but there will be lots more vendors, show specials, and the big boys will show up." Participate in future surveys at WoodCentral.com Send suggestions for survey topics to webmaster@woodcentral.com Thanks to our Editorial Assistant Barb Siddiqui for her work on this column,