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Brief Guide to Preparing for Open Studios

This is a fabulous event and opportunity, so, know why you're doing it. Know your goals.

So, you've signed up for Open Studios, and some sort of vision dances in your head. Do you want to do it for the sheer enjoyment of it? Do you want to share your latest work with friends? Other artists? Is this your debut? Perhaps you want feedback from the public, or you hope a gallery rep will stop by, or a potential client you've been cultivating. Do you want to make sales? Maybe it's an opportunity to clean up the place and acknowledge for yourself your year's accomplishments-- or maybe you hope it will goad you to make stuff. This guide is organized as a list of issues posed as questions, because no one has the same situation, nor is there a right way to do things. Just don't turn it into an obligation, or you won't enjoy it.

Who's coming? Who do you want to have come?

This is an invite list with many parts...Your friends. Your admirers. People who have heard about you. Curious neighbors. Art buyers. Supporters of the arts community! --arts leaders and volunteers. Other artists. Art reps. The media: reporters, critics, bloggers. Educators. Mentors. Tourists. Previous clients...

Follow-up

Chronologically last, consequentially first!! Open Studios is an end in itself but also a huge opening-- life goes on. Things to think about-- At event: have take-away cards listing upcoming events, and cards about projects you're working on (and/or want help with). After: Write thank-you cards (not e-mails!); follow up with potential buyers; personally thank any arts professionals who visited. Do mailing list updates. Transcribe entries from your visitor's book: these are gold. Write a recap for your next newsletter or email blast. The place looks its best-- have a series of private visiting days in the weeks after SOS and capitalize on it. Here's a chance to get to know possible mentors, so ask them over for advice. Make notes right after the event about what would help next time. And...sit back, have a drink, and congratulate yourself!

Tell everyone Mailing list-->announcements via email marketing service, email, snail mail, Facebook, Twitter, website, forums. Flyers, Posters, postcards, where? Video aggregators like YouTube, if you're a sound artist! Note performance times on announcements. Press releases, local/other? Radio? Community Access TV? Galleries, museums, film festivals, maker fairs. Start yesterday. Have a vernissage?

Curate and exhibit your show Show only the best, old or new. How much to show? Less is usually better. Get help choosing? Various price points. Studies. Framed pieces-to go. Sale items. Postcards. Print stand. Things in process, materials, tools... Walls? Easels? Stands for 3D? Frames? Film? Installations? DVD loop of performance excerpts? Headphones, if many audio displays? How about cassette recordings of info on each piece, like at the MFA? Toys? Jewelry? Furniture? Lighting!! Layout. Mats? Shrink-wrap/plastic? Cotton Gloves? Boxes, bags, brochures, cards, inserts, gift wrap, bubble wrap, take-aways, tape. Red dots. Maps. Guest Book.

Prepare your space Inside/outside studio. Safety. Make it attractive! Clean up. Cover up, close off. "Don't touch" signs (or vice versa). Clear away clutter. Mark pathways. Balloons. Parking. Neighbors. Plant flowers? Hang curtains? Paint? X-ratings. Noise. Refreshments? Protecting the art. Trash. Music? Kids area/participation? Bathroom?

Make friends, make sales A sale is only an artifact of a relationship. Listen to your guests and find out about them. If they like things, assume they want to buy. Decide prices beforehand. Discounts? Negotiating? Focus guests on what's available NOW. Leave details until later--or to others (your helpers?). Labels, price list, red dots. Make it easy. Check, PayPal, Square-up? Cash...change! Sales Tax! Invoices/sales receipts. Down-payments, lay aways, on-approvals. Shipping, insurance, fees, extra services. Duplicate to buyer. Get all contact info.

The event BE THERE. Welcome visitors. Wear a name tag. Make a good first impression. Be friendly! Acknowledge new visitors if you're busy. Talk about your art and about the story behind each piece. Avoid being monopolized. Ask the questions you want to answer, and the ones guests find hard to ask. Which visitors do you want to spend time with? Dress the part!

Enlist help There's a lot to do/keep track of during the event. Your focus should be on being the artist and interacting with your visitors. Get helpers: for set up, clean up, so you can have a meal or bathroom break, to greet, to offer food. Have someone else explain pricing, write up sales, pack sold work, handle guests. Have assistants wear name tags, too. Be sure to thank them generously-- a meal? a piece of art?

This guide was originally prepared for a talk given at the Somerville Museum, Somerville, MA at the request of the coordinators of S.O.S. on March 20, 2012. Writer: Jesa Damora of FunnelCake Marketing. It's free, and intended to be used, downloaded, and added on to. Kindly give credit. It is also available at www.facebook.com/Funnelcake.Marketing in the Notes section. If you want to talk about how this list applies to your Open Studio event goals, call 617-759-4787, 9AM - 9PM.