

# GOING TO MARKET? BUYING AT A SHOW?

Gain industry insiders' tips to make your trip easy and - dare we say it - fun.

By Amy Knebel



PHOTO: RETAIL MINDED  
Many trade shows offer a cash and carry section, such as the ASD Show in Las Vegas does. While not all exhibiting vendors participate in this, many jewelry vendors take part in this popular category of the ASD Show. For show attendees, it's important to plan ahead as to how they will both pay for the jewelry - since payment is expected right away - as well as how they will transport it back to their stores.

It's an inescapable fact. You own a store and you must fill your store with goods for your customers to buy. Even if you have a group of independent local designers to partner with, you still need to go to market for the bulk of your wares. Depending on what kind of store you own, you may be going to market a few times a year or several times a year. You might even be attending several different kinds of markets in several different cities. Regardless of your situation, there are ways to make your trip to market easier.

Retail Minded gathered four retail veterans to ask them what

they would do. We're grateful to Starr Cumming, director of Business Development at Urban Enterprises in Atlanta, GA, Deanna Price Boyanton, veteran showroom manager at AmericasMart in Atlanta, GA, Susan Lilly Gerock of Zoe Boutique and Amy Rutherford of Red Barn Mercantile, both located in Alexandria, VA, for sharing many years of going to market lessons... some of them learned the hard way.

When we asked our retail veterans for input, one particular tidbit really stood out as a way to put your entire trip to market (and the planning for it) into perspective.

"Think of a trip to market like a vacation. You wouldn't just get on a plane and go somewhere without booking a place to stay, finding out what special requirements your destination has, deciding how you would spend your time while you were there, and most importantly, budgeting for it. Going to market is no different. The more you plan before you go, the more you get out of it," Cumming explains.

We couldn't agree more. Read on for candid, unfiltered advice straight from the pros.

## BEFORE YOU GO

Overwhelmingly, each of our contributors maintained that significant planning was the most important way to ensure a successful trip to market.

## PLAN YOUR LOGISTICS AND CALENDARS

**PRICE BOYANTON:** At some markets, depending on where you have traveled from, you'll need a hotel room. Due to the number of people trying to stay close in to market, pre-arrange to book your hotel room almost a year in advance. If you book too late, you'll only find open hotel rooms farther out, which makes transportation to market more than time-consuming. Also plan on taking public transportation whenever possible. Sometimes booking hotel, air and car through the market website can save you money and time.

**RUTHERFORD:** Stay at a hotel on the shuttle line if your market offers one and try to stay at the first stop after market. You'll be the first to exit when you are tired after a long day.

**CUMMING:** Take a look at your calendar and prepare a spreadsheet broken out by the week for notes of the dates you want orders shipped. This way you can spread out your shipments in a way that works for your storage and floor space. People can't buy what they don't see.

## EFFECTIVE TIME MANAGEMENT NEEDS TO BE PLANNED

**PRICE BOYANTON:** Use the market or show's website. Download anything (maps, guidebooks) you might need ahead of time and either print it out or save it to your iPad. For example, the Dallas Market Center has a great Glossary of Industry Terms that's helpful for new buyers.

**GEROCK:** Have a plan. Know which brands will be there. Whom do I want to meet with? Note that this can change from season to season. During big buying seasons like spring and fall, I want to hit everybody, but during shoulder seasons like resort and holiday, I adjust my list. I also ask myself if there are any brands I've wanted to look at and haven't yet had the opportunity to see them in person. I make a list of those. Allow yourself some time to wander around and see if there are brands that would be a good fit for your store, especially

if it is a line that is completely new to you. Don't overschedule yourself.

**RUTHERFORD:** Especially for the New York shows, I create walking lists pre-show. I look for my current vendors and note where they are. Then I make a note of the new vendors I want to check out and their locations. It's so enormous; you have to be strategic about which aisles you go down. Since the walking lists don't come in alphabetical order or by pier or Javits Center locations, I then redo my walking lists in a spreadsheet so that I'm organized to see what's new and intriguing while making sure I get to see my trusted, tried and true lines.

**PRICE BOYANTON:** Pre-register if it's a market new to you or double-check your registration for your regular markets. The goal is to do as much paperwork ahead of time so that your wait times at check-in are at a minimum. Some markets change their procedures from year to year as technology changes, so this can save you time and a potential headache. Some markets have workshops for new buyers or trends. Pre-register to take advantage of these workshops and write them into your show schedule. Sometimes you can sign up for these when you pre-register, and sometimes you can't sign up for them until you check in, but they're a valuable way to spend your time either way.

**RUTHERFORD:** Know the rules before you go. Some markets are OK with rolling bags, and some aren't. Things like photography, strollers, children, guests and bag size are all handled differently at different markets. Make sure you check the rules for that particular market before you go.

**CUMMING:** Some markets are really daunting, so lay out your plan in as much detail beforehand. Get a map and make an hourly schedule for each day. Know what you will focus on, but also leave time for exploring in each day.

**GEROCK:** Make appointments with your local reps and allow enough time for your appointments. Big season and foundation brands for your store usually need an hour.

**RUTHERFORD:** Know your reps. Know who reps whom in which city before you go if you are going to multiple markets in different cities. Some reps are not at every market.

**GEROCK:** Anytime you have an opportunity to preview lookbooks online or on Joor, use that chance to review line sheets before market. This can often help you focus on certain pieces that are good fits for your store.

## KNOW YOUR BUDGET, PRICE POINT COMFORT AND MARKUP

**PRICE BOYANTON:** Not only should you know your budget for that show, you should also have a clear grasp on what your budget for the entire year looks like so you aren't tempted to blow it.

**GEROCK:** Be aware of the price point that your customer is willing to pay for something. Ask yourself when thinking from wholesale to retail points of view. For example, it may be gorgeous, but will my customer buy it?

**CUMMING:** Keystoning. Know your markup. Ask yourself what your customer will spend after markup and remember this is different for different geographic areas. Make sure when you are thinking about your markup that you might need to factor in shipping or export fees in your calculations.

## HAVE IMPORTANT CONTACT AND CREDIT INFORMATION PREPARED

**RUTHERFORD:** Let your credit card company know where you are going and that large amounts may be charged in a short period of time. Also know your credit limit. This can save you from wasting time on the phone with your credit card company while you should be buying.

**GEROCK:** Since you will be making large purchases, use a credit card that rewards you somehow. Sometimes the points you earn can be used for your travel to market or to offset other business expenses

**PRICE BOYANTON:** Prepare a 1-pager cheat sheet with your business information for showrooms, especially new showrooms. You can print these on half-sheets. Make sure it

**GEROCK:** Make notes of what customers say they want or need.

**CUMMING:** Remember that you're buying for your customers and not shopping for yourself. You are buying inventory, in bulk, and tempting as it may be, it isn't personal shopping.

**PRICE BOYANTON:** Know your floor space square footage and your storage capabilities. Make a list of large items you need to fill floor space. Think if you need to buy point of sale items to sell at the counter or fill-in items. Also determine if you need fixtures/cabinets/visual display items or mirrors for your dressing rooms. Don't overlook your display or other physical store needs. Functional merchandising items are great pick-ups at some markets.

**CUMMING:** Take advantage of your POS system and know what you already have in inventory. Know what sells well and what doesn't sell well. Going to market with this in mind can keep you from repeating past buying mistakes.

**RUTHERFORD:** Wear the right shoes. Flats, not heels. Don't feel the need to be fashionable. Only the vendors who get to sit down get to be fashionable. Identify where the food and restrooms are located so you can eat quickly and move on fast. Try to go to lunch early to miss the rush.

**CUMMING:** Eat healthy and stay hydrated. Avoid alcohol and

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contains the following information: your contact information, Federal (for shipping over borders or non-US distributors) and State tax ID, bill to and ship to addresses, credit references for terms, and/or credit card information.

**CUMMING:** You can also print out ship to and bill to information on labels or use a pre-inked stamp to make ordering run smoothly. Have plenty of business cards. Some vendors won't charge until an item is shipped, but always double check so you can manage your credit limit on your credit card.

## REVIEW YOUR CUSTOMER BASE, INVENTORY AND STORE NEEDS

**CUMMING:** Know the upcoming trends for the season you are buying for and have a plan to shop for that season. Take a hard look at your customer base as it stands at this moment in time so you have a clear vision of who you are buying for, how much money your customer is willing to spend on what, and which trends your customers will embrace.

the temptation to party since you are away from the shop. There is an amazing amount to cover in such a short period of time and you need to physically be on your game.

**GEROCK:** Pack a protein bar or some nuts and some water in case you are too busy to eat. Your judgment can be affected if your blood sugar gets too low. Even though some booths offer water and snacks, it might not be enough to keep up your strength.

## ASK QUESTIONS AND THINK SMART

**CUMMING:** Ask if there is a show special. Usually it is a lower minimum or free shipping. Both can add up to savings for you.

**PRICE BOYANTON:** Ask about minimums. Some places don't have them and some ask that you buy a certain amount and then free shipping kicks in. Make sure that you can get to the minimum especially if you are a small store.

**RUTHERFORD:** Don't get bogged down trying to lug around a bunch of catalogs; ask reps to send catalogs to you. Also, try to use the smallest guide available to you at check-in. Use your badge as a stash spot for business cards and your coat/bag check ticket. Keeping those items easily accessible means you are digging through your purse less often.

**CUMMING:** Labels can be hard to figure out, so ask what sales quantity (SQ) you are required to buy. This is based on how items come packaged from the manufacturer, so there isn't a lot of wiggle room. The amount is usually per item at wholesale cost. Take the time to understand the terminology and numbering on showroom labels so you have an accurate idea of what you are about to buy.

## MANAGE YOUR TIME EFFECTIVELY

**PRICE BOYANTON:** Take the time to explore the entire showroom, you never know what might be around the corner because some showrooms are awkwardly shaped or have too much merchandise in a small space for everything to be seen easily.

**PRICE BOYANTON:** Even though iPads and the like have changed buying in many places, not everyone has adopted these newly available technologies, so be ready for anything.

**GEROCK:** Once you have made an appointment with your rep to get the right attention, do your absolute best to respect these appointments. It helps the reps manage traffic in the booths/showrooms.

**PRICE BOYANTON:** At some shows, permanent booths are open the entire show and temporaries are open only part of the show, so plan accordingly. It's smart to hit the permanent booths when the temporaries are closed.

**RUTHERFORD:** Try to be 30 minutes early for things like the shuttle and checking in.

## MANAGE YOUR BUYING EFFECTIVELY

**GEROCK:** Some reps want you to spend as much money as possible, so if you can't add quickly in your head, use the calculator app on your phone to keep track. After you have gone through the whole collection, sit down with the line sheet and edit while you are in the booth when you can see everything, touch everything and ask questions. Then place your order right then and there.

Some lines will tell you that a particular item is on everyone's order, and sometimes it's just not for your customer, so don't be swayed. Always keep your customer in your head.

Minimums can sometimes be negotiated. While you should always try to respect them, don't let a minimum bully you into making a bad decision. You can tell the rep that you won't or can't write that order and sometimes she will back down and change her mind.

If it's allowed, take pictures of what you ordered when you are ordering. This will prevent you from buying multiples of similar items as you go from booth to booth.

**CUMMING:** If you are unable to take photos, use your line sheet to take copious notes. Carry a notebook with page protectors in it. You can pop the line sheet into the notebook along with your spreadsheet where you are taking notes on what's being delivered each week.

**GEROCK:** Give feedback (tactfully) to reps so designers can adjust accordingly for what buyers really want. Work to develop good relationships with your reps so that they listen to you and develop a good understanding of your customer.

## REVIEW AND ORGANIZE EVERYTHING

**GEROCK:** When you are back from market and have had a chance to catch your breath, take the time to go through your orders and line sheets and do a formal totaling. Then go through and put on the calendar when to expect items. You really need to think about when things are going to come in, especially if floor space and storage are tight. From a budgeting standpoint, you need to have your shipments timed right.

**CUMMING:** After a show closes is the perfect time to take advantage of what vendors and reps are throwing out. Look for pieces that are good for visual merchandising or fixtures. For people who drive to market, this can be a great way to pick up cast-off items.

**GEROCK:** For some brands with permanent booths or showrooms, it's worthwhile to make an appointment go to after market is over to have a more relaxing time and have a better opportunity to look at things more carefully. Often you can bring a guest on non-show days, so this might be a way to work around not being able to bring a guest during a show, depending on which market it is. Bringing someone else for perspective can be helpful when you can manage it.

**PRICE BOYANTON:** This is the time to look at your calendar and make your hotel reservations for next year's show. This is also the time to make notes about how this past show went, what you'd repeat next year and what you would change for a better experience.

## FINAL THOUGHT

Trade shows and markets are not just a destination to buy for your store. Many offer fantastic educational and networking opportunities. Allocate time for these types of experiences in advance, making sure you don't miss those that can help your business. Additionally, many trade shows and markets host networking or social events that can be fun as well as introduce you to like-minded retailers, vendors and more. Combined, your participation in trade shows and events are bound to help both you and your business.