

Preparing for Conventions/Artist Alley

some rambling thoughts by Sunhawk – www.sunhawk.ca

I. The Essentials

- **Secure storage device for your cash**
 - some people use cashboxes/lockboxes, I personally use a fanny pack more these days as I find it lighter and it takes up less space – whatever you use, it's best if it's portable and can keep separate change and bills.
 - Suggested breakdown of change: ten \$1 coins/bills, ten \$2 coins (Canadians only ha ha!), six \$5 bills, four \$10 bills
- **Container to transport your art & various supplies**
 - I use my wheeled suitcase, anything with wheels is best because you never know how far you'll need to walk with it and even a small duffel bag starts to feel really heavy sooner than you think
- **The art you want to sell**
 - stored in a way that protects it from harm during transport while limiting the space it takes up in your transportation container/suitcase
- **Paper art protection**
 - If you are selling anything that can be ruined by folds or getting wet, etc then it's good to bring something to place the art in to protect it, ie plastic sleeves and/or small cue cards or sheets of bristol board to put inside the sleeves keep things flat and straight
- **Business cards or any other promotional cards you want people to take**
 - Bring way more than you think you need, better to have extra than run out and be forced to scribble your website on notebook scraps, believe me. If you do commissions, it might be a good idea to make special convention-business cards that list what you specifically offer, so later on the customer can look at the card and remember what exactly they were thinking of getting from you
- **Display for your art (including any tools needed to assemble it ie screwdriver)**
 - more on this below
- **Any extra supplies related to your art (spare parts, different necklace options, etc)**
- **Signs for the prices of your art that you want to put on the table**
 - I mostly just make them up on my computer, print them out and cut them the night before, you can also make one price list sheet if you prefer, or little folded-over free-standing signs
- **A notebook of thicker paper or blank cardstock sheets for any last-minute signs you might need to make, plus a marker (sharpie, etc)**
- **Either use the same notebook or get a normal-page notebook for any customer-related things you may want to write down (orders, other random stuff that comes up while talking to other artists, etc)**
- **Tape (at least one roll, usually 2 kinds)**
 - I usually bring really clear stuff and also something tough like duct tape, you never know when you might need to either fix something torn or affix a sign to your table (the clear tape so you can see through it) or reinforce something structural on your table (the duct tape)
- **Scissors (even if you don't think you'll need them, you probably will)**

2. The Table Display

To me, there are certain things you want out of your table display:

- *To look good*
Your table is what brings people over and makes them linger to look at your art, it should be visually coherent (ie not too cluttered, not confusing or misleading) and reflect something about you, even if it's nothing more than you are an artist who takes care and pays attention to the details, as people like that. The easiest thing to do is to find yourself a nice cloth to put on your table, sometimes that's all you need.
- *To allow you to maximize the table space and display all that you want to display*
That's when you start building structures to maximize horizontal space
- *To be as light as possible and compact as possible*
So you can actually get the stuff to and from the con! I pick display items that I can fit into my wheeled suitcase for easy transport
- *Quick/easy to assemble*
Related to the light/compact criteria, it's nice to have a display that packs away much smaller but you also don't want to spend an hour putting something overly complicated or fussy together
- *Durable enough to survive the con*
Nothing worse than having something collapse overnight! Bungee cords can be a good way to secure taller structures snugly to the table
- *Affordable in terms of cost of materials to make it*
I keep an eye out at thrift stores, hardware stores, Canadian Tire and Zellers (usually the laundry or organizational sections) and often try to repurpose something pre-made to suit the display need I have. Also dollar stores can give you some really interesting items, like plastic page displays

What I normally do before a con (when I've never set up on a table of that particular size) is that I measure and temporarily mark on the floor a space of the same dimensions (masking tape is a good marker but whatever you have handy) and then I take all the art I want to display and the display items/stands I have and set them up to see if they fit in the space. Stand back and see how the overall table look works for you. If you construct something, leave it overnight somewhere (with art on it as you are going to do at the con) and see if it holds up. Be smarter than me and leave yourself a space to be seen and see people while sitting in your chair at your table (I often end up hidden and have to stand the whole time).

Another thing to consider is whether to not leave small items loose on the table: my preference is to only leave bigger, 3D items loose, as smaller items like bookmarks, stickers, even sometimes buttons in a wee basket can end up being taken, even if it's by someone who did genuinely think they were free for the taking. Also, taping samples to a board/display frees up more space on the table itself!

3. Keep Yourself Alive

So you are trapped behind your table for usually at least eight hours at a time. Besides escaping for the rare bathroom break, that's where you'll be for the whole eight plus hours, so you'll need provisions to keep up your strength. I'll leave the dietary details up to your own discretion but some general suggestions:

- too much sugar is not a great idea
- pack food items that do not easily spoil and can be left at room temperature
- I tend to find I eat less at cons, either due to distraction or the recycled air, whatever it is, you may have to remind yourself to eat in a timely fashion
- better to eat things that don't make your fingers greasy/messy if you can avoid it, otherwise bring wet naps to clean your hands
- waterbottle to keep hydrated
- this isn't food, but along the lines of keeping alive, bring headache meds and/or over the counter pain meds of your preference.

Other non-food suggestions include: sweatshirt/sweater in case they crank up the AC or turn the heat down/off, comfortable shoes, comfortable clothing in general, and hand sanitizer gel.

4. The List of Stock

I've left this section last because I consider it to not be something that is strictly necessary for everyone selling stuff at a con. I used to write up very detailed lists of what stock I'd brought and carefully mark down what I sold. And then, after a few cons, I realized that for me personally, it wasn't necessary and I always had a good idea of what sold and if I ran out of something, it wasn't the end of the world. Now for you, depending on what you sell and how successful you become at it, a stock list may work for you. What the list really represents is a method by which you try to organize and keep track of what you are bringing to each convention and also figure out what you need to make more of. If you do end up doing more than one convention, you'll find what way of tracking sales and stock works best for you.

I hope you found this guide helpful – Goodluck at your next con!