

The Shopping Mall Show - Dream or Disaster?

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Published in Awards Quarterly Vol. 13, No. 4, 1982, page 233

The following is a listing of some potential pitfalls that can fall on your unsuspecting head as you contemplate holding your next show in a shopping mall. Don't misunderstand me. You may be luck and not have a single bad experience, but there is a good chance your show will be easier on everyone working or participating in the event if these problems are checked out first. Then, hopefully your show will be the exciting and interesting experience it should be. I don't mean to infer that every mall has all of the following problems, but all malls do have some of them.

Item #1 - What is it going to cost you? Many shopping centers charge for your space; some insist that you use their electricians and technicians at full rate just to connect an extension cord or equivalent, charge for Security Guard service, rent for backdrops, tables, covers and staging supplies. A large number of malls will not allow a plant sales area and most, if allowed, require a percentage of your sales. Some advertise your show for you and then you for various services provided. Be sure to check these out before accepting the location!

Item #2 - Security is always a problem! Assuming that you have a very secure area guarded by your own reliable members during the day so that the public can't remove anything, we've found that even the security guards cannot always be fully trusted, due to the size and shape of some malls, number of guards, etc. Sometimes the guard doesn't consider the value of a plant and therefore picks a flower or takes a plant home. More likely it will be the trophy that will walk off over night. Remember that there are janitors and even various store personnel in the center at all times and the guards can't be everywhere at once. Security is really one of the most difficult tasks you will have in a normal shopping mall. When the mall is crowded, the light-weight pipe frame and curtain booth affair is, in my opinion, the least secure system available. However this is used quite extensively due to the lack of wall space to back up to, and the width of public space available.

Item #3 - Damage to plants. Is there any way to build up the humidity? Malls in the hot portions of the country are air-conditioned and obviously dry. This is terribly hard on the plants. Blooms collapse and leaves wilt and shrivel. In the cold areas there is an intense dry heat from the heating system which does exactly the same thing to the plants.

Item #4 - Can your displays be attractively and adequately illuminated? This is usually a very difficult problem, with minimum plug-ins available and possible charges for the use of mall electrician personnel. Watch out for the beautiful sky-lights spaced through the mall creating an area of alternately good diffused natural light and a low-light area of

incandescent or fluorescent lights fitted so high in the mall ceiling that the lighting effect at the table height is miserable for judging and public viewing. Sky-lights are also frequently tinted some shade that may not be compatible to the flower colors. If not tinted, they permit the sun to burn the plants.

Item #5 - Check out the hours. These are quite frequently very difficult to work with, as ideally you would like to set up the show and get it judged before the public arrives. I have never seen this happen in a mall. As a judge, I have been jostled, stepped on, glared at, and generally not appreciated by the shoppers as I was trying to complete my duties of the day.

Item #6 - In a word or three, congestion, disruption of the judging process and lack of privacy are probably the most serious problems for the judges at mall shows. Usually, as the judging advances, so do the shoppers. There is inevitably someone in the throng that just has to see their friend's flowers, or must interrupt the judging team to talk very confidentially to one of the judges, thus calling a halt to the progress of that team. This is time-consuming and causes a certain amount of ruffled tempers as the day progresses. A private space for the judges to complete the award judging is very important, as well as space for the poor photographer who must have an area that the little "Saturday-afternoon waifs" can't get into to kick over his equipment. He or she should also have adequate plug-ins available for lights. Many malls have no such areas.

Item #7 - The design of the mall and placement of the show can be the straw that breaks the judges' backs. I have judged at shows which have placed different divisions of the show as much as a block apart, making judging and placing of the trophies nearly impossible. It is practically impossible when displays have different divisions within them with the distance so great. Picture the judging when Division 1, White Cattleya, has 3 entries shown in location A at the south entrance of the mall and 5 more at least a block over at the east entrance in location Z, and you have to fight the Saturday or Sunday afternoon shopping crowd to get there. Consider how professional this can make the judging of that show! Many of these problems are not necessarily restricted to malls, although malls seem to make them more indelible, undoubtedly due to the crowd factor.

I hope I haven't painted such a grim picture of shopping mall shows that you give up before you try. Just ask yourself the above questions and, if the answers are right, have at it. And good luck on your next show!