

American International Toy Fair in New York – Do's and Don'ts for Inventors

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The following is advice for first timers wishing to attend The New York Toy Fair.

The New York Toy Fair is a trade event - there is no such thing as a ticket. You need a badge to enter, and they're free, but they only give them out to people in the trade.

They have always had a grey area for inventors as to whether or not they will give them a badge. It's kind of gone back and forth. If you are an inventor who has a game for sale at the show, it's easier. I think this year they are permitting inventors to attend for \$25 with pre-reg, or \$100 at the door.

I am an inventor but I publish my own games so I exhibit at the show. You do need to be aware, and I'm not trying to be mean here, that exhibitors, like me, are paying thousands of dollars to exhibit and meet retailers to sell their games to. The cheapest booth is \$2,600 just for empty space and it goes up every year. My costs of attending the show are about \$10,000, maybe a bit more. For that reason, most exhibitors can't make time for inventors or other "suppliers" during show hours. Your best bet is to walk the show, find the companies that look like good prospects, then approach the booth when there are no customers and quickly ask if they accept outside submissions, the name of the person you should speak with, if they are available, and if they have a moment to look at your invention (in that order). If not, trade business cards, shake hands, and follow up with them after the show. Don't hover around a buyer that's in the booth, wait patiently in the aisle.

The issue is that while we don't dislike inventors, and some may have great ideas, we spend money on Toy Fair because we have to speak to buyers, who attend for free (except for their own travel costs, etc). When I want to buy something, be it office supplies or a manufacturing run of product, the company that wants to sell to me will happily do it on my terms when I want to make time for them - so I don't use expensive Toy Fair time to do this kind of business. On the other hand, the buyers are available to me during those hours, and not always when I try to call them at their stores (at which point they're busy trying to sell to *their* customers). Please understand that exhibitors can't afford to risk losing a customer while talking to an inventor. Even if a booth is empty, exhibitors know that customers often walk by when they see the salesperson is busy talking to someone. Be prepared to break off a conversation in mid-sentence if a potential customer comes near. Persistence at Toy Fair is not the key to getting a sale - it will anger your potential customer. Toy Fair is our only chance to meet with most of our customers during the year, including the ones who sometimes write 5-figure and even 6-figure orders. We can't afford to blow it.

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Written 12/2005