

AUTUMNFAIR

6-9 SEPTEMBER 2026 | NEC BIRMINGHAM

First-time Exhibitor Guide

How to exhibit at Autumn Fair,
and come away with orders.

How to exhibit at Autumn Fair, and come away with orders.

It is your first time, and you want it to count. Everything that matters, before, during and after your show, in one place.

What you'll learn

- How to budget realistically and set targets you can measure
- How to design and merchandise a stand that stops buyers in their tracks
- How to work the floor, qualify leads and turn conversations into orders
- How to follow up fast and measure the return on your first show

“

FIRST TRADE SHOW, FIRST ORDERS

We started the business two years ago, but this is the start of our wholesale business and our first ever trade show. We have had a good show, taken some orders, but the one that really stands out to me is the Nottinghill Bookshop.

**Holly Michelle Graham,
Owner & Creator of Izzoo**



Why be in the room

Plenty of sourcing happens online now, but buyers who come to Autumn Fair are in buying mode: time set aside, budgets ready, and looking to write orders for the season ahead. With thousands of independent and multiple retailers gathered in one place, it is the fastest way to put your product in front of the people who can actually stock it.

01 · Visibility

Get found: Footfall puts you in front of buyers who've never heard of you.

02 · Credibility

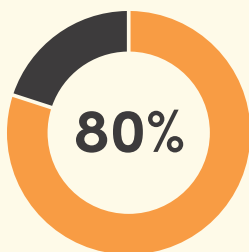
Look the part: A physical stand signals you're a real, investable brand, worth opening a wholesale account with.

03 · Feedback

Read the room: Nowhere else gives you this volume of honest, immediate reaction to your range, in real time.

04 · Relationships

Start something: Buyers want to touch and feel a product before they commit. A conversation today is how an account begins.



Attendee buying power, so the conversation you have on the stand can turn into a decision on the spot.



SUCCESS STORY SPOTLIGHT

We had a record-breaking day one. Customers want to smell our products and meet us in person: it adds the value to retail that you just lose online.en taking orders and new clients.

Tara Carlisle Swift,
Founder of Freckle Face

Your show, in three parts

01 · Before

Set your budget, design and merchandise your stand, pack your toolkit, and fill your diary. The unglamorous part that decides everything.

02 · During

Work the floor, talk to buyers, show up well, and turn conversations into leads and orders.

03 · After

Follow up fast, measure what you got, and start planning the next one.

Win it before the doors open

A. Know your numbers

The most common first-time mistake is underestimating the true cost of exhibiting: the stand space fee is only the start. A handy rule: budget your stand space cost again for everything else.

Stand: build, fixtures, branded graphics, signage, lighting and flooring.	Product, people & the easy-to-miss: stock, samples, travel and meals, plus electrics, wifi, parking and insurance.
--	---

Quick-Budget Snapshot

Stand + Product & samples + People & travel + Marketing + 10% contingency
= your total show cost.

Simple ROI Worksheet

Line	Estimate
Total show investment (from snapshot above)	£ _____
Orders needed to break even ($\div$ average order value)	_____ orders
Realistic new accounts this show	_____ accounts
Expected 90-day order value	£ _____



Autumn Fair Pro Tip
Write your three targets on an index card and pin it inside your stand. A number you can see beats a number you meant to check.

B. Set targets you can measure

Decide what a good show looks like before you go, in numbers you can count.

A good show might look like

30 quality buyer conversations, 5 new wholesale accounts, a sample to every hot lead within 48 hours, 50 new contacts added to your database.

Recommended KPIs

- Appointments booked ahead of the show
- Qualified leads (hot + warm) captured on the day
- Average order value
- Conversion rate: leads to confirmed orders within 90 days

Before-you-go checklist

- ☐ Budget signed off, incl. 10% contingency
- ☐ Three headline targets written down and shared with the team
- ☐ KPIs agreed: appointments, qualified leads, average order value, conversion rate
- ☐ ROI worksheet estimates filled in
- ☐ A simple way to track actuals against target on the day

C. Design a stand that earns a second look

Your stand is your shop window: buyers should understand what you sell within three seconds of a glance.

Top 10 stand mistakes to avoid

- Hiding behind a table
- Overcrowding the display
- Poor or flat lighting
- No signage visible from the aisle
- Price lists nowhere in sight
- Staff on their phones
- No clear reason to step inside
- Clashing or inconsistent branding
- Stock stored where buyers can see it
- Nobody at the front to greet people

Stand design checklist

- ☐ Clear brand identity and a consistent colour palette
- ☐ Hero products at eye level, with space to breathe and a reason to step in
- ☐ Brand name and logo readable from the aisle
- ☐ Hero products lit and positioned at eye level
- ☐ Price lists visible and easy to find
- ☐ Clear walk-in point, nothing blocking the entrance

Autumn Fair Pro Tip

Stand at the aisle and look at your own stand before the show opens. If you can't tell what you sell in three seconds, buyers won't either.

D. Merchandise like the retailer you're talking to

- Tell a story, not a stock list: show a world and a feeling, not every product
- Zone the space, group products in threes, and vary height with risers and shelving

Sector	Merchandising approach
Gift & Home	Gifting-ready bundles
Fashion	Rail, plus one styled mannequin or flat-lay
Garden	Group by season, use height
Everyday	Bestsellers at eye level, price points visible



“

We used the show to launch our new collections and they've been very well received. We've had a real range of buyers and taken a lot of orders.

Helen Marshall,
Sales Director of Walton & Co

Pack your toolkit, and be easy to find

E. Pack your sales toolkit

A buyer loves what they see; what happens next is decided by how prepared you are.

- Line sheets & order forms, easy to scan
- Wholesale catalogue & clear terms
- Business cards & lead capture forms
- Card reader / payment device, charged
- QR codes for catalogue, sign-up & socials
- Chargers, extension leads & power strip
- Spare tablecloth & cleaning wipes
- Snacks, water & change for parking
- Gaffer tape & basic tool kit
- Spare stock and packaging

F. Fill your diary: your 8-week run-up

Do not leave it all to footfall. Email your stockists and book appointments before you arrive.

Timing	Action
8 wks out	Announce you're exhibiting
6 wks out	Invite stockists to book a slot
4 wks out	Tease new product, listing live
2 wks out	Countdown & reminders
Show week	Daily behind-the-scenes content

“

People came over intrigued, we talked them through the whole concept, and they loved it.

Nici Robinson,
Blue Bear & Co — First-time Autumn Fair exhibitor

G. Be easy to find online

Optimise your Exhibitor Listing before buyers even arrive:

- Sharp logo and 3–5 product images
- A two-line brand story, written for a retailer, not a shopper
- Keywords buyers actually search: sector, style, price point
- Live links to your socials and wholesale site

Make the most of your journey



Plan Your Visit



Exhibitor List



Autumn Fair x Glee

Autumn Fair Pro Tip

Buyers often shortlist exhibitors from the listing before the show even opens. Treat it like a shop window, not a form to tick off.

“

We've had a very busy day one. We've seen about 70% new customers with great prospects for orders and feel very positive going into the rest of the show.

Josh Allen,
Creative Director at Handle Fragrance Co

Turn footfall into orders

A. Show up well

Stand at the front of your stand, not behind a table: a table is a barrier.
Be genuinely interested in everyone who steps on.

Top Tip

Treat the show as live market research: your whole industry in one room.
Watch what buyers pick up and put back, and which price points land.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3+
Serious buyers with appointments and budgets ready	Wider discovery: browsing and comparing ranges	Closers: final decisions and last orders

Autumn Fair Pro Tip

Early risers on Day 1 are usually the most decisive buyers of the whole show. Be fully stocked and ready at opening.

B. Conversations that convert

Greet buyers with a question, not a pitch.

Try opening with

"What kind of store do you have?"

"What's missing from your range right now?"

"Have you worked with a brand like us before?"

- Open with curiosity, then listen
- Handle objections as information: "too expensive" often means "show me the value"
- Close gently: "Shall I put together a suggested opening order?"

Qualify every lead

Hot	Warm	Cold
Order-ready, follow up in 24 hrs	Interested, follow up in 48 hrs	Browsing, newsletter, 4-6 wks

Autumn Fair Pro Tip

Ask one open question before you mention price. Buyers remember how the conversation felt long after they forget the numbers.

Capture every lead

C. Log it before you lose it

Most orders are written after the show, not on the day, so capture every lead while it's fresh.

Lead scoring sheet

Buyer & Shop	What caught their eye	Score	Promised
e.g. J. Wren, The Nest, Bath	Ceramic mug range, gift boxing	Hot	Sample + price list, Fri

- Use a simple lead form, paper or digital, not memory at the end of a long day
- Give browsers a way back: a QR code or email sign-up keeps interest alive
- Tag as you go, so your follow-up writes itself when you get home

Autumn Fair Pro Tip

Score leads the moment the buyer walks away, not at the end of the day. Memory fades fast on a busy stand.

D. Keep the stand sharp

Phones away, no eating on the stand. Stagger breaks so the stand is always covered.

REMEMBER: YOUR STAND IS ALWAYS ON SHOW.

Early-morning buyers are often the most serious, so arrive fully restocked and tidy.

RETAILER PERSPECTIVE —

"WHAT MAKES ME STOP AT A STAND?"

"A clear name I can read from the aisle, someone who looks up and smiles, and prices I don't have to ask for twice."

“

SUCCESS SNIPPET

The response and overall footfall have exceeded our expectations. We've seen existing customers and a lot of new accounts and new enquiries.

Lesley Bland,
Manager at Powder

Where the real work pays off

A. Follow up fast

Most buyers decide after the show, not on the stand, so be specific: “following up on the candle range you loved” beats “great to meet you”.

When	Action
Day 1	Personal email to every hot and warm lead, naming what you talked about
Day 2–3	Send any sample or pricing you promised
Day 5	Connect on LinkedIn with a short, personal note referencing your conversation
By week's end	One value-led nudge; do not chase more than twice

Autumn Fair Pro Tip

A LinkedIn note that mentions the exact product a buyer picked up gets read. A generic connection request gets ignored.



We’ve exhibited at the show for over 15 years, and every fair brings new opportunities to open accounts, with both new and existing buyers.

Paul Hooker,
MD at Joe Davies

B. Measure and reflect

Score the show against the targets you set, then write a short debrief while it’s fresh.

Metric	Target	Actual
Orders on the day		
Orders confirmed at 30/90 days		
Return on investment		

C. Play the long game

Do not judge a first show purely on day-one orders. Most first-timers find their second show far stronger than their first.

- Stay visible between shows: feature in Autumn Fair Retail News, tag the show on social
- Keep in touch with retailers you met, even ones who didn't order this time

Autumn Fair Pro Tip

Rebook your stand before you leave the hall. The best positions go first, and momentum is easiest to keep while it's still warm.



Your show, at a glance

BEFORE

- ☐ Stand space confirmed, budget locked incl. 10% contingency
- ☐ Stand design, graphics & signage ordered
- ☐ ROI worksheet and KPI targets set
- ☐ Catalogue, line sheets & order forms ready
- ☐ Exhibitor listing live; pre-show email sent
- ☐ Appointments booked with existing stockists
- ☐ Toolkit packed, QR codes tested, team briefed

DURING

- ☐ Team at the front of the stand, phones away
- ☐ Every lead captured and tagged hot / warm / cold
- ☐ Lead scoring sheet updated after every conversation
- ☐ Energy steady, breaks staggered
- ☐ Stand restocked and tidy each morning

AFTER

- ☐ Hot / warm leads followed up within 48 hours
- ☐ Samples and pricing sent as promised
- ☐ Show scored against targets; debrief written
- ☐ Next show dates in the diary

First-time exhibitor mistakes to avoid

- Under-budgeting beyond the stand space fee
- Turning up without appointments booked
- Losing leads to memory instead of a form
- Waiting more than 48 hours to follow up on a hot lead
- Judging the show only on day-one orders

Autumn Fair Pro Tip

Photograph your stand each morning before the doors open. It's the fastest way to spot clutter creeping in.

Ready to be in the room?

Autumn Fair puts your brand in front of thousands of buyers. Make your first show count, then make it a habit.

Need help?

- Exhibitor Hub: booking, listings and logistics
- Marketing Toolkit: downloadable assets and templates
- Your Account Manager: for anything else



Exhibitor Hub

13,000+

Buyers in the room

80%

Attendees with buying power

£500m

Collective buying spend

75%

of the UK within 3 hours of the NEC

“

This is the most successful show we have had in 30 years.

Jon Swallow, Sales Director at TY

AUTUMNFAIR

6-9 SEPTEMBER 2026 | NEC BIRMINGHAM

Autumn Fair First-Time Exhibitor Guide

6-9 September 2026 · NEC Birmingham

autumnfair.com

By

