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Young Entrepreneurship in Philadelphia

Mario Heitman

Summer Fellows

Advisor: Cari Freno

7/18/17

Abstract:

A contemporary case study in starting a small business in Philadelphia. The paper focuses on my experiences as an artist and centers on a pop-up exhibition held July 15th 2017.

For my project I organized and hosted a pop-up exhibition in Philadelphia. I had initially formed the idea for this event last summer. I am an artist and I was having several painting exhibitions. My friends couldn't afford to buy paintings so I started making t-shirts with my work on them so my friends could get my art. While browsing Instagram I noticed a trend with clothing brands; within the last couple of years, a growing number of brands host pop-up shops before they become house-hold names. A pop-up shop is essentially a temporary store front used to sell merchandise. They are utilized by musicians along tour stops, and by small clothing brands who cannot yet afford to open a flagship store. I figured I could make a bunch of clothes, hang my paintings on the wall, and begin a career. I'll tell you now it doesn't go down like that. This project turned into a guide for what not to do. Let's get started.

So here I am one year ago. I notice that brands such as Vlone which are associated with music collectives have more successful pop-up shops. My friend Antonio Goode makes music, so I ran the project idea by him and we decided to collaborate. We formed the art collective now known as Suspect Maars (You can find us at suspectmaars.com). As we started working on the actual products for the store, we quickly realized we would need to build a fund for it. We found out the U-Imagine center here on campus hosts a social media competition each semester, the winner of which gets thousands of dollars, so yeah we were in. Our project was to host a concert on campus and market it with social media. We reached out to several other performers on campus and we got a show set up. This is of course a simplification. For about a month we were doing paperwork, learning how to promote on the internet, producing music and clothes, while keeping up with schoolwork. About 60 people showed up throughout the night, and although it was the highest turnout of any event in the competition, we somehow didn't even place. We were discouraged, but from this we learned the first lesson of entrepreneurship. You are going to fail.

You will get used to it. The next place I turned to get the funds to host the event was the Summer Fellows program. Antonio was initially going to apply, but he could not find a mentor in time, so we decided that it would be good if at least one of us was in the program, so we could have a mentor. We finish up the school year, getting ready to start figuring out the pop-up shop details over the summer.

One thing I can recommend is starting earlier rather than later. I started planning the logistics of the pop-up the day summer fellows started. This gave me about 6 weeks to plan, make product, market, and host the event. It is not enough time. If you are hosting a pop-up shop, I would say start with a minimum of 6 months before the event. At this point I will break down into various components to hosting a pop-up shop, what I did, how it went, and what I would do differently.

Start Small:

Do not jump straight to a pop-up shop the way I did. You want to build a loyal fan base. The best way to do this is to have smaller pop-up events. What I mean by this is look for other events in the city such as beer gardens, and have a table next to them. You can apply for a permit from the city for \$300 and have the potential to make that back in a day. I did not do that because of the summer fellow's time constraint, but before I host my next pop-up shop I will spend at least a year popping up at smaller events to build. Maureen Cumpstone from the U-Imagine center had initially told me to do this, and I would recommend scheduling an appointment with her to get some specifics.

Venue:

When you look for a venue you want a neighborhood that has foot traffic and reaches the demographic you want to reach. Antonio and I had initially planned to host the event at Ruckus Gallery, a high end glass art shop located in the old city district. It is surrounded by other art galleries and has high foot traffic. We talked to them several times in person, and they kept giving us business cards to email them, but never emailed us back. This went on for about two weeks. The day I started looking for other venues there were 4 weeks left. So I did what I should have done to begin with. I used google maps to find appropriate venues, compiled a list of 35, and drafted a mass email. After I sent out the email, within an hour I had a meeting setup for the next day with a venue, the PhilaMoCA. I somewhat liked the venue, but it didn't seem to have much foot traffic, and it was pricey (\$350 for an afternoon). Had I given myself more time, I would have found a better venue. If you the person reading this are looking to host a clothing pop-up shop, I will give you a venue recommendation: Heres2CoolStuff. It is located on South St. has high foot traffic, costs \$50 an hour to rent, comes with its own marketing team that will help you, and is probably where I'll host my next pop-up shop. I had not found this venue until the day after the pop-up shop. Once again, taking your time with projects will pay off.

Internet Marketing:

So once you have the venue and a date planned, there's a couple things you'll need to do. If you don't have a website made already, build one. You also want a Facebook, a Twitter and an Instagram. A major key would be to make a Youtube account and post videos. Youtube is the second most used search engine on the internet. You want to be on it. Also make an Eventbrite page to generate ticket sales, and market. I honestly think the golden age of Instagram and Facebook ads is over, so don't waste money on it. You will also want to make sure your brand feels cohesive across platforms. Everything from the look to the way you scroll is key. If you

want to know more, there is an entire section on branding in the 3rd floor of the library. If you are an art major reading this, it's a shelf away from the art books.

Word of Mouth:

Word of mouth is by far the most powerful form of marketing. Text your friends. Get on the streets with posters and pass them out. It will feel awkward at first, but you get used to it quickly. The worst thing that will happen is someone waves you aside. You just be polite and go talk to someone else. I developed a list of 18 places I wanted to go (If you aren't familiar with the city ask people who are), and Antonio and I went into the city for 3 days passing out posters. The weekend prior we went to the skate park during Philly's scooter jam and started a contest with amateurs and professionals in the mix. The contest was: whoever throws the best trick down the stairs gets a free piece of clothing from this box we had. We also passed out posters and exchanged Instagram's with people. It's the groundwork required to building a brand. We should honestly have done it every weekend. Having never thrown a pop-up before we assumed 3 weekends was sufficient. It was not

Miscellaneous:

You will find a lot of things you did not originally consider become very important. You will want security to work the venue, people to work cash registers (make shift cash registers), clothing racks, square cash readers (for credit cards), refreshments, a cooler, clothing tags, hangers, transportation, wrist brands, press releases... I'm sure I'm leaving something out but you get the point. Plot these out in advance and organize them early. Clothing racks are available on Ikea's website for \$11. Get the regular square cash readers, they function the same as the chip versions. The company is honestly shady in this respect because they charge \$30 for the chip

reader version. If you get alcohol you can't sell it in the venue, but you can have a "suggested donation" that people will generally follow. People love free drinks so it would be cool to market it, but alcohol is expensive, so the choice is yours.

The Actual Event:

The day of the event was hectic. We were supposed to arrive at 12pm and setup by 12:30pm, but we were held up at the U-Haul center and arrived at 12:20. We setup by 1 and a couple people had arrived. By 1:30 there were maybe 15 people, so Antonio and I decided to drive out to South Street and pass out posters. It didn't work, so don't go trying to market during the event. Had we been in an area with foot traffic, I would recommend sending one person you employed to go out with posters to pull people in the immediate area in. While we were out, Dr.O. DJ'd from 2:30-3:30pm. Antonio and I got back to the venue and went on to perform at 3:30pm. It was really fun. There were only about 20 people there but we perform with high energy no matter what. We cleaned up at 4:30 and left by 5:30.

Lessons:

Build up to a pop-up shop. Do smaller events first. Pop up within other events. You can google events in Philly and find a list. Honestly we went out to South Street the day after the show and setup a blanket with clothes on it. We made \$180 in 3 hours on a Sunday evening. It would be ideal to get a street vending permit, they're \$300, but this one guy told us you'll be good selling small amounts, with no food. Apparently the city is mostly concerned with food vendors. Host during the school year, and promote at colleges. Give yourself time to plan thoroughly. Get a high foot traffic venue. Do not hold the pop-up in the afternoon, night time is the right time. Be mentally prepared to fail. There will always be another show, on to the next.

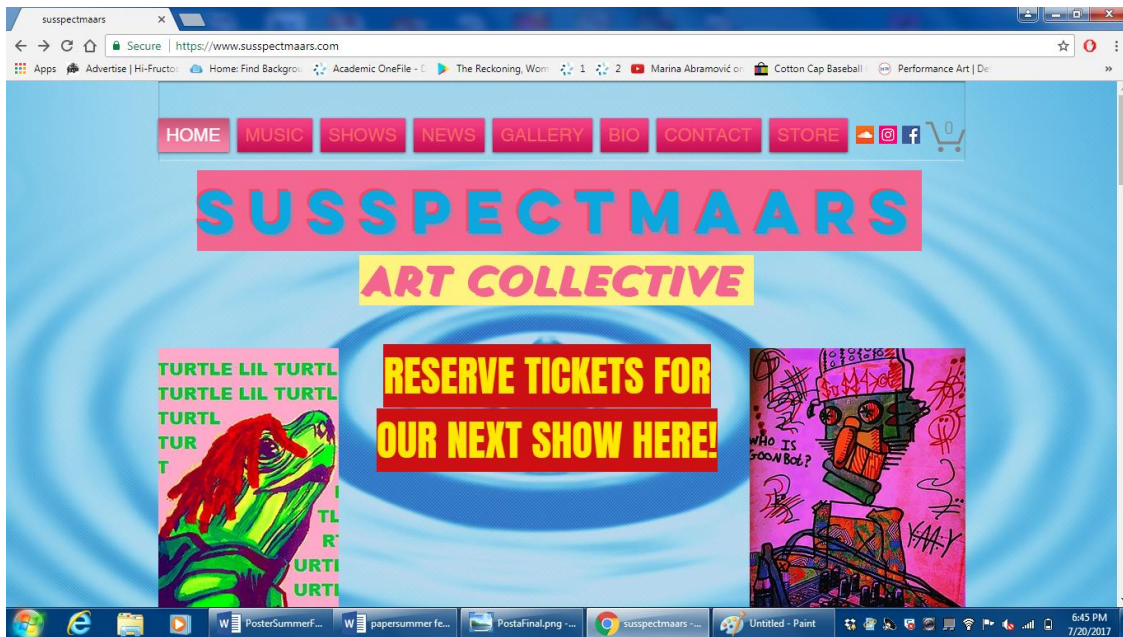
Pictures:



This was the Clothing and Painting Portion



Poster for the Event



A Screenshot of our Website