

Start a Haunted Attraction without spending tons of money

Creative strategies to build an efficient haunted house business

Brian Foreman

www.HauntersToolbox.com

Key ideas & money saving strategies

- A story from Home Haunter to Pro
- Getting your mind set for running a Haunt
- Where to find a affordable location
- Save money on building materials
- Set design tips you can do yourself
- Target your market with guerilla marketing
- Staff your Haunt with the right people
- Putting together the pieces

First, a little about me & how I got here...that used to be my backyard.



~Story~

I started out in a one and a half garage.



~Story~

I asked for help wherever I could.



~Story~

I rewarded my helpers with praise,
food, and freedom to be creative.



~Story~

All this lumber was donated to me.



~Story~

6 of these scare actors are my family.



~Story~

Everything in this picture cost less than \$100.



Old wood rack: Free

Mummy: \$20



Garage sale: \$10



Family

A few things I learned my first home haunt



Great stuff & fake
blood are magic.



~Story~

It's OK to buy cheap Halloween props...



Pick the most real ones.



Home theater systems work great for sound.



Ziploc bags work great for weatherproofing speakers.



Many creepy things are organic and free.



~Story~

I also learned a few good lessons:

- If you're building on rented property, don't damage anything.
- Start gathering your scare crew early.
- You can fit a lot in 300 square feet.
- Sound makes a Haunt come to life.
- You don't need a lot of money to scare.
- It's better to have a small show than an incomplete show.
- How can I move everything inside?

So...we moved to the suburbs.



~Story~

The neighbors were confused
at first.



~Story~

Until they remembered what
is was like to have kids back in
the neighborhood.



~Story~

I had 600 sq feet to experiment with.



story~

I worked on my scare actor management...



~Story~

...prop making and corpsing...

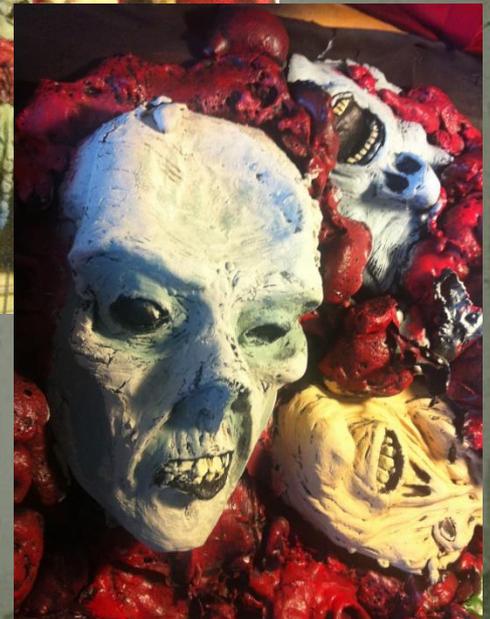


~Story~

...repairing old props...



...by spending time and not money.



~Story~

Lattice works great for
hiding things



Simple scares
are effective.

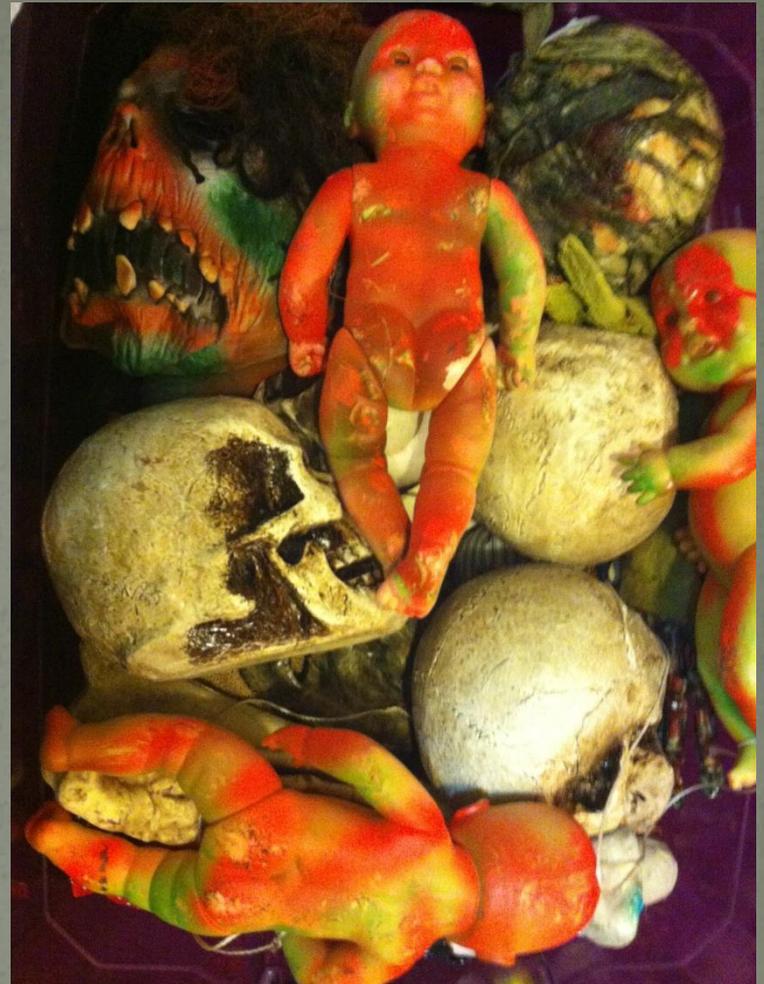
~Story~

Compressed air is cheap and useful.



Use chalk to layout your walls.

Save everything.



Highlighters glow
under blacklight.

And the Haunt was outgrowing my house.



Here are a few things I learned:

- If you treat your actors with respect, they'll come back to help.
- I was too scary for many young children.
- People that went through were impressed with the details, story, & time inside...in such a small space.
- The families liked it, but I'm not sure the city police did.
- My vision outgrew my house too.

So...I started
looking for
rural
properties.



And letting all
my friends &
family know.

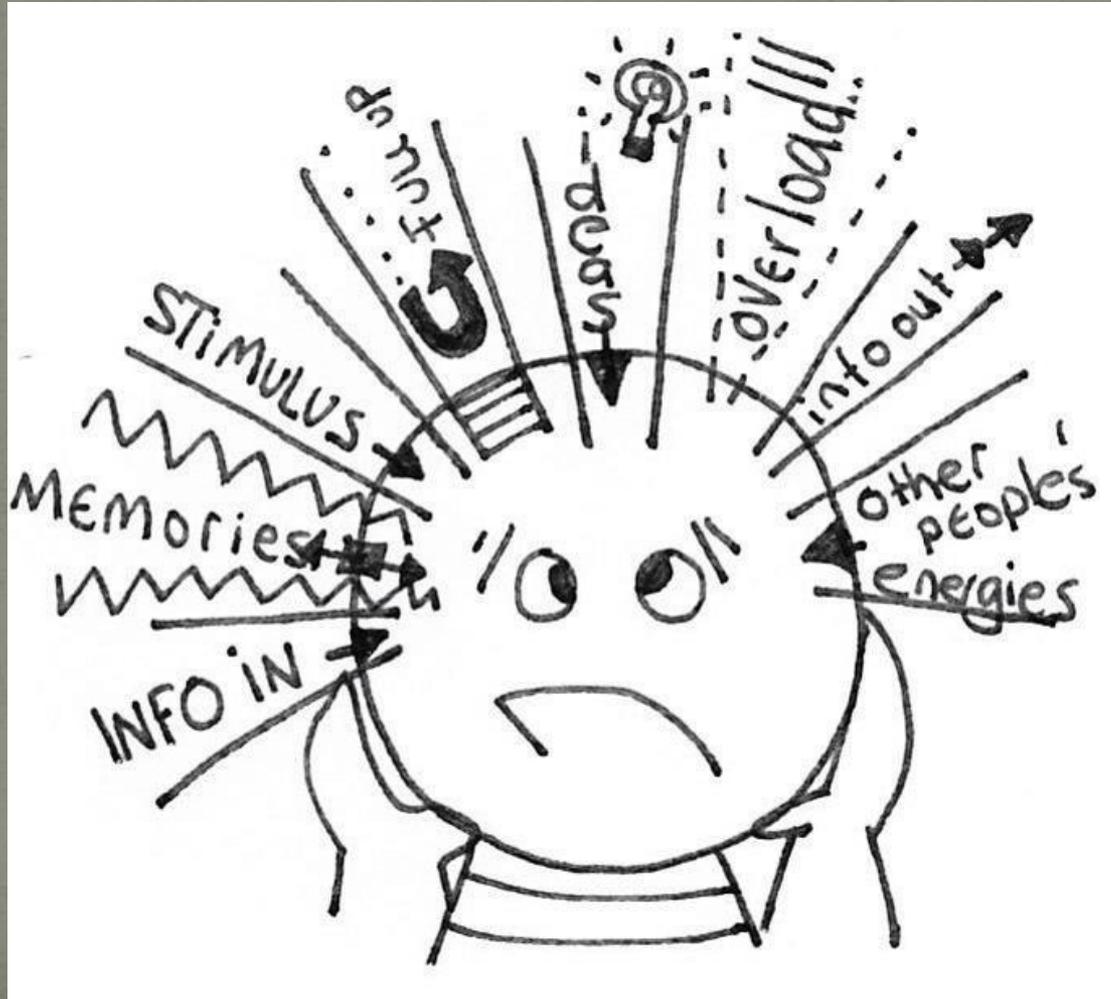
An old friend
had an old
building that
had parking.



12,000 sq feet

But like you...I had a huge question?

Where should I focus my energy and thoughts to make a good experience?



While using money wisely and only on the things that produce the greatest results....



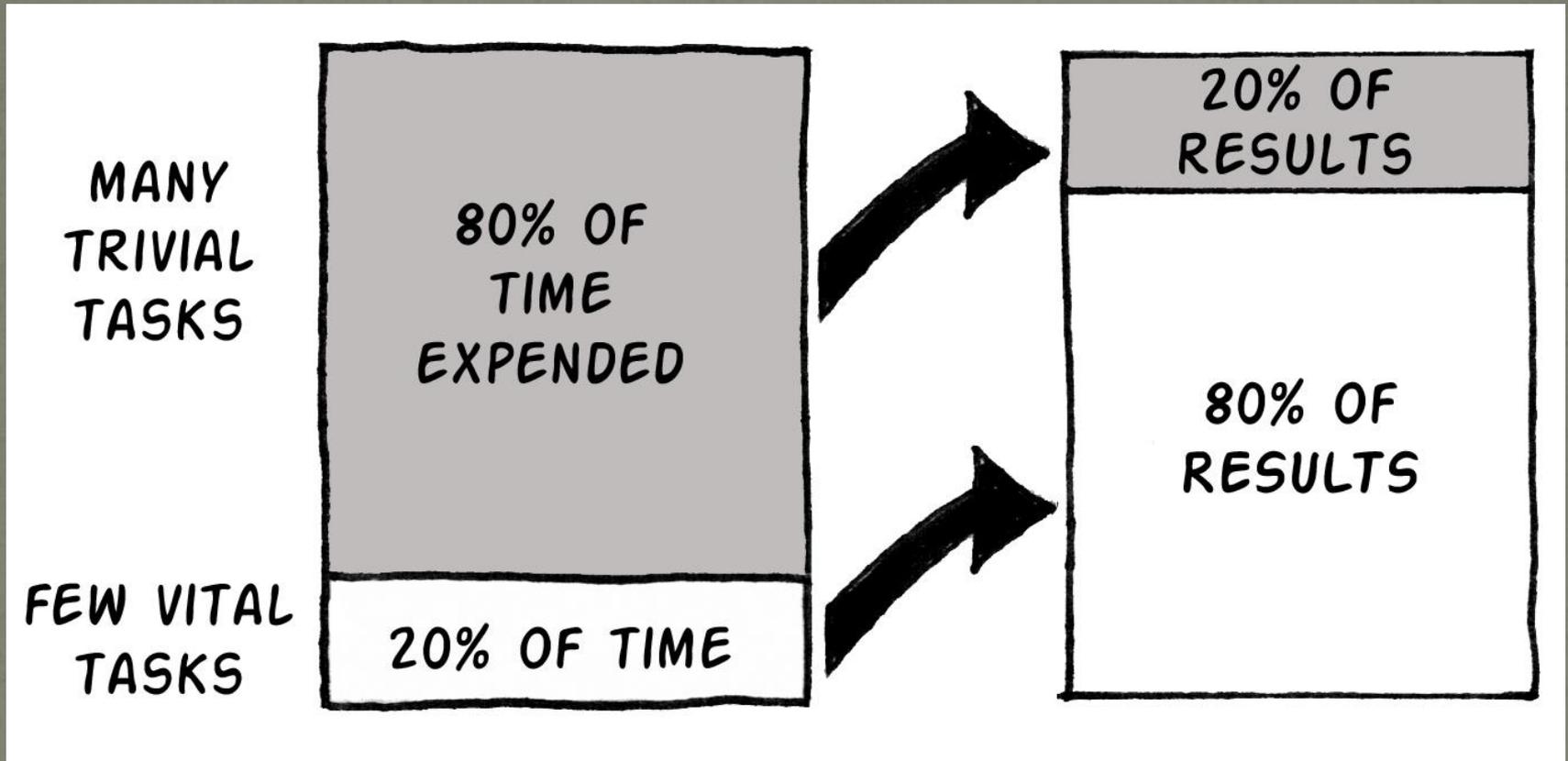
Having the right mindset. It's free.

Money is the exchange of value.

Big success traits that cost nothing:

1. Mindset: think long-term growth
2. Purpose: why do you want to do this?
3. Time management: what can you give up?
4. Resourcefulness: start with what you have
5. Leadership: this holds it all together

A good rule to use is the Pareto principle

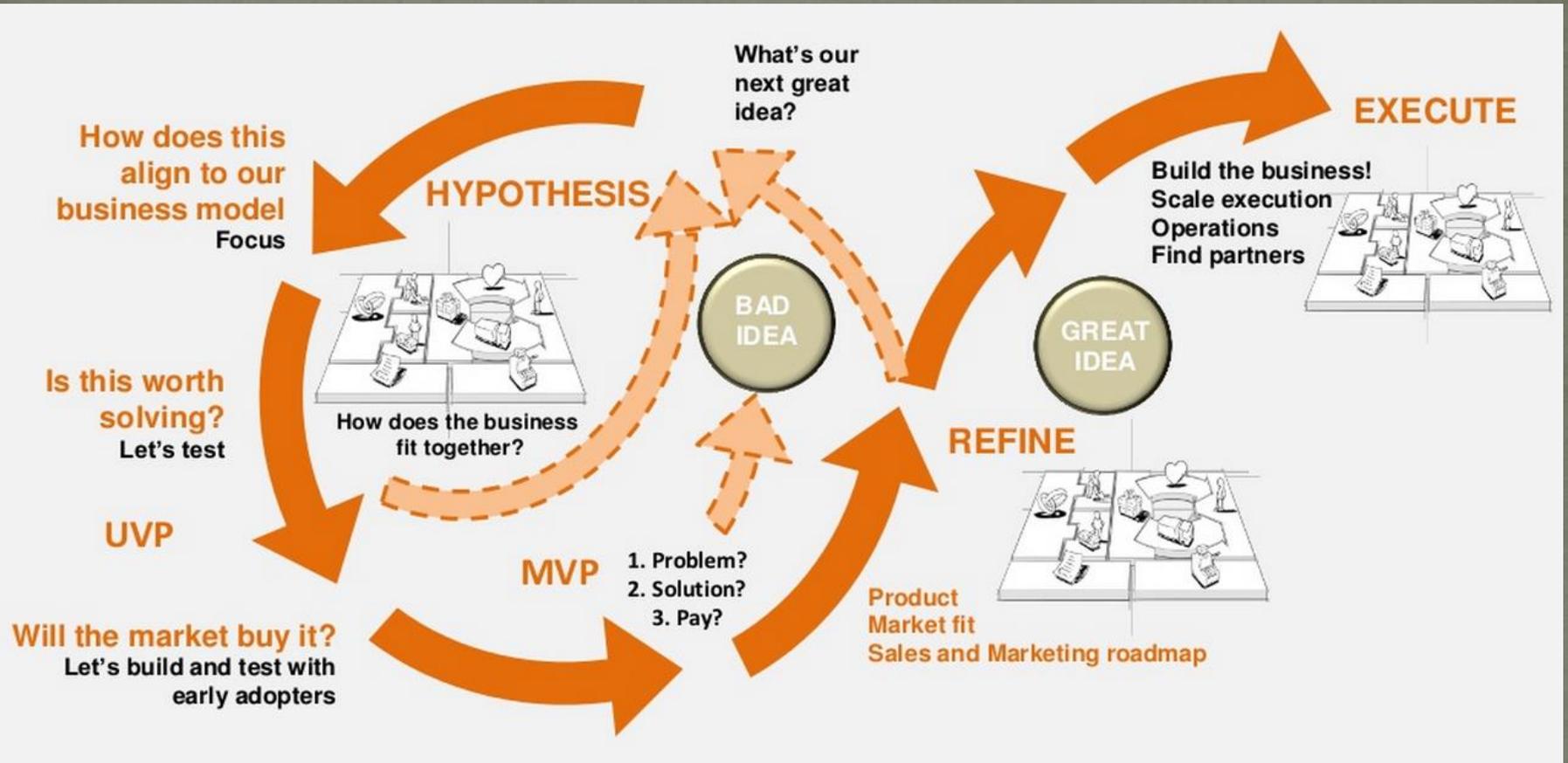


20% of marketing=80% results

20% really good actors & 80% need extra training

Switch 20% of your scares up each year

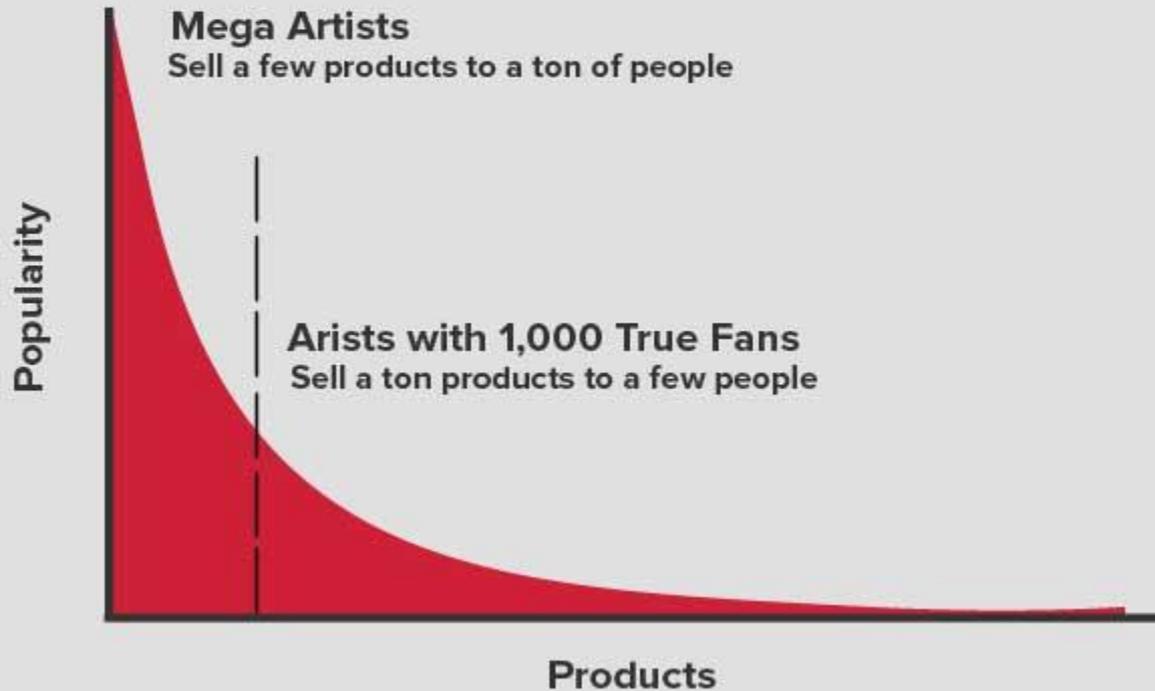
And a “Lean Start-up” mentality. (Eric Ries)



Test your target market with small experiments.
Kill what doesn't work. Keep what does. Test again.
Keep innovating each season & listen to your customers.

The Power of 1,000 True Fans

Kevin Kelly



If you can keep your costs down and acquire 1,000 die hard fans, you can sell more to them and grow by word-of-mouth. This allows you steady growth your first few years.

Ready to take the leap?

Before you start.

1. Check local codes: **inspectors ,fire marshals, insurance**
2. Try to keep overhead cost low: **write down your plan**
3. Visualize it: **start with the end in mind & years out**
4. Start gathering your tribe: **tell others your idea**
5. Take inventory: **what do you already own or can use?**
6. Start your LLC or business structure: **ask lawyer help**

DREAM

BIG

START SMALL

but

MOST OF ALL

START.

Visualize the experience you want to give

Think about how you want it to feel. Customers remember how your show makes them feel. What type is yours?

Once you have your theme. Stick to it. You'll save money by using what you buy. I always repurpose my props. You'll know when it's time to switch it up.

Once built. Change it up 20% each year. You don't need to completely remodel each year. Add more effective scares, new props, new rooms. Scrap what doesn't work.

Focus on the right things to save money

~Location~

The Top 5 Areas to Spend Your Money:

1. Location: a safe and easy-to-find spot
2. Materials: lumber, screws, tools, & paint
3. Set Design: learn a few tricks to DIY
4. Marketing: social, radio, flyers, parades
5. Staff: hire help where you need it most

Location. Location. Location.

~Location~



The Haunted Mansion at Disney World



**The Warehouse Containing
The Haunted Mansion at Disney World**

Low Cost Locations

1. Vacant buildings: drive or walk around your area
2. Farm land: corn fields and outdoor trails
3. Parking lots: use tents, generators, truck trailers
4. Fairgrounds/Parks: team up with local entertainment
5. Stadiums: Many have extra space and customers
6. Outside the box: caves, under a brewery, float trip..
7. Team up with another Haunt. They might need help.

HAUNTED RIVER FLOAT



Haunted houses can be scary. Corn Mazes can be fun. But nothing compares to the thrill of the haunted river float on the Big Piney River

Every Friday & Saturday in September
7:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.

Once you are in the raft...
There is NO TURNING BACK!!!!
After the spooky float, take a walk through the haunted forest then hop on the hay wagon for a ride back to a bon fire.

Kids 5 and under free
Ages 6 and over \$25
Under 18 must be accompanied
by parent or guardian



Places to dig up money

1. Ask a friend or family member.
2. Save up enough to rent a space for 1-2 months.
3. Buy an existing Haunt. This could save you thousands.
4. Take out a small business loan. That you can pay back.
5. Ask building owner about a profit share deal.
6. Check your community for a Tourism Grant.

Nonprofit Haunts

Nonprofit organization 501(c)(3) can get many costs reduced and tax benefits as this type of business.

For example, a nonprofit organization may be tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) if its primary activities are charitable, religious, educational, scientific, literary, testing for public safety, fostering amateur sports competition, preventing cruelty to children, or preventing cruelty to animals.

Costs like advertising, sponsorships, land use, property sharing can be reduced. And receive grants

Materials and Building Methods

~Materials~

Money Saving Materials

1. Construction sites: new, destruction, remodels
2. Lumber yard: contractor account, discard pile, paints
3. Pallets, crates, & barrels: many times free or cheap
4. Wall panel build: estimate your price per panel
5. Old barns & sheds: hard work but so worth it
6. Buy an old attraction: if the price is right. Figure cost.



And a friend
with a trailer.



Wall Panel Construction

Building the wall panels will be your largest material cost. We decided to use 7/16" OSB (Oriented Strand Board). \$12 a 4'x8' sheet. Interior walls double sided.

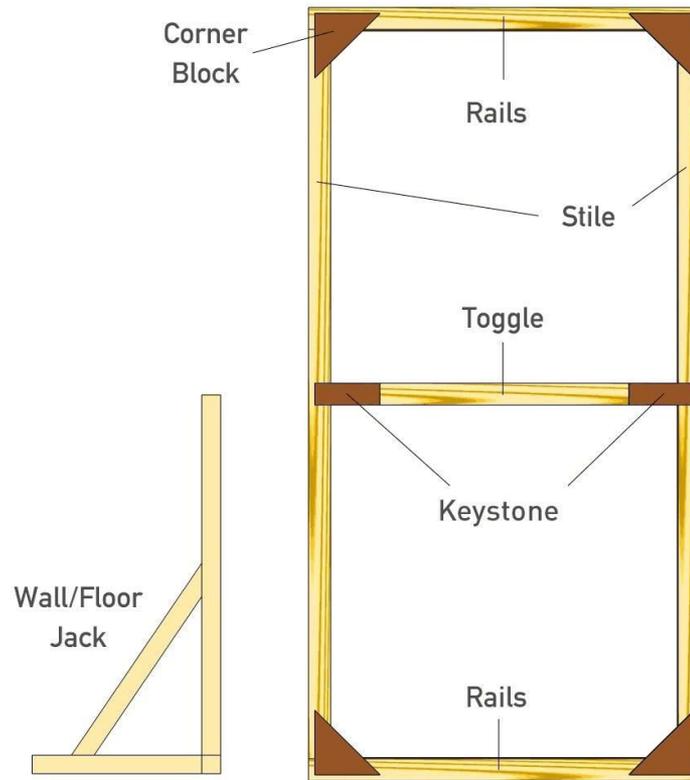
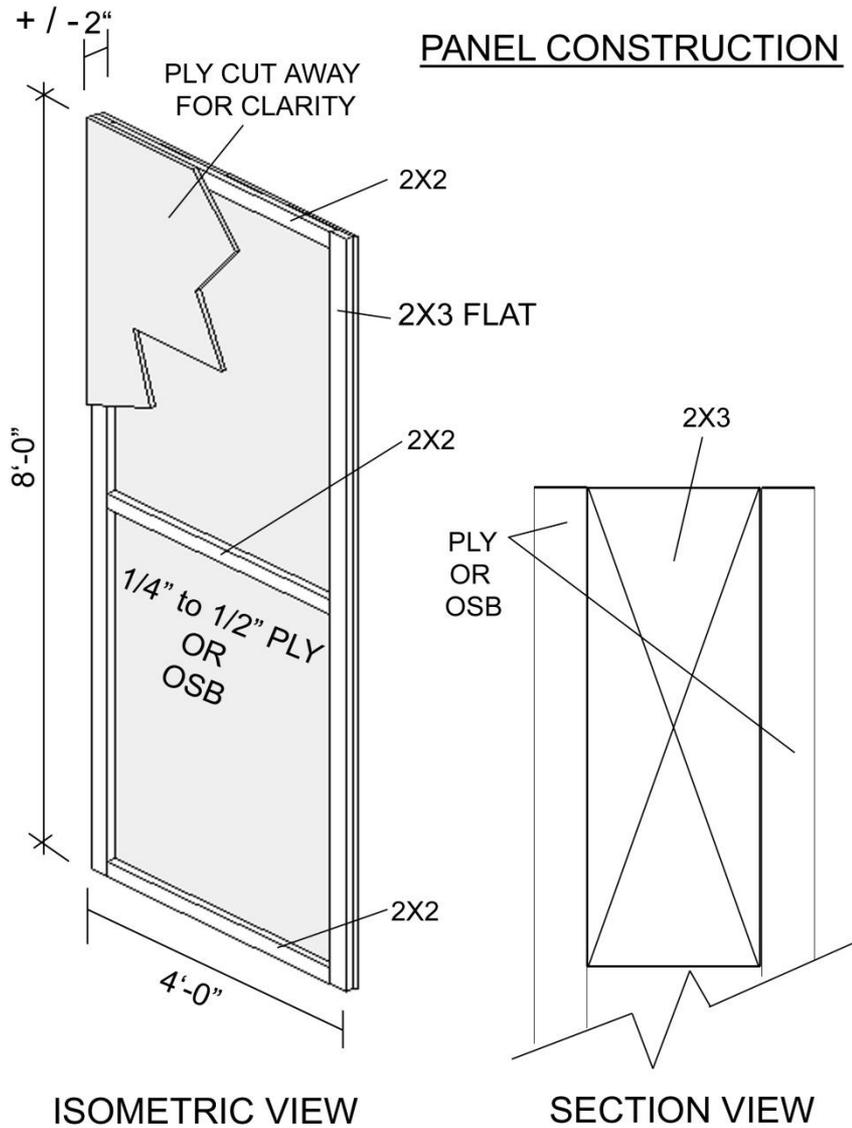
Others have used 1/4" Luan (thin plywood) at \$14-\$20 a sheet.

Ours our heavy, but we're inside and not moving them. Different panels require different build methods.

OSB Tips: use the smoothest side for painting. Less splinters. Likes: price, durability. Dislikes: heavy, soaks up paint, rough

Luan: Lighter to carry, less space, smooth painting surface. Costs more & may not hold up in certain active locations.

PANEL CONSTRUCTION



There a many ways to build a wall panel.



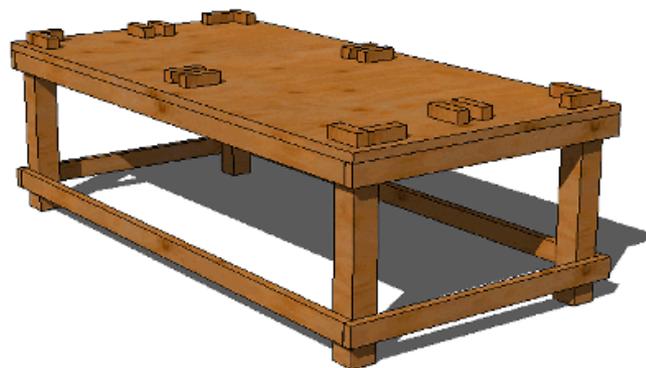
Build a jig. You can build a wall panel in 2 minutes. With practice.





HAUNT DESIGN KIT

Wall Panel Jig



Provided by [Haunt Design Kit.com](http://HauntDesignKit.com)

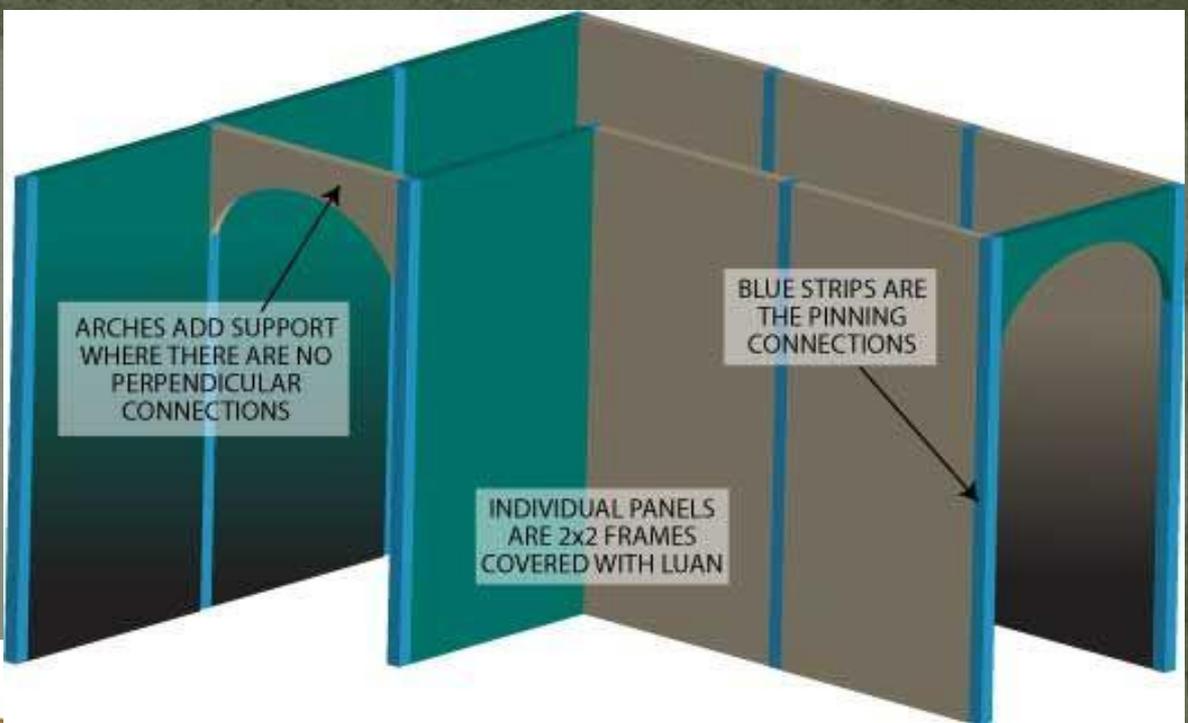
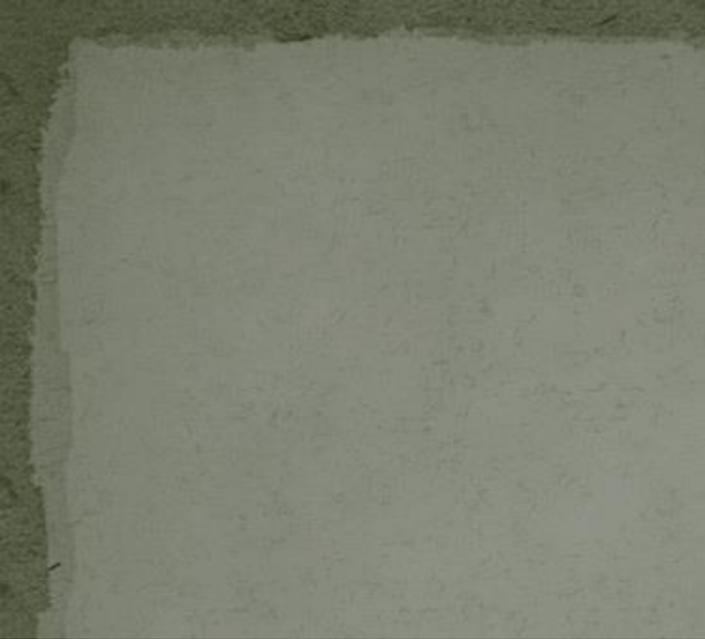
Wall Panel Design Tips

Design first. Plan your rooms around your props and scares. If you have large props, move them in first.

Easy escape exits: Indoors, measure out 4' feet away from walls for safety egress. All exit doors open to them. Easy to see exit signs & emergency lighting. Actors can use these as well. Add interior actor doors that open away from patron traffic .

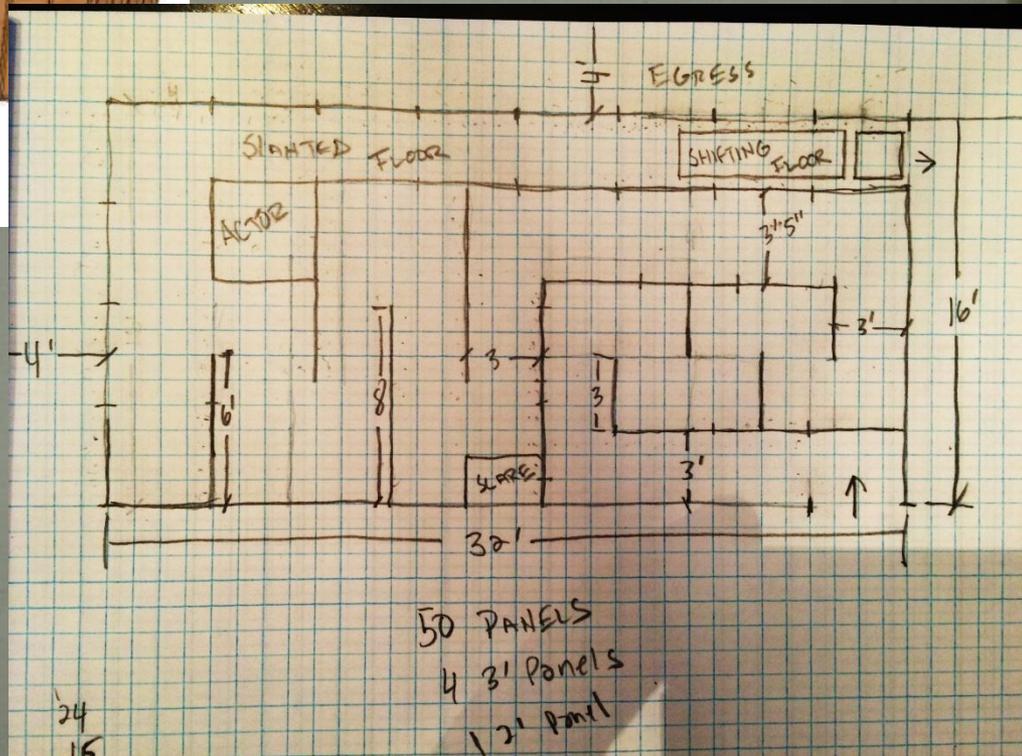
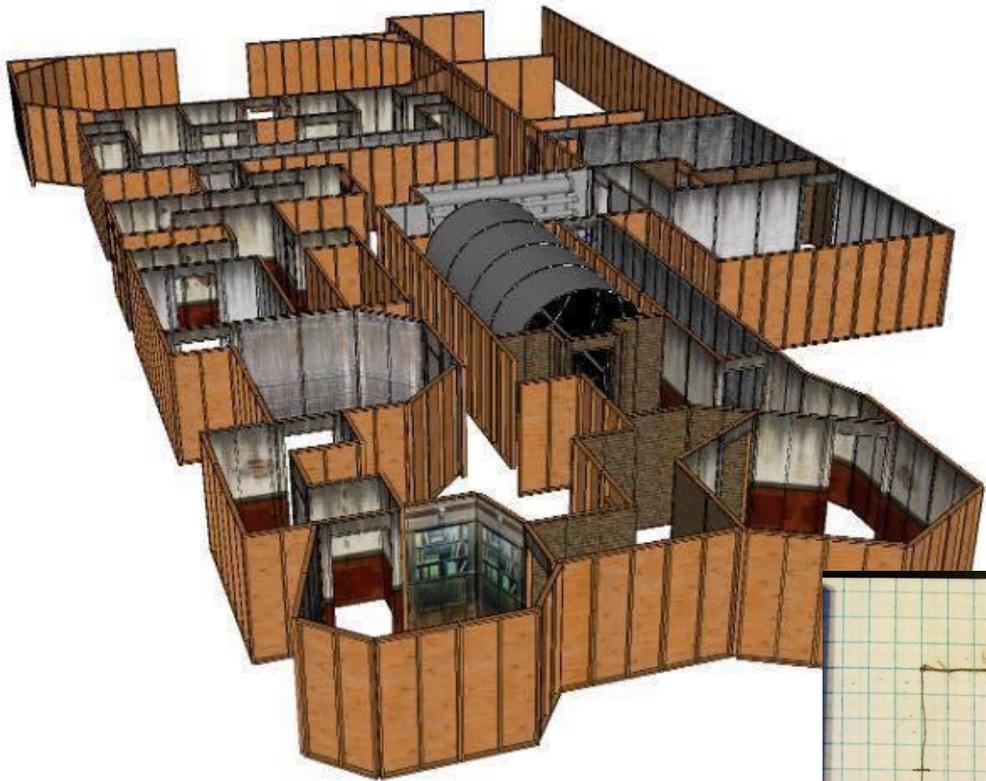
Hallways at 36" and openings/doors at 32". If you have an area that is not wheelchair accessible, provide a way around it. Design a little 'wiggle room'.

The corners are your strongest points. Brace your walls off your existing space or standing braces.







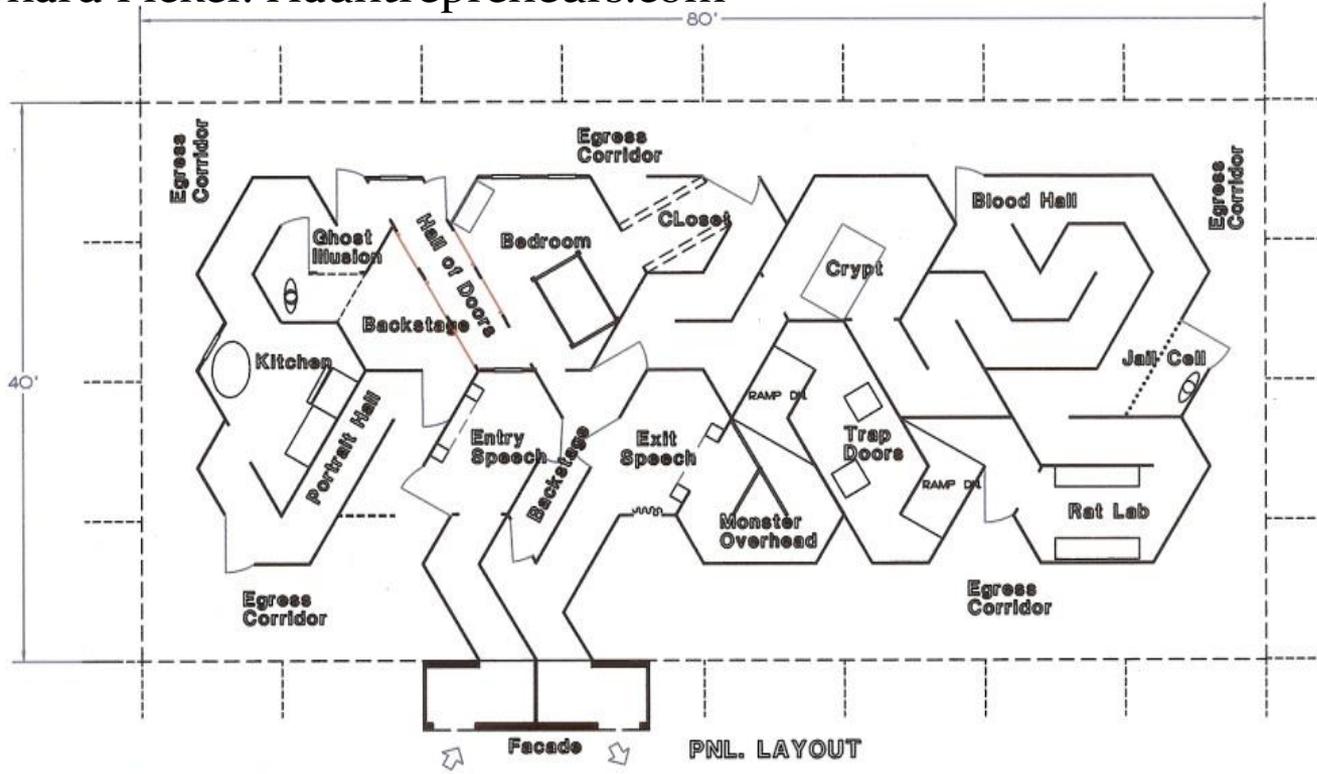


REVISIONS	
NO. DATE DESCRIPTION	

Mayhem Manor^(R)
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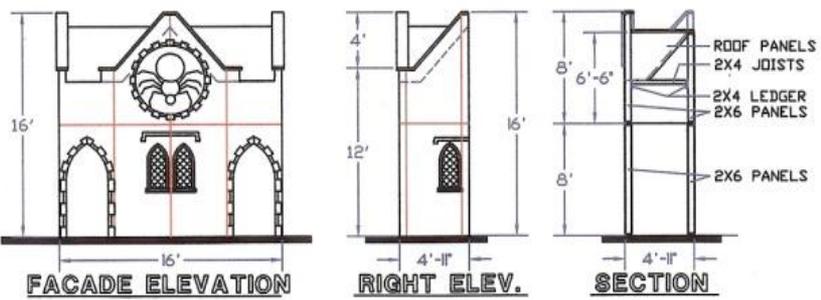
SHEET TITLE
PNL. LAYOUT
 DATE
 9-04-03
 SHEET NO.
A2
OPERATED BY D.O.A.



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GENERAL NOTES

- Attraction is a pre-engineered temporary attraction designed for quick install, reconfiguration and strikes.
- The attraction is designated as a "Revolving Exhibit" and only the perimeter walls are permanent construction.
- Posted Maximum Occupancy of 299 people.
- All egress doors are spring closing, non-latching.
- Pre-manufactured modular wall panels are flame resistant.
- All wall panels are free standing modular units.
- All decorations and fabrics are fire retardant.
- Hallways and ramps are ADA accessible.
- All Doorways are min. 3' x 6'-8".
- No dead end corridors.
- All doors open in the direction of travel.
- Maximum egress distance is less than 200'-0"
- All emergency lights and lighted Exit signs have battery back up.
- House PA system provided.
- All platforms and ramps are built to local code.



KEY

	4x8 Panel
	Window Panel
	4x8 One Sided Pnl.
	1 Way Mirror Panel
	Mirror Panel
	Open Doorway Panel
	1 Sided Mirror Panel
	Operable Door Panel

Use TORX screws, especially if you are taking panels apart.



Set Design: Distress your scenes yourself

~Set Design~

Scenic Design Tips

You can build a set of walls and then detail that area. Or you can build it all, then detail everything.

One scene at a time: allows you to keep track of your materials and deadline. You can always stop and have a smaller attraction. Allows switch between creative to labor modes

Build it all then decorate: you can systemize your plan. Painting black one week, distress with green, hang webs. You'll have to make sure everything is detailed or make it a dark zone. (we're still adding things that were on our list year one).

Check hardware stores,
Walmart, contractors for
old paint.



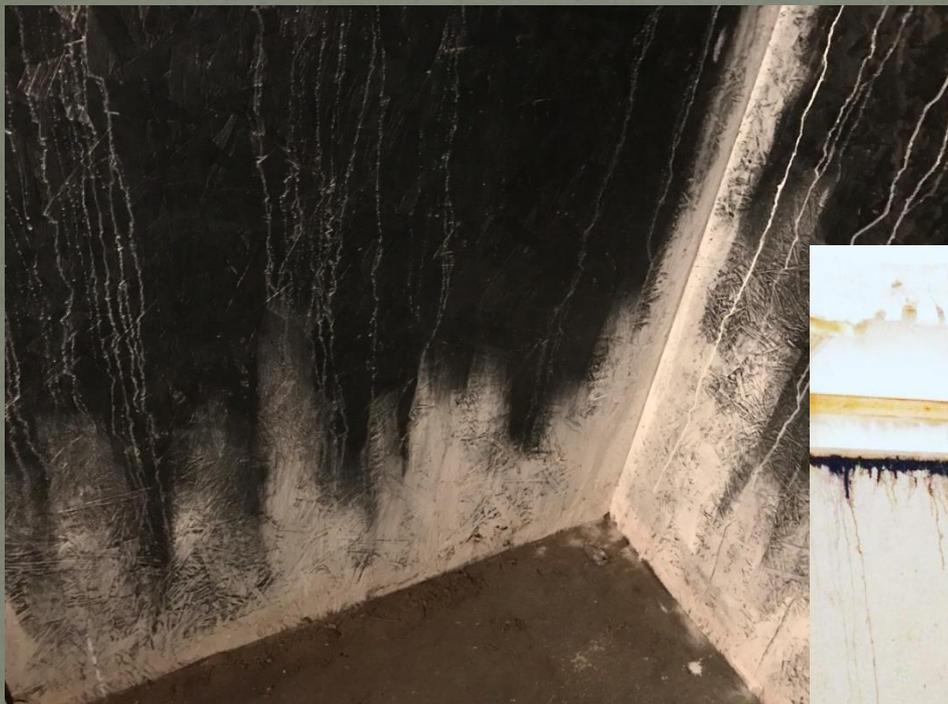
Use a certified flame retardant in your paint & on flammable surfaces. Check your local fire codes with fire marshal.



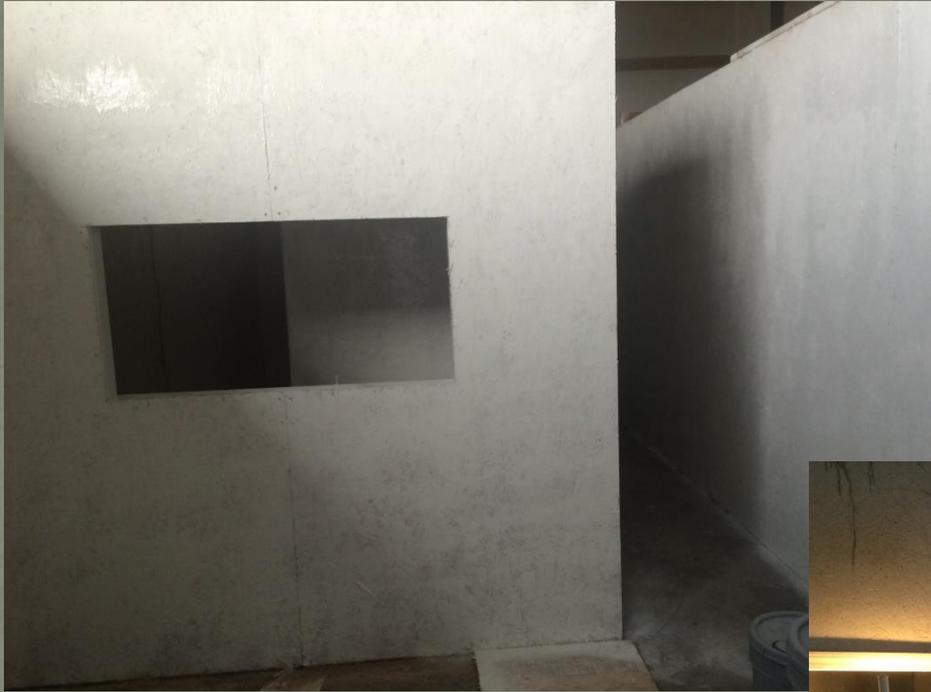
Use layers and bold patterns to make things stand out. Only 3 colors here.



Get messy! This is my favorite part. Experiment with brush patterns, spray bottles of water/paint, colors, sponges, rags.



Go to websites like Pinterest, Google Images, & Instagram for ideas for your theme and set designs.



You can even give wood a distressed look by dipping a 2 x 4 in paint and dragging it along the surface. Use layers of color.



Damon Carson: Fright Masters

These windows were bought at a antique store \$25. The cedar siding came from my brother's job site as trash. We made the shingles from the siding too.



Use existing structures in your scenes. In the woods? Light up the creepy trees! Large pole in the way? Scare acting spot. We used an old camper to block off an area in our cemetery because we ran out of walls.



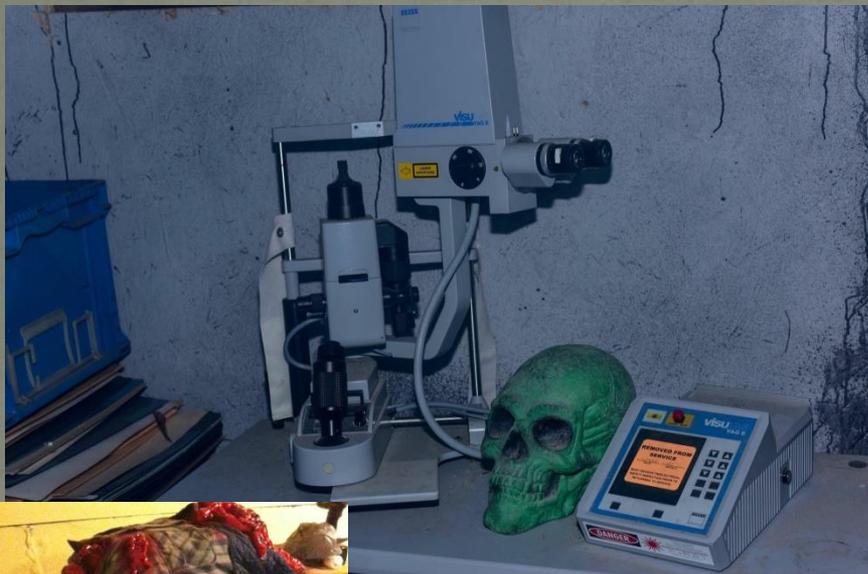
Filling up your scenes with props

~Set Design~

Watch for deals on the curb, flea markets, thrift stores, friends, social media for sale groups, auctions, newspapers, craigslist...



Take inventory of current props. Create a theme around what you already have. Mine was "Phobia13"..a series of phobias. Clowns, spiders, dolls, hospitals, etc. I can always switch phobias as needed.





Use affordable lighting & tech systems to start. You can always upgrade later. Natural light placement is best.

LIGHTING ACCESSORIES



BUDGET FLICKER CONTROLLER
Make lights flicker, dim, simulate electrical problems, strobe, flash, and more. Works with all lights between 5 Volts and 24 Volts. (HFX-INDIM) \$12.95

FRIGHTIMER MINI
This 12-volt PIR motion sensor has an adjustable timer that allows you to trigger any 12-volt appliance, light, motor, etc. Automatically resets itself. (FRIGHT-MINI) \$19.95

8-WAY SPLITTER
This useful splitter allows you to share one power supply with multiple items, such as lights or props. (SPLIT-8) \$12.95

ELECTRIC CONTROL
Control lights, motors, etc. Silent when running. (ELEC-MOT-CON) \$12.95

2-WAY SPLITTER
This handy splitter allows you to use one power supply for two lights. (SPLIT-2) \$5.95

4-WAY SPLITTER
Are you running out of power adapters? Turn one adapter into power for four lights. (SPLIT-4) \$8.95

5-FOOT EXTENSION
Just like a regular extension cord - but for 12-volt lights. (EXT-5) \$5.95

12-FOOT EXTENSION
These extenders are great for lighting jobs with not-so-easy-to-reach power adapters. Add one of our 2, 4, or 8-way splitters to save on additional cords. (EXT-12) \$10.95

IN-LINE DIMMER
This dimmer allows for easy adjustment of brightness on any of your lights. (IN-DIM) \$9.95

DELUXE DIMMER
Use this dimmer to adjust brightness of lights, or electric motors to control speed. (DEL-DIM) \$19.95

INLINE SWITCH
Easily turn your 12 Volt lights on and off using this rocker switch. (IN-SWITCH) \$6.95

2-WIRE ADAPTOR
2.1x5.5mm male or female wire adaptor. Choose Male or Female. (ADP-2) \$0.99



We still use low-watt colored bulbs, flicker bulbs, strobes, & blacklights. LED lighting is getting affordable.

Use a sound system that is versatile.

Lepy

★★★★☆ 80

Lepy LP-V9S Hi-Fi stereo power digital amplifier with USB SD DVD CD FM MP3



Size:
LP-V9S



List Price: \$39.99

Price: **\$24.90**



NIZHI

★★★★☆ 709

NIZHI TT-028 MP3 Mini Digital Portable Music Player Micro SD USB FM Radio (Black)

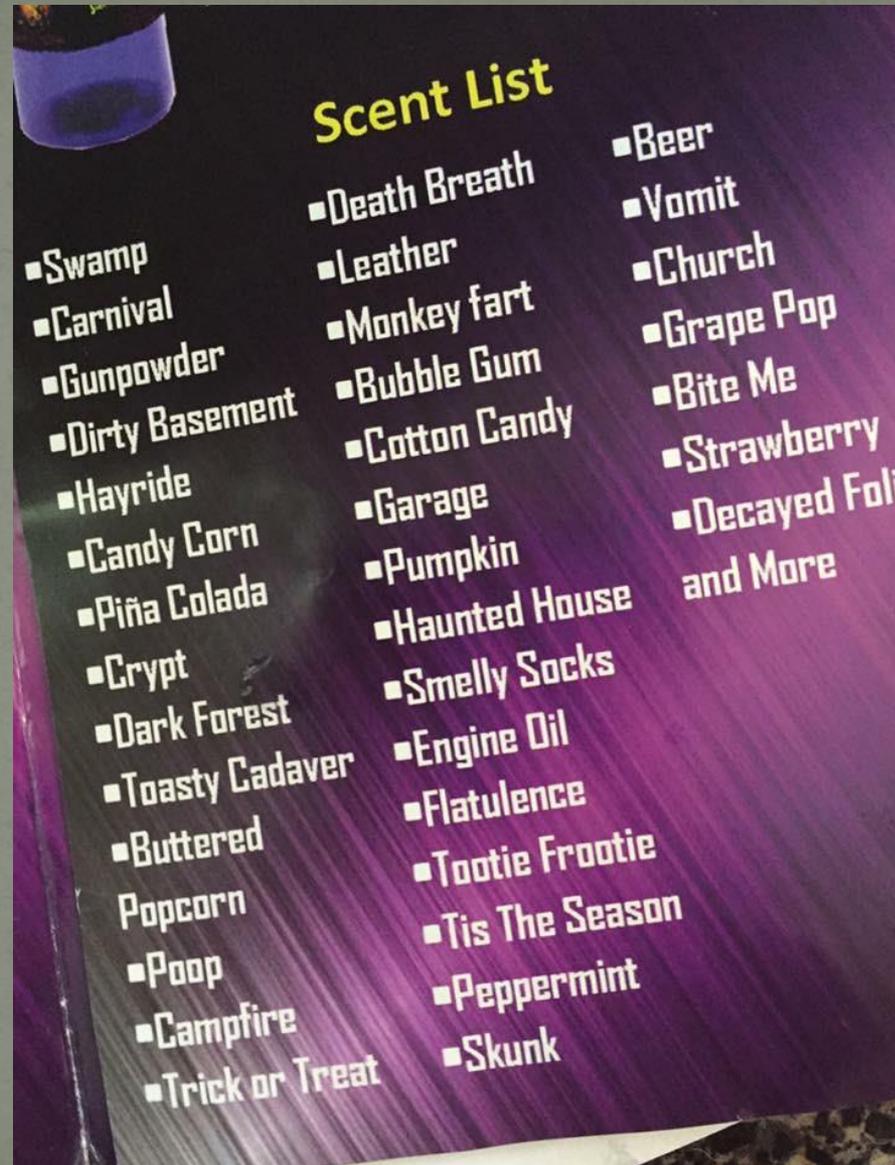


\$9⁷⁰

~~\$11.99~~ Save \$2.29 (19%)

prime

Use scents in the proper scenes. Don't OVER USE.



Create an atmosphere

Customers want to be immersed in the story, the sets, and the magic. They want unique experiences just for them.

Shoot for as much realism & details as possible. Test in proper lighting.

Change a room's lighting, sound, story if not working.

Monitor where bottlenecks happen & try to fix them.

Try to stay away from the Conga line. Improve throughput or slow down the line. It's a balancing act.

Marketing: Getting people to your Haunt

~Marketing~

Where to spend your money

Test. Test. Test. Start with small budgets in different areas and track your return on investment. Some things you can't track but it may lead to someone REMEMBERING you.

Facebook: Yes..it's pay to play on Facebook now. Organic reach is down. But you can still be effective with boosted posts and paid ads.

Google My Business: Verify or Create your page. Link it to your attraction address. Fill this out completely. Add photos. Send people here to leave reviews. Most people find us on Google Search.

Let your staff use social media. Wisely.



~Marketing~

Where to spend your money

Radio: We spend a few hundred bucks on live remotes and a week of commercials. People hear it. They come in. It still gives your haunt credibility and people still listen.

Promotion cards: We had a quality gloss card printed out with a \$2 off coupon in different store locations. Another \$2 off coupon on bright paper that we handed out in a local parade. We had 100's of people bring them to the booth.

Banners: Ask local businesses with heavy traffic if you could put up a banner in the front. You could even trade for tickets.

Where to spend your money

Ticket promotions: Hand out free tickets to school raffles, radio contests, sports banquets, charity auctions, sponsorships, and contests on social media.

Parades & local fairs: Walk in your local parade and hand out coupons. Set up a makeup booth with your special fx artists doing face painting...promote your haunt.

T-shirts: Buy quality t-shirts with your logo but don't charge much for it. Walking billboards everywhere.

Email: Mail Chimp is free. Use sign up on your website.




Randa Harlan ▶ **The Dead Factory Haunted House**
▼

October 30, 2016 · Montgomery City, MO · 🌐

Sooooo...I don't always make the best choices...and I let some damn fools talk me into doing something I knew I shouldn't have! 😂 My worst fear going in, was someone chasing me with a chainsaw...should have known how it would end. I froze, my fear literally paralyzed me, and mr chainsaw man had a hay day with that. 😂



Marketing~

Get to know your customers

- **Get feedback:** Ask your guests after the show for feedback or take a survey for a prize. Ask what they liked best and if they had any problems.

Watch your customers: pay attention to ages, gender, the way they dress, if they have friends, etc. This is your target market.

Treat them like a guest: Hospitality is king. Trouble inside? Here's 2 free tickets. Wrong turn? Wanna start over? (Never disagree on social media or public.)

“Be Different” Shortcuts

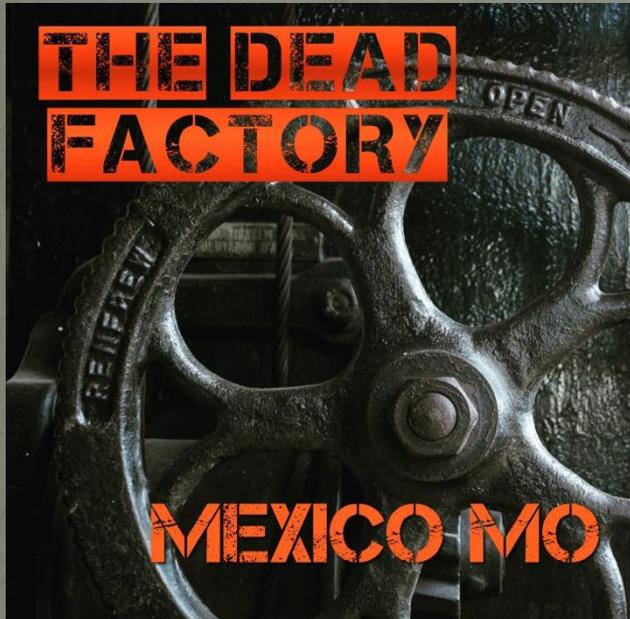
What sets you apart from other local haunts: Search social media reviews and listen to what other customers don't like about your competition and focus on those things.

Example: We market The Dead Factory as

- ADA (handicap accessible)-safe for everyone
- Indoor waiting area-stay dry
- No conga lines
- A long walk-through time
- “Must-See” Haunt. Scary!



Brainstorm ideas for your brand. What do you want your Haunt to feel like?

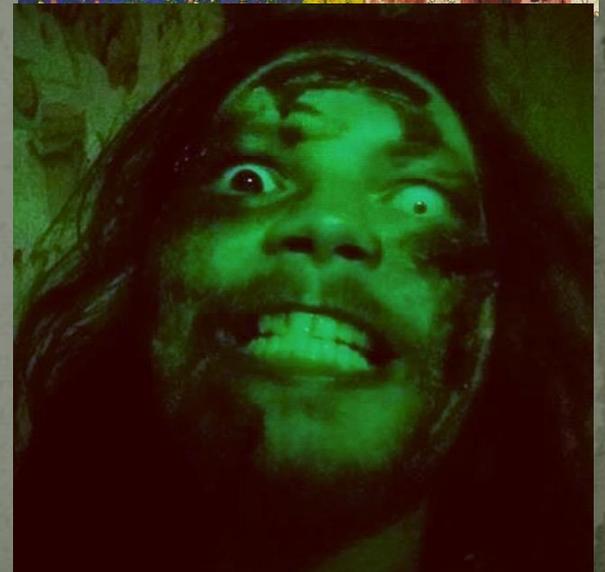


~Marketing~

Staff: Bring your Haunt to LIFE!!

~Staff~

Scare Actors are the heartbeat of the haunt.



Recruit scare actors and staff

Scare actors are the pulse of the show. No animatronic can replace the timing and realism of an actor.

Hold auditions in the summer and have some of your characters picked out in your theme. Look for actors like this. Provide training. Let senior actors help.

Allow trial periods. This helps 'letting go' a little easier.

Ask current actors if they have any friends. You might need help in the ticket booth or security too.

When do you start looking for STAFF? NOW

Reward & treat your staff with respect

- Provide a fun but energized culture: we have pizza on Fridays and Crockpot food on Saturdays. We're open 7-11 Only 11 nights. This allows plenty of rest for everyone.

Let your actors help: Give them boundaries in their room and costume but give them creative freedom.

Be a leader or hire someone that is: the Haunt needs someone that holds it all together. A people person that can bring the team together and keep everyone inspired.

Recognize them: Offer merit badges or trophies

Cheap Costumes & Makeup

Use makeup and latex. And coffee grounds, Nose & scare wax. Half-masks and comfortable gear. Save your best stuff for the light! Fake blood. Quick face paint. Test under light.

Buy clothes at thrift stores and sales. I found all my medical drab at our local handi-shop and bed gowns. They have suits and dresses as well. Rip, shred, distress. Use paint or coffee/tea in spray bottles to distress.

Let the actors experiment at home then come ready. This can save you time.

Have everyone there early. Get help applying the base color. Have the artist do the detail work.

Provide training and advancement

- Have training days: do workshops on timing your scare, safety, quick makeup demos, or whatever needs improved.

Do dry runs: operate the show live as many takes as it takes. Correct then repeat.

Fire drills and drunk drills: get everyone in their spots and do a fake emergency. Use walkie-talkies.

Let Senior Actors have first pick: as long as they're fit for it

Staff pay & compensations

- Volunteers & Employees are both used in haunted attractions.

Nonprofit organizations can use volunteers.

For profit business must pay their actors.

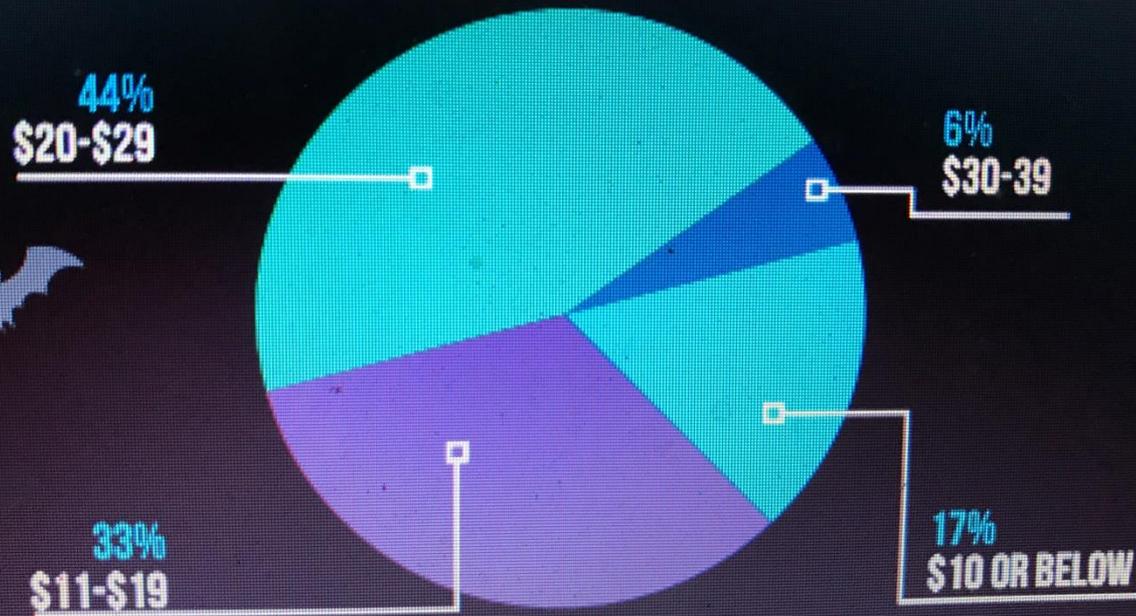
Create other compensations: T-shirts, free tickets, family night, food & drinks, parties, awards, team hoodies.

Contact your accountant or attorney for legal advice.

Adding it all together

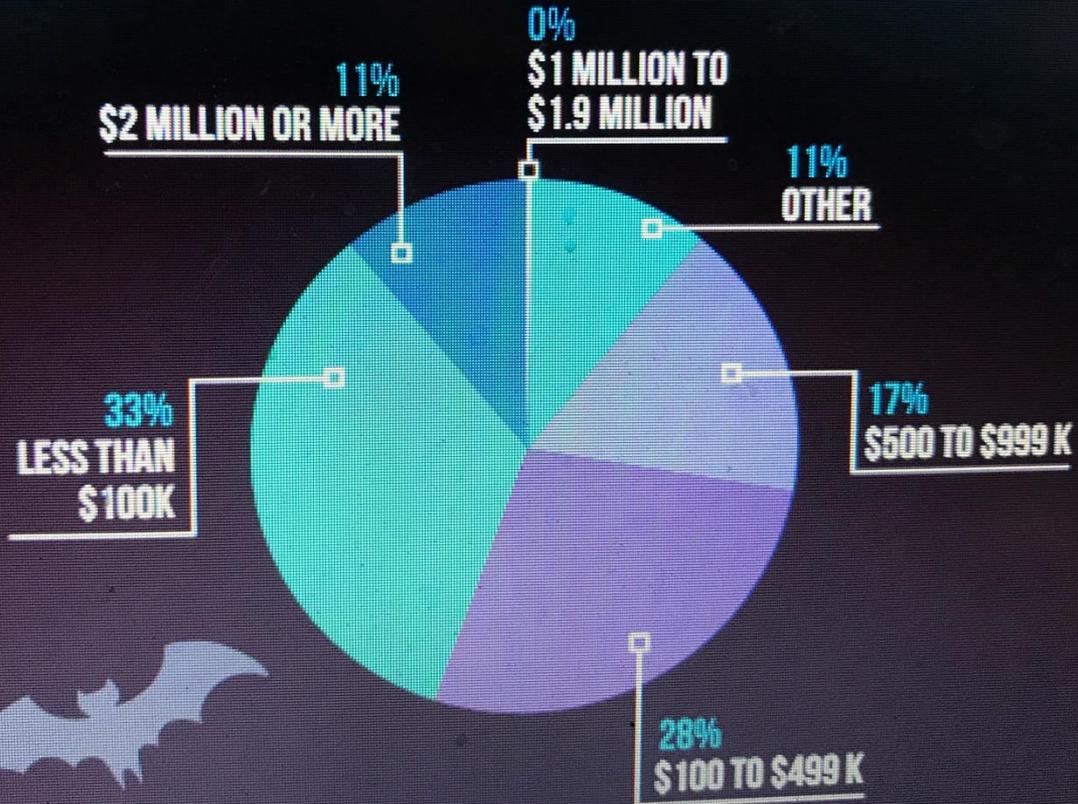
(FIGURE 2)

WHAT IS THE AVERAGE COST OF AN ADULT TICKET?



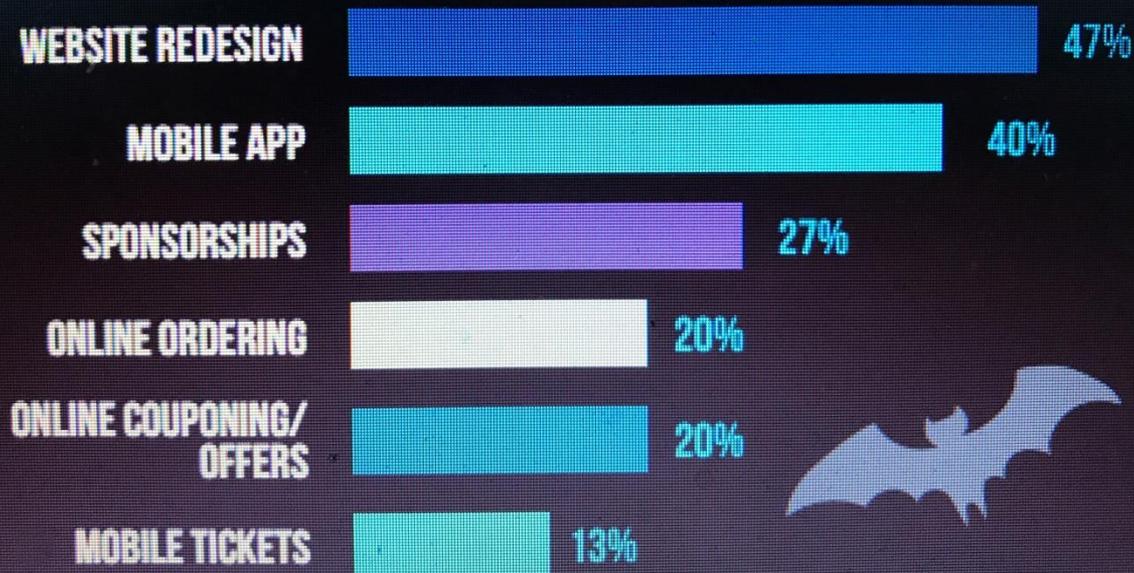
(FIGURE 1)

WHAT IS YOUR TOTAL SALES VOLUME (INCLUDING MERCHANDISE, IF APPLICABLE)?



(FIGURE 6)

WHAT BUSINESS-BUILDING INITIATIVES ARE YOU INTERESTED IN CONSIDERING OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS?



Be smart about how you spend your money. You don't need animatronics your first year, spend that on scare actors.

Stay focused on your theme. Don't be swayed by the next shiny object. Scare psychology never changes.

Be resourceful in your decisions. Use what you have where you are. It's either TIME or MONEY.

Test out small ideas and attractions before going big.

Keep the 80% that works. Improve the 20%.



**haunters
toolbox**

www.HauntersToolbox.com