

# THE 13 FEARS OF A HAUNT OWNER

Survival Tips and How-To Advice from  
Today's Haunted Attraction Owners

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# THE TOP 13 FEARS OF A HAUNT OWNER

1. Motivation to Keep Going
2. Time Management
3. Finding Reliable Help
4. Choosing the Right Location
5. Codes/Permits/Safety
6. Money & Funding
7. Community & Social Acceptance
8. Theme & Backstory
9. Managing Employees & Volunteers
10. Marketing/Advertising/Sponsors
11. Ticketing & Queue Line Efficiency
12. Competition
13. Customer Service & Bad Reviews





**NEVER  
GIVE UP  
ON SOMETHING  
YOU CAN'T GO A  
DAY WITHOUT  
THINKING ABOUT**

# MOTIVATION TO KEEP GOING

**The Fear:** Staying motivated all year long focused on your Haunted House can be exhausting. Planning, designing, researching, social media, marketing, hiring, firing, building, acting, managing, decorating, spending, multi-tasking, buying, and every other hat you wear can make anyone scream!

How Do You Stay Motivated?

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# MOTIVATION TO KEEP GOING

Things to try:

**Take a break.** You deserve & need it. Pick a period of time where you spend time doing 'no haunt work'. Spend time fishing, with family, or something that recharges you. Include your Haunt Family in something fun before, during, or after Haunt season. They need it too.

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# MOTIVATION TO KEEP GOING

Things to try:

**Go visit other Haunts.** Take a trip to see other Haunted Attractions. As a Haunter we don't get much time to be inspired by others. Many Haunts stay open for an extended time, open on different holidays, or haunt events like the Legendary Haunt Tours and Haunt Conventions/Trade Shows. You will come back with new ideas and be ready-to-go!

# MOTIVATION TO KEEP GOING

Things to try:

**Surround yourself with other passionate Haunters.**

Join facebook groups, membership groups, online forums, and local Haunt Clubs. Attend local meet-ups and Halloween/Haunt trade shows or conventions.

“You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.” –Jim Rohn

# TIME MANAGEMENT

**The Fear:** Balancing your time between family, friends, work, commitments, diet, health, and still have time for Haunting? Most Haunt Owners still have a full-time job....besides the Haunt. They continue to grow so one day it will be their only source of income. The successful Haunts have just as much time as you do. It's all about how you spend it.

How can you gain more time to squeeze it all in?

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# TIME MANAGEMENT

Things to try:

**Get up early or go to bed late.** If you have a job, get up a few hours before you go to work to plan, design, or complete other things on your checklist. Use your big chunks of time for building and decorating. Try to get 6-8 hours of sleep each night. You might just have to give up some T.V., internet, or video game time.

# TIME MANAGEMENT

Things to try:

**Ask friends and family for help.** You can't do it all by yourself. You might be able to start out that way but the more you grow the longer your checklist grows. Utilize a teenager that knows web design and social media. Or ask that friend who knows construction and loves Halloween. Keep your eyes out for those who would make great helpers.

# TIME MANAGEMENT

Things to try:

**Hire someone to do it for you.** If you have the budget to hire help then use it on things you 'can not' or 'do not' want to do. Spend your money on what you feel would be the most valuable. Save money by doing what you like to do and are good at.

## FINDING RELIABLE HELP

**The Fear:** You can't do it all by yourself. You will have to build a crew, paid or volunteers, to help you with all aspects of your attraction. However, dedicated people that are passionate as you are about Haunting are hard to find.

Where do you find the people to help you?

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# FINDING RELIABLE HELP

Things to try:

**Family and friends.** Some say it's bad to mix personal with business. As long as your guidelines and rules are explained up front (an attorney may be needed), it can be successful. Supportive individuals can be an asset to your overall show. Offering them a % of profits might be an option. Just make sure all expectations and guidelines are clear. And in writing.

# FINDING RELIABLE HELP

Things to try:

**Ask other Haunters.** There is help out there-you just have to find it. Facebook groups, Haunt/Halloween Forums, Online Groups, Local Gatherings, Yard Decorators, or local Home Haunters are great places to start. Remember that house that goes all out on Halloween in your town?

# FINDING RELIABLE HELP

Things to try:

**Hire some help.** If free doesn't work, you may have to spend some of your budget on hiring people to get you going. Local 'Wanted' Ads, Craigslist, Flyers, a front page interview with your local newspaper, or college/high school kids. If you are a non-profit/charity Haunt, most local media outlets will promote you for free.

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT LOCATION

**The Fear:** Should you find an old warehouse or talk to your local mall for space? Should you be right off the highway or back in the woods? Can you build on your property or will zoning be an issue? How about parking? Maybe using a tent in a parking lot?

Where is the best place to set up your Haunt?

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# CHOOSING THE RIGHT LOCATION

Things to try:

**What type of Haunt do you want to be?** Sometimes you choose the location...sometimes the location chooses you. Visualize what kind of Haunt you want to be: Outdoor Trail, Hayride, Factory, Old House, In Town, Outside Town, Morton Building, Temporary (tents or trailers), etc. Start with your end goal in mind and look for property to match most of your criteria. Drive around your target area and research lease/buy options for property. This will be one of your biggest decisions.

# CHOOSING THE RIGHT LOCATION

Things to try:

**To buy, rent, or lease?** We would all like to own our own building. No complete tear-down each year & you can work on your Haunt all year long. But buying property takes a lot of upfront cost. You may have to lease a space for the first few years just to save enough money to buy your dream location. Remember, each time you move may confuse your customers or you may have to change themes. Be creative with your budget and keep your customers in mind.

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# CHOOSING THE RIGHT LOCATION

Things to try:

**Things your property should have.** When looking for property keep these things in mind.

Accessibility, Parking, Traffic Flow, Utilities (electric or generators), Building Codes, Commercial Zoning, Easy-to-find, Landlord Codes, Short term/Long Term Lease, & Does it fit your style? Some Haunts get Free space by working with a local business or charity.

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# CODES-PERMITS-SAFETY

**The Fear:** The Fire Marshal and Building Inspector seem to determine a lot when it comes to building a Haunted House. With fire codes, building codes, sprinkler systems, egresses, fire exits, fire extinguishers, flame-retardant coverings, handicap accessible, bathrooms, permits, etc. Sometimes codes change every year.

What do you really need to know about safety & codes?

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# CODES-PERMITS-SAFETY

Things to try:

**Get to know your fire marshal and building inspector.** Don't try to hide anything from your local code enforcers. Keep them in the loop and invite them out to the property you plan on using. Ask plenty of questions and let them know of any changes that happen. They are part of your crew now, whether you like it or not. Their interest is to keep everyone safe, not to make your life hell. One small safety hazard can stop the show and time is money. Request a copy of your local building and fire codes for reference.

# CODES-PERMITS-SAFETY

Things to try:

**Go by the books.** Use the International Building Code (ICC IBC) & the National Fire Protection Agency 101 (NFPA 101) manuals which are used by architects and contractors when it comes to universal fire codes & quality building standards. It might be overkill for some areas but it will answer many of your questions. They can both be found free on <http://archive.org>

# CODES-PERMITS-SAFETY

Things to try:

**Hire a professional Haunt Consultant.** There are many Haunted Attraction advisors out there that will give you advice for free. Attend a local fire safety class, attend a seminar at a convention/online, or hire a design consultant. There are plenty of resources out there to do it yourself. However, this is one place you want to make sure to get it right.

# MONEY & FUNDING

**The Fear:** You don't have the cash to start or keep going. Maybe your first year wasn't enough to pay the bills. Or you blew your budget before October and now you have no idea where to get more money to finish. You are so close to your dream of Haunt Ownership....do you try to get more money or close up shop?

How do you find more money to keep going?

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# MONEY & FUNDING

Things to try:

**Keep your overhead costs low.** There are creative ways to start & continue a Haunt without spending lots of money. Finding a free space or working with an existing business, recycled building materials, focus on actors/design with less animatronics, using sponsors to offset costs, & starting small and adding more each year with the profits you made at the end of season. Just don't cut corners when it comes to safety!

# MONEY & FUNDING

Things to try:

**Savings or credit.** “With risk comes great reward.”  
Maybe it’s that 401K you can borrow against, a Home equity loan, credit cards, line of credit, your personal savings, selling something you don’t need anymore, downsizing your spending (cable, eating out, etc).  
Borrow only when you need to because you will have to pay it back...even if your attraction is open or not.  
**DO NOT** borrow money if it will have a negative affect on you...bad energy will only bring you down.

# MONEY & FUNDING

Things to try:

**Investors.** Having others give you money with expectations to get more money back in return can be risky as well. Make sure to get all transactions handled by an attorney. Make sure everyone knows their role when it comes to operating the attraction. Now is the time to ask those friends and family for help. (A fund raiser or asking for donations can also be a way to get capital without investors.)

# COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE

**The Fear:** Your neighbors, your community, that church next door, the non-Halloween/Horror folks, and anyone that may not understand the whole concept behind a Haunted Attraction can cause friction in your overall plan.

How do you get the community to support your Haunt?

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# COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE

Things to try:

**Give back to the community.** You don't have to be a charity Haunt to give back to your area. Designate a day/days where some of your proceeds go to a local food bank, school, police fund, animal shelter, or other public service in need. Get creative and use this chance to be a huge asset to the locals. Maybe your local school needs new art supplies or the High School Drama Class needs training in set design?

# COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE

Things to try:

**Have a family friendly day.** Your Haunt might be the scariest one around but this might confuse the uneducated about your event. Have a 'kid friendly' day. Maybe no actors one night, a daytime tour, Halloween-type activities, a pumpkin patch, etc. This shows your softer side and can also bring more awareness to those who want to come back for the SCARINESS.

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# COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE

Things to try:

**Include the community.** Always be respectful to your neighbors and it's a good chance they will be too. Keep them informed on your intentions for the season. Join your local Chamber of Commerce, ask the fire/police/military department for help in security or parking in return for donations to their organization, and don't be closed off to suggestions. Yes, you have a Haunt to run but without the support of your community it could be an uphill battle.

# THEMES & BACKSTORY

**The Fear:** Creating a theme and backstory for your Haunted Attraction can help you in your marketing, attendance, and return customers. Getting your theme just right will take some experimentation.

How do you create a theme or backstory to help get more attendance?

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## THEMES & BACKSTORY

**Things to Try:** Use a local story or urban legend from around your area.

Bringing realism to your attraction can provide a great way to make your attendees feel that they are part of a piece of history.

Examples: A missing person from long ago, a murder from many years ago, a local beast that lives in the woods. New events may be 'touchy'.

## THEMES & BACKSTORY

**Things to Try:** Think popular topics and events.

Zombies seem to be popular with the release of 'The Walking Dead'. The outbreak of Ebola caused a few virus-type of Haunts. Christmas themed Haunts might have a Scary Santa or a Krampus.

Some Haunts stick with one theme each year.

Some completely change it every season. It does cost more to have more than one theme.

# THEMES & BACKSTORY

**Things to Try:** Be different.

The structure of today's Scare Attraction can be a mixed blend of 'Traditional Style' 'Walk through by yourself' 'Blackout' 'Torture Style' 'We can Touch You' 'Gore and More' 'Over 18' 'Theatrical Style' 'Kid-Friendly' or a combination of all.

Choosing the right path depends on your target market and the flexibility you have as a Haunt Owner. Some have an attraction for each.

# MANAGING EMPLOYEES & VOLUNTEERS

**The Fear:** You have the space and the money to continue; now you need help building, decorating, acting, & operations. Hiring new or existing employees will cut into your budget and certain rules apply when using volunteers for a profitable event. This group of helpers will become the soul of your show because many Haunt crews bond like a family.

How will you keep your crew motivated, safe, & on track?

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A large group of people, many wearing costumes and masks, are posing in a dark, industrial setting. The scene is dimly lit, with a spotlight effect on the group. The background shows wooden beams and a dark interior. The overall atmosphere is spooky and festive.

**NETHERWORLD** 2011  
Haunted House

# MANAGING EMPLOYEES & VOLUNTEERS

Things to try:

**Hire Slow. Fire Fast.** Choosing the right crew for your event can make you or break you. One bad employee can ruin the environment for everyone. I know that we are usually desperate for help but you need to take your time when hiring. Start searching for help early. Screen your prospects. Ask for references. And don't be afraid to let someone go when you know that you should. One bad seed can cause havoc in your event.

# MANAGING EMPLOYEES & VOLUNTEERS

Things to try:

**Find the best in each person.** Knowing where people are the strongest is a learned behavior. When hiring, ask them what they are the best at and try them there first. Some are natural leaders. Some have the skill of decorating. Some just want to stand in a corner and scare the crap out of your guests. If you don't have the experience to manage, find someone who can. Poor management is the #1 reason for any business failure.

# MANAGING EMPLOYEES & VOLUNTEERS

Things to try:

**Keeping everyone safe.** When your employees feel safe they will be better employees. Pay on time. Keep communications open & keep them informed. Pre-show/daily/weekly meetings work great. Provide liability insurance in case someone gets hurt while working. Make sure safety is an everyday reminder. After-the-season awards for safety & attendance can be a great motivator.

# MARKETING-ADVERTISING-SPONSORS

**The Fears:** Marketing and Branding your attraction can be tough to translate to the general public. Advertising costs are rising and there are so many different ways to promote your event. Finding sponsors can help with costs but it's a struggle to find the right ones.

How do you get people to know about your event?

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# MARKETING – ADVERTISING - SPONSORS

Things to try:

**Know your target market.** Over 70% of the attendees that visit most Haunted Attractions are between the age 18-24. Research your area and decide who your paying audience is. Your local Chamber of Commerce or Assessor's Office might be a good place to start. You can't narrow down your marketing budget and stretch your dollar if you don't know who you are trying to reach.

# MARKETING – ADVERTISING - SPONSORS

Things to try:

**Advertise for the highest return on your \$\$.** Knowing where to run ads and how much to spend is a science. Different techniques work in different areas. Use social media for a long-term strategy all year. Always analyze your numbers and track where your money is being best spent. Radio/Internet Radio, Billboards, TV, Direct Mail, Newspapers, Community Ad Papers, Facebook Ads, Google Ads, and Public Campaigns seem to be the most popular.

# MARKETING – ADVERTISING - SPONSORS

Things to try:

**Sponsors can help promote & fund your attraction.**

Sponsorships can be used to fund the costs of ticketing, flyers/postcards, materials, employees/volunteers, & space. Sponsors usually have their name located on all of your promotional material in exchange for something you need of value. Maybe they have a warehouse you can use? Or have resources that you can use..like a lumberyard? Align your goals with the right sponsor. Make sure your sponsor knows exactly where and how often you will be sharing their name.

# TICKETING & QUEUE LINE CONTROL

**The Fear:** Printing tickets and keeping track of them is a pain. Who are the good online ticketing companies out there? And when the customers show up; how do you get them inside quickly, entertain them, and avoid a conga line? The right ticketing solution can help you manage your attendees efficiently and a well-designed queue line can make your Haunt seem longer.

How do you keep your lines shorter & also increase your attendance?

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# TICKETING & QUEUE LINE CONTROL

Things to try:

**Finding the right ticketing company.** There are many online ticketing businesses out there. You have to find the right one for your needs. 'Timed Ticketing' works if you are having issues with long wait times. Just using ticket automation can save you time & resources and it is easy to track your sales. Here are a few companies to look at: [HauntPay.com](http://HauntPay.com), [InteractiveTicketing.com](http://InteractiveTicketing.com), [TicketLeap.com](http://TicketLeap.com)

# TICKETING & QUEUE LINE CONTROL

Things to try:

**Make your queue line interactive.** If you immerse your audience into your show as soon as they show up, it keeps them entertained and time flies a bit faster. Using queue line actors to scare and interact with your customers gives them an opportunity to take pics/video to share with their friends. Designing your Haunt so that the waiting line goes through the environment reduces frustration and makes the experience last longer. Your customer is there to be entertained!

# TICKETING & QUEUE LINE CONTROL

Things to try:

**Using tickets as a promotional tool.** Selling tickets is the main way to make your revenue. They can also be a great way to promote your event if you use them wisely. You can use them in radio giveaways & local contests for extra exposure. You can ration them to your employees/volunteers as one of the worker benefits. Always keep track of all tickets being donated and note if it actually helps bring in more paying customers to your Haunt.

# COMPETITION

**The Fear:** In today's entertainment industry, not only are you competing with other Haunted Attractions but Horror Movies, Video Games, Tablets, Smartphones, Sports, the Weather & the shock factor of everyday life. It is difficult to maintain a show that will not grow stale and that is different than other Haunts in your area.

How do you use competition as you friend?

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# COMPETITION

Things to try:

**Team up with other Haunts.** Most people that go through a Haunted Attraction want to go through another one that same night. Include your nearby Haunts (Home & Pro) as places for your guests to go check out. Share with these Haunts your plans to include them at your show and most will return the favor. You may just discover how rewarding it is not having to compete with other Haunters in your area.

# COMPETITION

Things to try:

**Give them what they want.** Zombies. Vampires. Werewolves. Torture. Massacres. Witches. Asylums. Castles. These are all topics that have been popular in the news or media (movies, video games, etc.) off and on for the past several years. Many Haunts are successful by following social trends and adapting their shows around that theme. Other Haunts do the opposite and strive to be different. Give the fans what they crave while sticking to your unique artistic style.

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# COMPETITION

Things to try:

**Build around the weather.** Thunderstorms, snow storms, & freezing October nights can keep anyone at home. You can't stop mother nature but you can be creative. Build indoor & heated queue line areas. Offer 'rainy night' specials on admission. Outdoor trails need to be debris-free and well groomed. Customers will still show up on rainy nights if they feel safe and the value of your show stays strong.

# CUSTOMER SERVICE & NEGATIVE REVIEWS

**The Fear:** Now with social media and review websites, one angry customer can become a thorn in your side. More than one angry customer makes you question your entire operation. It's tough to make everyone happy and keep a good standing with your customers. Putting your customer first needs to be on your priority list but you can't please everyone.

How can you be confident that you are on the right track?

# CUSTOMER SERVICE & NEGATIVE REVIEWS

Things to try:

The customer is ~~always~~ sometimes right... You will not please everyone. All successful businesses have their oppositions. The Haunt business is the same. You need to keep your focus on safety, providing a great show, and making enough profit to pay off your bills and start again next year. These all revolve around pleasing your customer. Listen to honest feedback & use criticism as a yellow light. Keep your mind open to suggestions from more than one person.

# CUSTOMER SERVICE & NEGATIVE REVIEWS

Things to try:

**Make your show safe and entertaining.** Make sure safety is priority #1. Entertaining #2. When the customer feels safe and entertained, they usually have a good experience. Take classes on safety and use staff to help with crowd control and emergencies. Fire patrol & local police departments are great to have on staff, sometimes they even work for charity donations to their house funds. And if you can't scare the patrons...entertain them!

# CUSTOMER SERVICE & NEGATIVE REVIEWS

Things to try:

**Never engage back with negative behavior.** Fueling the negative fire never works. If you have negative reviews online, try to find out WHY the customer had the bad experience and make it right. Don't make excuses. Usually people just want to vent online & change their attitude a bit after you contact them. If you have a problem that night, make it RIGHT then. Put out the flame before it becomes a wild fire. Do Not make matters worse by insulting or making enemies. Make sure your actors know this too.

# THE TOP 13 FEARS OF A HAUNT OWNER

1. **Motivation to Keep Going:** Take a Break-Go To Other Haunts-Meet Other Haunters
2. **Time Management:** Get Up Early-Ask Friends & Family-Hire Someone to Help
3. **Finding Reliable Help:** Ask Friends & Family-Ask Other Haunters-Hire Quality People
4. **Choosing the Right Location:** What Type of Haunt?-Buy or Rent?-Property Checklist
5. **Codes/Permits/Safety:** Know Your Inspectors-Go By the Books-Hire a Consultant
6. **Money & Funding:** Keep Costs Low-Use Credit/Savings-Using Investors
7. **Community/Social Acceptance:** Give Back to Community-Family Day-Involve Community
8. **Theme & Backstory:** Local Stories-Popular Topics & Trends-Be Different
9. **Managing Employees & Volunteers:** Hire Slow-Find the Best in Your Crew-Safety First
10. **Marketing/Advertising/Sponsors:** Know Your Market-Specific Advertising-Sponsorships
11. **Ticketing & Queue Line:** Ticket Companies-Interactive Queue Line-Ticket Promotions
12. **Competition:** Team Up With Haunts-a Happy Customer-Design Around Weather
13. **Customer Service & Bad Reviews:** The Right Customer-Entertain Safely-No Bad Behavior

# HAUNTING CAN BE THE MOST REWARDING EXPERIENCE EVER! DON'T BE SCARED

Educate yourself on everything business, marketing, and haunted attractions. Even if it's outside the haunt industry.

Attend Haunt tradeshow/conventions to learn, meet new Haunters, and see what the options are out there for products.

Work at a Haunt for a bit to get the idea of what it's really like and pay attention to the systems involved.

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HAUNTING CAN BE THE MOST REWARDING EXPERIENCE EVER! DON'T BE SCARED.

Owning your first Haunted Attraction can be complicated if you don't know where to start.

In order to keep your Haunt doors open, you'll need keep researching your market and manage your profits.

Only the strong and passionate survive; but it can be the most rewarding business of your life.

Where else can you scare the crap out of people and get paid for it?

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HAUNTING CAN BE THE MOST REWARDING EXPERIENCE EVER! DON'T BE SCARED.

Here are a few things you can do today to get started on the right track.

- Subscribe to our newsletter to be notified of any upcoming webinars & training seminars.

<http://hauntopic.com/subscribe>

- Check out our FREE articles, training courses, and upcoming training webinars at

<http://www.haunterstoolbox.com>