



# A guide to marketing and promoting museums' venue hire

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## Introduction

This guide is based on two training sessions run for SHARED Enterprise in December 2017, on how museums can market and promote their venues for hire.

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## Identifying your offer

First, think about *why* your museum wants or needs to offer venue hire. Is it simply to generate income, or do you also see it as part of your community engagement work? Do you hope it will support audience development activities or is there another reason? Keep referring back to your reasons for doing it, as this will help to guide your approach.

Then think about what your museum can offer hirers:

- What spaces do you have? Do you have a standard meeting room? Beautiful grounds? A café? An education room? A car park? Do you have spaces that lend themselves to lavish events, or interesting backdrops for photography and filming?
- When are the spaces available? (Consider when the museum is closed; the potential impact on visitors or other activities; staff / volunteer availability; and temperature.)
- What staff and volunteer availability, skills, experience and interest is there in running venue hire? Can you run it in-house or would it make sense to use an external events organiser? Do you need to organise training for anyone?
- Is there anything that is unique, quirky or unusual about your museum, its facilities, location or objects that could make your offer stand out and attract bookings?

Here are some possible hire options to consider:

- Board meetings, seminars, training, workshops, away days
- Conferences
- Weddings or wedding receptions
- Film and photography location hire
- Smaller hire needs such as community groups,
- Themed or niche venue hire e.g. for a steampunk event
- Bigger events such as award ceremonies, fashion shows, festivals
- Charity dinners, auctions and corporate dinners
- Christmas dinners or events
- Birthday parties, anniversaries, retirement parties.

You may want to do a SWOT analysis (identifying your museum's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats with regards to venue hire) to help you understand the venue hire market and how you might fit in.

## Competitor analysis

It is also important to understand which organisations and buildings will be your competitors.

- What other options are there in your area for venue hire? For example, hotels, business centres, community halls, stately homes etc.
- How much do they charge?
- What do they offer?
- Who are they targeting? For example, are they aimed at corporate or community bookings? Large or small events? Bespoke or standardised offerings? And so on.
- Have you got anything to offer that they don't have?

Understand:

- how much others are charging
- what you have or don't have that they do
- the aspects that clients really value and are prepared to pay for.

Consider mapping out your competitors to understand if there are any gaps in the market that you could plug, and where your museum's venue hire offer can fit in.

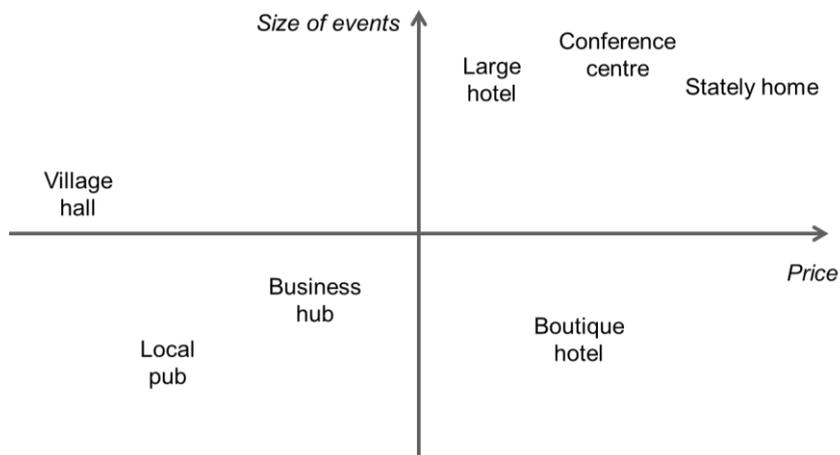
**Example: Fill out facilities and charges**

Venue name	Day hire charge (9am-5pm)	Coffee & tea per person	Lunch charge per person	Other extra costs (e.g. technology)	Wifi?	Key advantages (e.g. natural daylight)	Key disadvantages (e.g. no on-site car parking)

**Example: Tickbox by type of event catered for**

Venue For example:	Seminar / board meeting	Community group meet-up	Day conference	Evening reception	Parties	Wedding reception
Village hall						
Hotel						
Conference centre						
Business hub						
Pub						
Your museum						

**Example: Plot against two variables**



## Your target market

Undertake some market research to understand what demand there might be for hire of your venue. Talk to relevant people such as representatives of your local Chamber of Commerce, business networking groups, wedding and event organisers etc. Look at what public events are run in your area and whether they are one-offs or regular (for example look at [www.eventbrite.co.uk](http://www.eventbrite.co.uk), [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com) and [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)).

Identify your target clients, your likely clients and their needs:

- Who might book that type of event?
- Who has budget for this?
- Who is responsible for decision-making?
- Where do they go for information on venue hire?
- How far in advance do they book?
- What will they expect?

Potential clients might include:

- Local businesses
- Business networking organisations
- Business federations
- Community groups and organisations
- Charities
- Universities
- Colleges
- Schools
- Festivals
- Cultural organisations
- PR companies
- Tourism organisations
- Local authorities
- Print media
- Fashion organisations
- TV and film companies.

Some examples that demonstrate the variety and creative venue hire uses that museums offer include:

- The Escape Network hires [Essex Police Museum](#) as a venue for their escape room events and activities;
- [Bursledon Brickworks Museum](#) hires out its car park and site for a dog training company, search and rescue, and is regularly used as a photography and film location, in particular for gloomy and gritty backdrops for period and crime dramas that make the most of the site and brick-lined corridors and kilns;
- [Farnborough Air Sciences Trust Museum](#) – with its relevant collections and convenient location – provides popular opportunities for venue hire for corporate hosting during the Farnborough International Airshow.

## Facilities and equipment

Once you have identified what you can offer, consider what facilities and equipment hirers would expect and what you would need to provide. Identify what would be the bare essentials or non-negotiables (such as ambient temperature and drinks facilities) and what would be nice-to-haves that you might not need to invest in straight away.

Think about storage (for example, if you invest in many chairs and tables, where will you store them when they are not being used?), whether technology is likely to become quickly out of date, and how frequently

items will be used. Some equipment will be more cost-effective to buy upfront, some better if you hire on occasions when needed, and others you could consider buying once you have seen a demand and have several bookings or enquiries requesting them.

## Thinking like a hirer

Consider what a hirer might want, and see how you can meet these requirements. For example:

- Simple package options to choose from
- Transparent and clear costs, easy to get a quote
- Value for money
- Prompt responses
- Friendly and helpful service
- A trusted, experienced and capable pair of hands
- Prompts and ideas they may not have considered (e.g. an area for coats, ice for drinks)
- Something extra, distinctive, personalised
- Flexibility
- Suitable accessibility
- Practical and comfortable seating and tables
- Sufficient and clean toilets
- Appropriate lighting and audio-visual technology
- Suitable temperature
- Food and drink, cutlery and crockery
- Anything else to help make the event a success!

## Charging

Make sure you are clear on what costs you will incur so you don't make a loss. These are likely to include overheads and fixed costs such as heating, advertising, licenses and insurance; as well as variable costs such as catering and staff time.

Ensure that you know what competitors charge and this knowledge, combined with your understanding of how your offer is different or similar to competitors, will help you decide how you should price your venue hire. You can charge a flat hire fee, or a per person fee, or a combination of the two.

### Pricing strategies

If you have very basic facilities, you could consider **economy pricing**, charging a low price for a no-frills product or service, as this will appeal to those who are most price conscious (although your margins will be smaller). Examples of businesses using economy pricing are Ryanair and supermarket value ranges.

If you have excellent facilities and services and can offer a high-quality experience, consider **premium pricing**, where you charge a high price that nonetheless the hirer finds fair and is prepared to pay as they perceive and value higher quality, exclusivity, brand association and so on. For example premium fashion brands, high-end cars and restaurants.

Or if your offer is somewhere in between, then a **mid-range pricing** offer is likely to be more suitable.

You can also have a variety of packages to suit different hirers. Consider using pricing variations – different prices in particular circumstances – to maximise bookings. The travel market does this very successfully e.g. off-peak, first class, flexible tickets, reward systems, early bird offers, add-on options, inclusive benefits and so on. Just avoid making it too complicated for hirers or for you.

For example:

- **A launch offer** when you first announce your venue hire offer, for people who book within a short space of time (e.g. 1-4 weeks).
- **Off-peak pricing** where you have cheaper options available for times when bookings tend to be quieter. This might include Mondays, January and February, summer holidays, and Sunday evenings. For example, [Liverpool Museums](#) offered 1 free place for every 10 delegates booked for events at the Merseyside Maritime Museum between January and March 2018.
- **Early booking discounts** to encourage people to book and pay deposits early – for example for conferences booked a year in advance.
- **Bundles / block booking / repeat order discounts** – reward repeat or regular bookers with discounts. This also makes sense as generally repeat bookings won't involve as much administration and work on your side.
- **A discounted rate for community groups and charities**, especially during off-peak times and if they are regular bookers.
- **A discount for corporate members or members of your museum's Friends** as a member benefit.

You can also consider **psychological pricing**, where customers respond emotionally rather than rationally – for example, setting menus at £9.95 rather than £10.

Consider upselling, encouraging bookers to spend a little more, for example:

- Adding biscuits to their drinks order
- Charging extra for audio-visual equipment
- Charging extra for an extra hour of set-up or clear-up time
- Providing a 'museum extra' such as a tour by a curator, a Q&A session, object handling.

**Ultimately, do not be scared of thinking commercially!**

## Venue hire packs

Consider putting together some form of venue hire pack or guide with all the key information about your services in one place. This could be anything from a few typed-out pages available to download and print from your website, to a more professionally designed brochure with high-quality photography available on your website and also in hard copy for mailing and handing out.

Make your venue hire pack easily available on your website – for the hirer to download as a PDF immediately, and for you to post out if you decide to produce hard copies. A PDF can be easily shared, emailed and printed, but is not search engine friendly, so make sure you include at least some of the text from the PDF as standard copy on your website too.

Understand who your target hirers are and what they would expect or need – a brochure with sumptuous photography printed on quality paper will help sell a high-end corporate or wedding offer, but would be unnecessary for hire for community groups, and a disproportionate investment for your return.

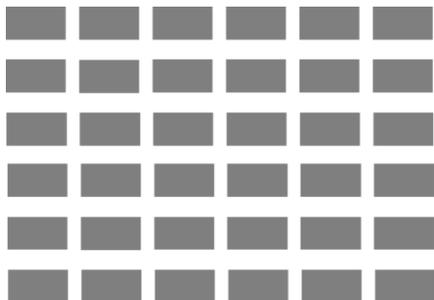
If you decide to print copies, think about how you can give the brochure a longer shelf-life – e.g. put prices (which may change frequently) in separate inserts so you don't regularly have to re-print the whole pack. Consider where you can display them, what events you can take them to and who you can mail them to.

A venue hire pack will typically include:

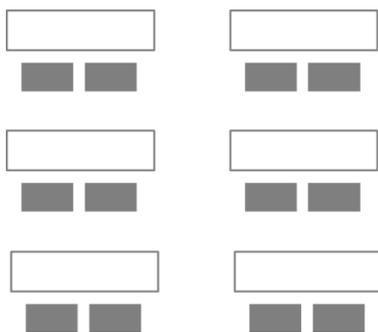
- Copy to sell your venue
- Excellent photography
- A clear breakdown of what spaces are available for hire and their sizes
- Example room layouts (see below)
- Minimum and maximum numbers of people for each room and layout
- Any big restrictions e.g. you only hire out on a Monday, or during daytime
- Prices and packages
- Sample menu(s)
- A list of approved or suggested suppliers such as caterers (if not done in-house)
- A map and directions (unless you are only focussing on very local bookers)
- Any added value or upsell options
- Contact information.

### Example room layouts

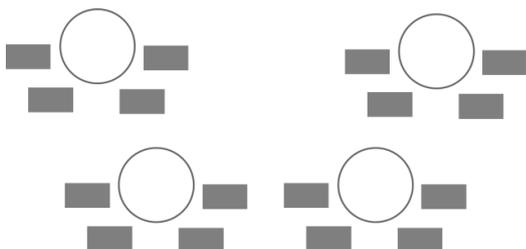
#### Theatre-style



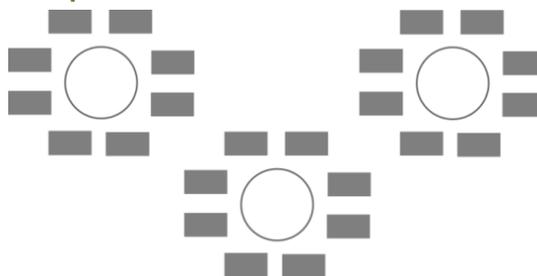
#### Classroom



#### Cabaret



#### Banquet



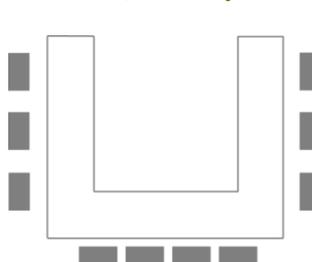
#### Reception



#### Boardroom



#### Seminar / U-shape



## Promotion

### Naming your services

Before you dive into promoting your venue hire services, make sure that you have the right name for them. The following real examples from museums' venue hire brochures show how different names imply different services and different target audiences:

- "Event spaces"
- "Corporate hire brochure"
- "Venue hire"
- "Parties & special events".

### Images

It's worth investing in good photos that show the scope and potential of your venue. They will showcase what you can offer and help give potential hirers an understanding of whether your venue is right for them. Ideally you will build up a bank of photos:

- Landscape and portrait for use in different media (landscape is the most common format for online listings sites and websites)
- With and without people in them (images with people can better show the ambience, help potential hirers imagine the sort of events that you can stage and show your track record, but online listings sites tend to require venue photos without people)
- Stage photos by setting up your rooms with different seating layouts and use basic props such as flowers, glasses, pens and paper
- Ask clients for permission for you to take and/or use photos from their events (with credits)
- Ask suppliers if they have photos you can use (e.g. showing catering options)
- If you lack photos, you could buy a stock photo for something generic (i.e. not site-specific) such as champagne flutes, coffee or people networking, to show the types of events you host.

### Website

If you are serious about offering venue hire as a key service, it would be wise to create a space for this in your main website navigation. That way, potential bookers don't have to hunt for it under other unrelated headings, and this might also put your venue hire on the radar of other website visitors too.

Make sure that your copy about your venue hire offer is well written, relevant and up-to-date. Think about how much information you want to give hirers at this stage – whether you want them to have access to all the information they might need to make a decision, whether you want to encourage them to contact you for all the details, or somewhere in between.

### Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

Also devote some time to SEO, so that your museum appears early in search engine listings for *relevant* searches (organically, i.e. without paying for advertising), such as:

- "conference venue Peterborough"
- "wedding venue North Norfolk"
- "meeting room hire Chelmsford".

Try some likely searches and see where you appear. Ask hirers and potential hirers what they searched for (if they did). For more detailed guides on SEO, please see the links at the end of this document.

### **Promote to existing contacts**

Ensure your existing stakeholders and contacts are aware of your venue hire services as they might well become a booker:

- Make sure you inform volunteers and Friends.
- Can you display venue hire packs, flyers or posters at the museum?
- Can you include news or offers in your e-newsletter?
- Can you share photos of events (with hirers' permission) and offers on social media?

### **Host an event**

Consider hosting your own event with relevant attendees for the type of events you want to promote, to start spreading the word about your venue hire and give you a track record. For example, can you host a local business networking breakfast, an awards ceremony, a wedding fair, or a crafts fair? For example, hosting a local business group will showcase your venue to a range of potential future bookers from different organisations, who may well be interested in booking or passing on details about your venue and their experience to others.

You can also consider hosting a specific event to officially launch your new venue hire service, with tours of your facilities, sample catering and perhaps discounts for people who attend and then book within a limited timeframe. However, remember that people are busy, so make sure it's a suitable date and time and that you give people a reason or incentive to attend. Encourage people to share photos from the event on social media with an appropriate hashtag.

### **Proactive contact and relationships**

Proactively contact and build relationships with potential clients, suppliers and stakeholders:

- Business networking organisations
- Event organisers
- Caterers
- Florists
- PR companies and consultants
- Business networks
- Community organisations
- Wedding dress shops
- Tourism organisations.

You can also consider exhibiting or attending relevant networking events.

### **Listings websites**

Do some research on venue listings websites that might be relevant to your venue. Some will be generic; others will be for specific types of venue hire (e.g. weddings, film locations). Type various relevant venue hire search terms into your search engine and see which listings websites appear towards the top of the page. Many will be paid for, so compare costs and any other data that the site will provide (such as monthly or annual website traffic to their site, the average number of clicks an advertiser can expect).

If you decide to get listed on any of these sites, make sure you monitor the referral traffic from each listings website to your website and also ask hirers how they found you, so you can evaluate whether or not it's worth continuing with each year.

## Evaluation

Make sure you track and evaluate your venue hire activities. For example:

- Ask potential hirers where they heard about you
- Monitor what promotions are successful in driving interest and bookings
- Monitor website referral traffic to your venue hire pages
- Provide a feedback form to hirers so you can improve your offer and learn what works well
- Pass on praise and lessons learned to members of the team who are involved
- Consider using testimonials and star ratings in future marketing efforts.

## Top tips

- Start small and manageable, and build from there
- Do what works for you and what there is a market for
- Don't try to do, or be, all things to all people
- Think commercially
- Provide an excellent service!

## Additional resources

### Guidance

AIM Success Guides: Successful venue hire and corporate hospitality: [www.aim-museums.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Successful-Venue-Hire-2017.pdf](http://www.aim-museums.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Successful-Venue-Hire-2017.pdf)

Room capacity calculator from The Conference People: [www.confpeople.co.uk/free-venue-finding/room-capacity-calculator](http://www.confpeople.co.uk/free-venue-finding/room-capacity-calculator)

SEO guides written by [Thirty8 Digital](http://www.thirty8digital.com) (and a host of other online marketing and digital engagement guides and resources by Thirty8 Digital and others): [www.southwestmuseums.org.uk/publications-resources/digital-engagement-resources/](http://www.southwestmuseums.org.uk/publications-resources/digital-engagement-resources/)

Creative England: Register your venue as a film location: [www.creativeengland.co.uk/film-and-tv/filming-locations#r19](http://www.creativeengland.co.uk/film-and-tv/filming-locations#r19)

Museum Association's Museum Practice on venue hire: [www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/12773](http://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/12773) (MA membership required to access)

Museum Association's Museum Practice on filming locations: [www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/12774](http://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/12774) (MA membership required to access)

### Licences and legislation

Government guidance on entertainment licences: [www.gov.uk/guidance/entertainment-licensing-changes-under-the-live-music-act](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/entertainment-licensing-changes-under-the-live-music-act)

Government guidance on alcohol licences: [www.gov.uk/guidance/alcohol-licensing](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/alcohol-licensing)

Health and Safety Executive: Venue and site design: [www.hse.gov.uk/event-safety/venue-site-design.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/event-safety/venue-site-design.htm)

Government information about applying to be a premise for civil marriages and civil partnerships: [www.gov.uk/approval-of-premises-for-civil-marriage-or-civil-partnership](http://www.gov.uk/approval-of-premises-for-civil-marriage-or-civil-partnership)

Bedfordshire (links at the bottom of the page to PDFs): [www.bedford.gov.uk/council\\_and\\_democracy/registration\\_service/marriage\\_and\\_civil\\_partnership/approved\\_venues.aspx](http://www.bedford.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/registration_service/marriage_and_civil_partnership/approved_venues.aspx)

Cambridgeshire: [www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/births-deaths-and-marriages/ceremonies/apply-to-become-a-ceremony-venue/](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/births-deaths-and-marriages/ceremonies/apply-to-become-a-ceremony-venue/)

Essex: [www.essex.gov.uk/Business-Partners/licences/Business%20licences%20available%20from%20ECC/Pages/Wedding-venues.aspx](http://www.essex.gov.uk/Business-Partners/licences/Business%20licences%20available%20from%20ECC/Pages/Wedding-venues.aspx)

Hertfordshire: [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk)

Norfolk: [www.norfolk.gov.uk/business/licences-and-permits/become-an-approved-venue](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/business/licences-and-permits/become-an-approved-venue)

Suffolk: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/births-deaths-and-ceremonies/apply-for-a-venue-licence-for-marriages-and-civil-partnerships/>

### Relevant associations

Association of Event Organisers: [www.aeo.org.uk](http://www.aeo.org.uk)

Association of British Professional Conference Organisers: [www.abpco.org](http://www.abpco.org)

Association of Event Venues: [www.aev.org.uk](http://www.aev.org.uk)