

To give you more of an insight into our Christmas Fair, and the team at Orchard Events Ltd, below are some FAQ's answered by Nicky Stephenson, founder of Festive Gift Fair.

How long has Orchard Events been running Festive Gift Fair?

I launched the Fair at the NEC, Birmingham 27 years ago! Sharla has been an integral part of the team for 15 years now. We have both worked on a whole host of shows in our careers, trade and public. Both good experienced all-rounders... creativity, administration, sales, marketing and a huge amount of passion and energy!

Not only are we professional event organisers but we also have a great understanding of the gift industry - know loads of stallholders and consistently deliver large numbers of Christmas Shoppers each year.

Why do you stage the Fair at NEC, Birmingham?

Because it's indoors, in the Heart of the Country, has great road and rail infrastructure, easy access for stallholders, and easy to get to with plenty of parking and a train station onsite. We don't want to be in the middle of a field in November!! Plus, we have the best floor management team in the UK, who are local to the NEC and have helped us run the Fair for many many many years!

What makes you different from other Christmas Fairs?

- 26 successful years! Still under the same original ownership... familiar faces and friendly voices!
- You're dealing with the same people at Orchard Events all year round.
- We go to town on presentation with lots of Christmas decorations but main thing is the quality and quantity of the entertainers - Festive characters and live musicians that bring the show alive!
- Easy build up and breakdown - drive into the hall for loading/unloading and the best on-site floor management team!

How many Christmas shoppers do you expect at Festive Gift Fair?

Without question, Festive Gift Fair is one of the most anticipated consumer events held annually at the NEC. For many years visitor numbers have consistently been between 28,000-33,000 over the four days.

Numbers in the hall are dictated to us by the Health & Safety regulations of the NEC. It's so busy, at peak times we occasionally have had to stagger visitors entering the hall if it's full to capacity.

How many stands are there?

Our floor plan is tried and tested over many years - it's the right size and right layout for the shoppers to see everything and not get overwhelmed or disorientated! So... we don't try and change or enlarge it, we keep the number

at 325 making sure there is a good ratio between volume of stands and shoppers.

How many stands do you allow selling similar products?

We try not to put likeminded products next to each other. We like to mix up in the hall so there is a surprise around every corner which increases the fun shopping experience. If we're getting too many enquiries from a specific gift category, we make the hard decision to turn some stallholders away and cap that particular product.

We do not offer exclusivity unless very specific. To be honest, despite all our efforts in advance (talking to customers and learning their product/price point), we don't always know until the day exactly what each stallholder will bring. Most have a lot of different stock and sometimes make last minute changes unbeknown to us! Nowadays it also depends on other factors such as supply and freight.

How much can I expect to take at Festive Gift Fair?

That's a difficult one to answer! In the main, our sellers are reluctant to share their takings with us.

We monitor and gauge the success of the Fair by the visitor footfall (always good) and the number of stallholders that rebook year on year. Plus... we rely on feedback from our onsite team. The guys that run the Exhibitor Store have a good handle on this, as they witness all the re-stocking that takes place throughout the day. Likewise, the Present Creche (where purchases can be left securely in crates) gives us a very good indication of the amount of shopping that goes on.

Despite economic challenges and venue/contractor price increases, we have taken the decision not to put our stand costs up this year. We appreciate that the investment, the logistics, setting up, staffing and selling is full on and we want all our stallholders to enjoy being part of the Fair and make a good return.

How do you promote Festive Gift Fair?

We invest heavily in visitor promotion - radio, leaflet distribution, posters, roadside signs, press coverage, competitions, emails and social media campaigns. In addition to our own marketing, word of mouth is huge!

Working in tandem with the NEC venue and Ticket Factory Box Office - results in 94% of visitors planning ahead and pre-booking tickets. Walk-ups are available too on each of the 4 days.

What happens when I reserve a stand?

It's pretty straight forward... we'll send you a one page contract for completion/signature and a deposit invoice for £200. The 2nd stage payment of 40% is due mid July and the balance payment mid October. Payment can be made by credit/debit card or BACS. At the end of August we'll email you the Exhibitor Manual containing all the info to help you plan everything smoothly in advance. Mid-October, you'll receive some complimentary tickets for clients/friends along with the Final Exhibitor Instructions.

What's included in the stand cost?

- white shell scheme walls
- silver grey carpet
- snowflake name board with company name and stand number
- decorative Christmas icicle lighting along the top fascia
- free Exhibitor Store
- link through from our website to yours
- 1 x vehicle car parking pass for duration of the show

It's then down to you to make your stand look gorgeous! It doesn't have to cost a lot to be creative and Christmassy ... make it bright and eye-catching and you'll attract more shoppers to your stand!

When can we set up our stand?

The day before the Fair opens ... Wednesday 15th November any time between 8am-8pm. There will be a NEC traffic system in place. The great thing is you can drive into the back of hall to unload so no getting wet if it's raining or indeed snowing!

It's a good time to say 'hello' to our team who run our free Exhibitor Store and get allocated a defined area for your stock.

On arrival in the hall, come and see us in the Organisers Office to pick up exhibitor badges and vehicle pass.

What other Christmas Fairs do you run?

We don't! We work our socks off to make each year better than the last focusing all our energy and expertise on this **ONE BRILLIANT FAIR!** We have a large number of sub-contractors from electricians to musicians we need to connect with throughout the year to ensure the smooth running of the event. After all these years, Sharla and I still get excited about seeing it all come together.

