

We've had several exhibitions in the time I've been with the Tennessee Valley Woodworkers Club and all were a lot of fun and accomplished our goal of exposing the Club and Woodworking in general to the public at large in our area. Some were merely a collection of items at a place and at a time. Others were organized and had orchestrated, planned steps. A judgment as to whether the more strongly organized accomplished as much as those lesser so I'll leave to the reader's judgment while admitting that there are advantages in both approaches.

This article intends to describe how the 2014 "In the Spirit of Fine Woodworking" exhibition was organized and critique it to a certain extent with the hope that mistakes made this time are avoided in the next attempt – should the next chairman decide to use the more stringently organized model.

The goals for the exhibition were stated up front as to meet the Mission and Purpose expressed in the Club's Constitution with emphasis on providing a means for bonding within the membership.

Mission/Purpose

The mission of the Tennessee Valley Woodworkers is to promote woodworking skills within our group and the community and to provide a means for fellowship with other people having a similar interest. Anyone interested in woodworking is welcome

Again a judgment as to whether the latter was achieved is left to the membership, but the number of visitors to the site and their comments speaks for the acceptance of the exhibition by the public.

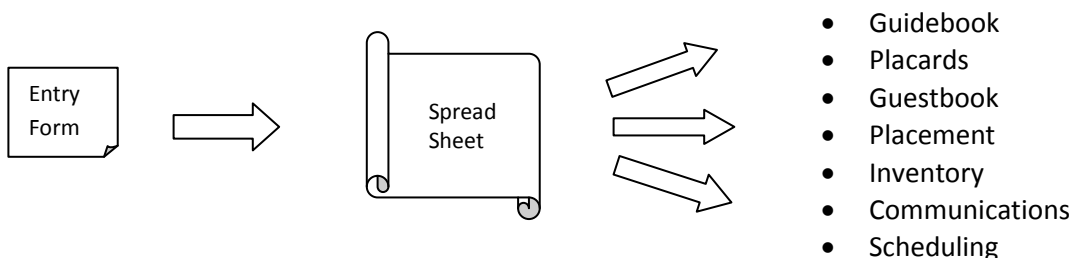
Process

A process was designed, based on learning from the 2009 Exhibition of the same name, to avoid some of the pitfalls of that event while using the basic scheme. Without going into the motivational aspects of the early days of the project; (e.g. meeting presentations, promotional use of old video, lectures, etc.) the plan has a flow that was used to get the committee functioning without detailed daily instructions.

Entry Forms: The process begins with the prospective exhibitor filling out an entry form. The form was preprinted to include the necessary information for planning and inventory control. It included spaces to identify the exhibitor and descriptions of his/her items offered for display.

Excel Spreadsheet: The second step in the process included an Excel Worksheet in which the pertinent information from the entry form was logged. Since the worksheet included the information from the entry form, the entry form became obsolete once the data were entered into the worksheet.

Activity performance: There were several activities that branched from the worksheet. Once enough information was entered, the spreadsheet was passed on to the committee members needing that data.



The flow provided for all information to flow to one individual relieving the other committee members from having to make multiple contacts or for exhibitors to interact directly with those responsible for providing documents (e.g., placards) and others responsible for actual placement of the items. The result of this organization was that committee members could focus on their outcomes rather than interfacing with the exhibitors for the information needed to accomplish their tasks.

A shortcoming in this approach occurred in the design of the entry form. The Guidebook and Placards required a biographical sketch of the exhibitor. This should be included in the entry form and some means of accommodating the information flow incorporated in the spreadsheet. One way might be to scan the entry sheet and include a link in the spreadsheet to the scanned document but it could be accommodated more efficiently by overcoming another shortcoming; that being the form of the entry form itself.

It was thought that a hardcopy would be best but later in the project we encouraged exhibitors to enter their items using a formatted email. This was done to expedite the entry process due to lateness of entries – in fact many of the exhibitors delayed their entries to the last minute despite constant requests to get them in early – but in retrospect it would have been easier to have as many as had basic computer literacy to use the email process. This would have avoided much of the manual entry (vis. Copy and paste) and will enable the biographical entry without much difficulty.

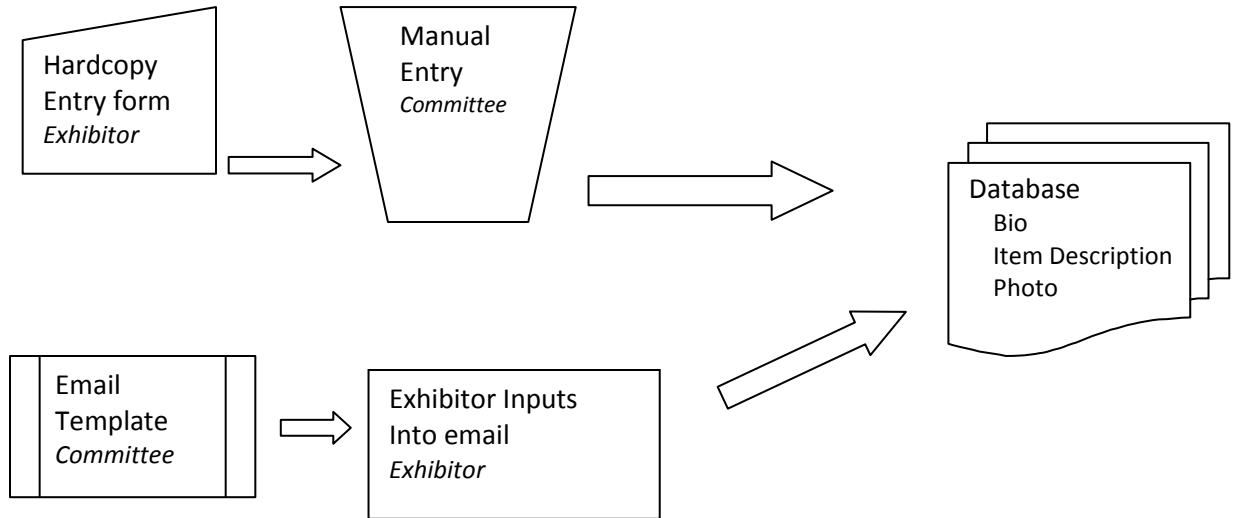
Another issue was the desire to have photos of the exhibitors on their Placards and in the Guidebook. That is not only a nice touch but enables the Monitor to more personally connect guests with the exhibitors who may be an acquaintance. The spreadsheet contained the contact information for each presenter so they could be contacted to provide a digital photo of them in their shop environment. Some thought needs to be given to streamlining this process as well.

An issue came up with the format of the spreadsheet itself. The Excel program has many functions that one can use to enhance everything from convenience in viewing to sorting or filtering. The expertise of the users of the spreadsheet requires that formatting at one level doesn't preclude the use of the spreadsheet downstream in the process. An early understanding of these nuances needs to be discussed so that each committee member's needs could be met. It's recognized here that this isn't an easy task since one has no idea of what the other's needs or experiences are; hence the need for upfront communications.

Future exhibition committees would be well advised to set an earlier deadline for entries. The 2014 deadline was set only nine days before hands on set-up activity. Given the need for final planning of support activities and scheduling the actual reception of the exhibits, this turned out to cause some concentrated work on the part of the committee.

Having a more complete data base containing all the information needed and linked to the spreadsheet is technically possible and could decrease the hands on work of the committee. The majority of the exhibitors have enough email skills to fill in their exhibit descriptions and biographical sketches to permit copy/paste transfer from emails to the database. The same could be said for the photos needed for Placards and Guidebook use – taking a photo and sending it via email is what is currently done. The

photo can be added to the database and linked to the spreadsheet easily enough. For those without email facility or skill, there would be a need to manually input the data from a hardcopy entry form similar to the way it was done in the 2014 event.



In the streamlined procedure, the manual process remains as it has been with the spreadsheet committee member typing in all the data manually. A request for biographic information and a photo can be given up front with the exhibitor providing the text on the hardcopy form and emailing the photo to the database manager. Those using the email input would receive a template from the committee into which they would put the item description and biographical sketches and attach the digital photograph as an attachment. The Database manager would then copy and paste the data into the database and link it to the spreadsheet. Alternatively, a interactive PDF could be sent to exhibitors and used by those with the technology and computer skills. I'm sure there are other options but these examples point to the fact that a process could be set up to alleviate the drudgery and confusion caused by the intense effort of manual input and the myriad of phone and email swaps.