



These are a Few of My Favorite Things... *The Best of the Booth Mom's® Gang Box*

Candy Adams, CTSM | CEM | CMP | CMM

After 25+ years on the show floor, I've assembled an arsenal of packing materials, tools, cleaners, and comfort items that go with me to every show. Sort of like my AmEx card, I "don't leave home without them!"

And, in case you're wondering, I don't own stock in any of the companies mentioned, but have been using their products for years and found them to be of good quality and with good customer service when I've ordered them either from their catalogs or online. Are they the *only* vendors of these items? No, but they've never let me down when I needed something! And that's worth a lot!

Packing Materials and Adhesives

D Containers - If crates are out of your price range, consider purchasing large, reusable boxes you can assemble on pallets, called "D Containers", "air cargo containers" or "Gaylord boxes". If you're not familiar with them, think of an oversized cardboard copy paper box on a large pallet. It takes five pieces to assemble



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each container: a rectangular wooden pallet, a box bottom, a 3-sided side panel with a separate 4th side panel for easy loading, and a lid. The size of a D Container varies slightly from 48" x 39" x 40" to 58" x 41" x 45".

The beauty of using D containers is that they break down for storage to the size of just the lid and base (about 12" tall) with the pallet and cardboard side wall panels folded up inside. I can generally get 3 to 4 shipments' use out of these containers and then start cannibalizing the undamaged parts and disposing of the damaged ones. They're efficient to ship, especially via van line, as they fit two wide and two tall in the van when placed on stacker bars.



D Containers can be purchased from companies selling packaging materials and boxes and cost about \$50 - \$75 each, depending on the quantity you buy. But before buying them, check with your internal shipping department to see if they ever receive inbound product in these containers and can save them for you for additional cost savings. My local vendor, who's nationwide, is Kent H. Landsberg, and can be found on the Web at www.landsberg.com.

Portable Strapping Kit - To secure D Containers or cartons to a pallet, I recommend using a portable strapping kit that comes with the polypropylene strapping, cutter and buckles. It's small enough to be easily shipped, or you can pre-cut pieces long enough to fit around your D Containers and put them in plastic bags with their metal clips. A portable strapping kit costs under \$50 and definitely worth owning.



These kits can be found via the Internet or catalog sales through packaging material vendors. I get mine through Uline (www.uline.com) and do a key word search on "strapping kits". I purchase the 1/2" x 3000 ft. portable box with the metal fasteners.

Adhesive Bubble Wrap – If you have product or odd-shaped items you have to pack for your shows that need extra protection, use adhesive Bubble Mask®. It comes in varying widths (6", 12" and 24") and is perforated every 12". It is reusable, and peels off easily. It doesn't leave any sticky residue and sticks to just about everything but finished wood surfaces. Again, check out www.uline.com and do a search on "Bubble Mask".



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Black Stretch Wrap – Although clear stretch wrap (also known by the misnomer in our industry as “shrink wrap” although heat isn’t applied to make it shrink) is the norm, I’ve learned to love opaque black stretch wrap film for securing my cartons on pallets. It’s well worth the additional investment of a couple of extra dollars a roll more than clear stretch wrap, especially if you’re using original cartons that show names or photos of valuables on the outside of the carton and you want to conceal your contents. (But, I’ve also been warned by my I & D labor that based on it looking like you’re trying to conceal something valuable, it may actually entice thieves.) And, if you happen to misplace a wrapped pallet of cartons on the show floor, it can help you differentiate your pallet from the sea of brown cardboard wrapped in clear plastic.



The prices for black stretch wrap are similar to that of clear stretch wrap – between \$20 and \$30 a roll, and usually sold in cases of 4 rolls. To locate black stretch wrap, do a key word search on “black stretch wrap film” or check out my favorite vendor, www.uline.com.

Neon-colored Paper and Spray-on Glue – If you want your black-wrapped pallets to REALLY stand out, create your own shipping labels on bright, neon-colored paper. Depending on the office supply store you choose, they may be called “Brights” or “Astrobright”, and are generally available in various sized reams of 8-1/2” x 11” sheets containing 5 different colors.



This paper is both laser and ink jet compatible. I generally print two labels per page at the top and bottom of the page in portrait format. Using color-coded labels allows you to easily and quickly eyeball that you’ve removed all the inbound shipping labels to avoid mix-ups or color-code your shipment to different locations or shows.



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To adhere my brightly colored labels to my boxes and crates, I use either clear plastic packing list envelopes (that I can usually get from my client's shipping department or use the ones provided by FedEx or UPS). Or, if I want to stick the label directly on the freight container, I use 3M Artists' Spray Mount, which comes in a number of different levels of tackiness and allows you to remove or reposition labels easily. Both paper and spray mount are available at any large office supply store.



Tear-by-Hand Tape - If you've ever gotten bitten by a tape gun (ouch!) or frustrated trying to load tape onto one, this product is for you! It is good quality packing tape made by 3M that seals securely, but has little microscopic cuts along the edges that allow you to tear it by hand without a need for a tape gun with metal teeth or scissors. (And your dentist will thank you for not biting off pieces of tape!)



To find vendors, do an Internet search on "3M Tear-by-Hand Tape" and buy by the case to save money. And, a word to the wise – everybody who helps you pack for your shows will love it, so buy extra since it seems to grow feet and walk away!

Velcro (a.k.a. Hook and Loop) – How did trade shows run before Velcro was invented in 1948? I never leave home without at least one full 25-yard roll each of male (hook) and female (loop) Velcro.



Depending on the color of your exhibit or graphics, you can purchase rolls of hook and loop fastener in black or white, and in a number of widths from 1/4" to 3/4" to 1". It also comes in small squares, dots, and even wire managers.

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Prices vary by manufacturer and width but beware of inexpensive knock-off products with inferior adhesive, unless you want to find your damaged graphics on the floor the day after you hang them. I get very good deals from Bron Tape at www.brontapes.com/products.html.

Duct Tape and Gaffer Tape – A few years ago, Lee Knight, Exhibitor’s publisher, gave me a book called “The Duct Tape Book” listing hundreds of uses for duct tape (also known under the brand name of Duck Tape). Surprisingly, holding your broken exhibit together or taping closed the cuts made in your carpet for access to your electrical wiring weren’t even listed in the book!



Duct tape was originally a wide silvery, fabric-backed adhesive tape intended to seal joints in sheet metal duct work but now has hundreds of other uses and a cult following. Through the years it has evolved to being available in many colors and widths. One of the downsides, though, is that it leaves a sticky residue.

Enter gaffer tape (also known as gaffer's tape, gaff tape, gaffing tape, or cloth tape), a tough, fabric-backed adhesive tape used extensively in entertainment industries that doesn’t leave a sticky residue like duct tape. Because it doesn’t leave any residual goo behind, it’s favored by the AV staff and electricians who tape wiring to the floor of convention centers. It’s also great for bundling wiring in your booth, because it doesn’t leave glop on your cables after it’s removed.



The tape is manufactured in many colors, including fluorescent and custom ones, but found most commonly in matte black, red and white. Get the gaffer tape closest to your exhibit color and you won’t need WD40 to remove the residual adhesive from duct tape!

Cleaners and Polishes

Folex Carpet Cleaner – If you’ve ever gotten to the show and found spots on your exhibit carpet or had someone spill something during the show, spray-on Folex Instant Carpet Spot Remover is your new best friend. I’ve been using it at my home for years, and found out early in my career that it even took inkjet printer ink out

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of my booth carpet! (It also took year-old red wine stains and leftover kitty furball stains out of my carpet at home...)

It also works great to clean the nasty spots of who-knows-what off your cloth-covered rental chairs. I always carry a few clean white terrycloth towels (the ones sold at automotive parts stores) so I can tell when I've gotten off all the dirt and grunge.



Folex can be found with other carpet cleaning products at most home improvement stores, discount retailers, grocery and drug stores. A list of their retail outlets can be found on their Web site: www.folexcompany.com. I buy it by the gallon for about \$15 a jug, or under \$8 for a 32 oz. spray bottle.

K2R Spot Lifter – If you've ever gotten a spot on your clothes at a show from a drippy chili dog or the yellow pollen from the flowers in your exhibit, you're a good candidate to add K2R Spot Lifter to your gang box. At about \$6 per 5 oz. aerosol can, it literally lifts spots and stains into the powder as it quickly dries. The spray can comes with a cap with bristles used to brush off the powder and stain residue after it dries. Find it in the laundry aisle at your grocery store, or with the laundry products at your local drug or discount store.



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Novus Polishes – When it comes to making your plastic literature racks, light boxes or surface laminates shine, think Novus Polishes. Novus manufactures three different products – Novus 1 to clean and polish, Novus 2 to remove fine scratches and Novus 3 to remove deep scratches and abrasions to plastic.



You can purchase them separately for about \$3 for a 2 oz. bottle, or in a set, known as the Novus 1-2-3 Trio, in varying size bottles from \$15 a set. Novus is carried by home improvement stores and is available from numerous vendors on the Internet.

If you can't find Novus, Brilliantize by Kleenmaster is also a great cleaner and polish for acrylic exhibit fixtures.



Sprayway Industrial Strength Glass Cleaner – If you're looking for a good, all-purpose spray cleaner to wipe down your exhibit and keep your glass showcases shiny – and that won't spill in your gang box – try the aerosol bottles of Sprayway. I was told once by a mirror installer that it's especially kind to the silvering on the back of mirrors because it doesn't contain ammonia.



It's gotten really hard to find multi-purpose aerosol cleaners and this brand is reasonably priced and easily available in a multi-can packs at the large discount warehouse stores or singly at big-box discount retail stores. You can also find it on the manufacturer's Web site at www.jurgeninc.com/spraywayglasscleaner.htm.

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Evercare Mega Cleaning Roller – Ever since vacuuming an exhibit became a “skilled trade” in some convention centers, I’ve been looking for a way around using an electric vacuum cleaner. And I found it:



Since it doesn’t have suction, it’s not technically a vacuum cleaner and it also doesn’t use electrical power... so no problem with the unions since it’s not in their jurisdiction! (I love it when you can get around their restrictive “skilled trade” contracts!)

The greatest features of this roller are that the entire unit comes apart in pieces that are no longer than 12”, the handle is sturdy metal with spring-loaded buttons to pop it together and the replacement rollers are inexpensive at about \$5 each.

I can clean the carpet daily in a 10’ x 20’ for 2 shows with one roller and that includes touch-ups during the day. I’ve found them online at Amazon.com, Drugstore.com and at my local Target.

Swiffer Duster – For last-minute wipedowns (and especially after the aisle carpet has been laid). And a little anti-static spray on the duster doesn’t hurt either, especially in dry climates. You can find these at most big-box discount and home improvement stores, or online.



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Goof Off and Goo Gone and WD-40 – If you end up with any gooey residue from either Velcro or duct tape from your exhibit property surfaces, or have marks on your exhibit properties that need some extra oomph to remove them, check out Goof Off, Goo Gone and WD-40. (And WD-40 is also great for lubricating squeaky hinges.) Small bottles and cans of all three of these can be found at the big-box home improvement stores and hardware stores for under \$5.

But based on their flammability and local fire regulations, they may be on the “no-no” list with Fire Marshals.



Misc. Exhibit Supplies

Pocket Level – I still remember one of my first bosses who always told me my graphics were crooked when I hung them; in self-defense and with a small tool box, I bought a pocket level. For under \$7 at your local home improvement or hardware store, you can get a durable ABS plastic yellow-vial pocket level with a pocket clip and V-shaped groove on the side to level your exhibit and graphics. You'll never need to wonder if that graphic is perfectly placed ever again! (But the floor under your exhibit could be uneven, too!)



Visqueen – If you've ever seen the heavy plastic sheeting that show contractors use to protect your carpet in your exhibit during set-up, you've run into Visqueen. While Visqueen is a brand name, you can buy Visqueen polyethylene film or the generic equivalent from any home improvement store in 100' x 20' rolls in a 4 or 6 mil thickness. They often refer to it as “roofers’ or contractors’ plastic”. It comes in frosty clear and black, but I recommend only using the clear, which looks from a distance like frosty wax paper. The black Visqueen is as slippery as ice and you don't need to add a safety hazard to your exhibit during set-up!

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This plastic sheeting has a number of purposes when used in your exhibit, including keeping the forklifts from leaving marks on the perimeter of your exhibit carpet; keeping dirt, food, oil and hydraulic fluid from forklifts and hoists and water from leaking convention center ceilings from damaging your carpet during set-up. But the best reason to use plastic sheeting during set-up is that it allows the exhibit to be moved in case you need to slide your exhibit a few inches on way or another to align with electrical, truss, or even connecting walls of your exhibit properties.

Felt Markers – If you need a quick touch-up for your exhibit, purchase exhibit-colored permanent felt-tip markers at an office supply or art supply store to match the various surface colors in your exhibit. They're much faster and easier to use than the touch-up paint usually provided as a gang-box staple by your exhibit house.



Double-Sided Adhesive Tape – One of the least expensive, but most often used, supplies to have in your office supply box is a roll of double-sided adhesive tape. You never know when you'll need a quick fix in your exhibit. My I & D crew lovingly refers to the double-sided tape they use that rolls up in little blobs (similar to rubber cement) as "booger tape". Regardless of what you call it, keep it handy!



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Be-Nice-to-Your-Staff Stuff

8 oz. Bottles of Water – If you take bottled water to trade shows for your staff, consider cutting down on the size of the bottle. It seems we waste a lot when a staff member opens a bottle, takes a few swigs and sets the bottle down to clutter your exhibit. I keep a Sharpie marker near my cases of bottled water so staff can initial the caps to avoid the “Is-that-my-bottle-of-water?” syndrome and avoid finding orphaned half-consumed bottles.



Antibacterial Wipes or Gel – With all the hand shaking and germ passing going on at shows, the easiest way to give your staff the chance to clean their hands without frequent visits to the washroom is to keep a supply of alcohol-based hand-sanitizing gel, such as Purell, handy. And if you want to be **really** nice and spoil your exhibit staff, get the gel with a moisturizer like aloe, since the germ-killing alcohol in it will dry out their skin.



Foam Insoles – My nickname, “The Booth Mom”, was bestowed on me because of the comfort items I provided for my staff at trade shows in my early days as an exhibit manager. The most sought-after items in my gang box were the large, thick foam insoles I buy in quantity at discount retailers, often for as little as two pair for \$1.



Buy the largest insoles that come with a template, either imprinted right on the back of the insole or on a separate piece of paper, for cutting them down to any size.

And the little foam “donuts” made for cushioning corns will be a hit for your staff who get blisters because they didn’t listen when you told them not to use the trade show floor to break in their new shoes. Another anti-blisters

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product you may want to consider stocking in your gang box is moleskin that can be cut to fit any blister, also found in the foot department of your drugstore.

Be-Nice-to-Yourself Stuff

Kart-A-Bag Luggage Cart – After seeing the sturdiness and value of this line of luggage carts after buying my first one at a photography trade show (PMA) over 15 years ago, I've been a poster child for this product. After wearing out a few of the cheap, airport gift-shop luggage carts every year, Kart-A-Bags by Remin, with their 10-year warranty, have been a great solution for schlepping my luggage, equipment, and even huge boxes of press kits around trade shows. (Just don't let those material-handling Teamsters catch you with wheels!) To find a list of your local distributors or to review the products specs to order directly from the manufacturer, check out Remin's Web site at www.kart-a-bag.com.



One of the greatest trials to me being “vertically challenged” (I’m 5’2” if I stretch!) is to be able to find a luggage cart for a person my height. I’m the proud owner of Concorde III (\$105), but have purchased the taller model, Concorde V (\$156), for taller members of my staff.

Three words of caution:

- 1) Based on union rules in some cities that you can use only a 2-wheel cart, don't get one with 4 wheels and expect to do your own material handling on the show floor;
- 2) Keep your eye on your Kart while on the show floor, as show labor may “appropriate” it to transport their tool boxes, as I've lost two of them this way; and
- 3) Plan on stowing it under the seat on airplanes, as some carriers won't let you put any luggage cart in the overhead bin.

Post-It Note Flags – OK. I'll confess to being a Post-It Note Flag junkie. I mark all my deadlines in my show binders using color-coded Post-It Note Flags. These tabs tell me when I need to start working on show-related tasks, not necessarily the deadline printed on the form. I use Sharpie markers to write the deadlines on the flags and place the tabs from the first of each month on the left top of the binder page to the last day of the month on the right top of the page.



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Mini Sharpie Pens – If you see me with a cluster of knives, keys and pens hanging around my neck on my set-up lanyard, you can bet that there will be a Mini Sharpie Pen with its cap clip hanging around my neck. Although these permanent marker pens come in 20 colors, I stick with black. But hey – go wild and pick an outlandish color for filling out those zillion empty labels if you dare! www.sharpie.com



EarPlanes – If you’ve ever had the misfortune to have to fly while you’ve got a head-thumping cold, allergy attack or sinus condition that plugs up your ears, you should have a pair on EarPlanes in your carry-on bag. Used by pilots and flight attendants who have to fly even when they’re sick, these pressure-regulating earplugs help to reduce ear discomfort during air travel. And, at about \$6 a box at your local drugstore (found near the earplugs), they’re a great insurance policy against that helpless feeling when you’re just *sure* that your head is going to explode. www.earplanes.com



Hundreds of Percent Mark-up On Site? You Betcha!

Many of the packing, cleaning and adhesive items above are available on-site for purchase through your installation and dismantle (I & D) contractor or the show’s General Services Contractor, but at a very hefty mark-up. Case in point: I was recently automatically charged \$28 (plus tax) by my Exhibitor-Appointed Contractor for a “cleaning kit” during pre-show wipe-down -- that included only a bottle of Fantastic spray cleaner and a roll of paper towels -- which I didn’t request, nor use, at a show, since I bring my own cleaning supplies.

And you’re often charged a minimum percentage of the heavily marked-up cost of materials, which is much more than actually used, such as 50% of a roll of stretch wrap for wrapping two pallets or a minimum 100’ of strapping when you only used 25’.

To quote my wise old Dad, “Watch the pennies and the dollars will take care of themselves!”

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