

# INRODUCTIONS

In 2013, we asked 46 of our fellow artists, small press publishers, cartoonists, and makers to anonymously answer questions about the pop culture conventions and indie comics shows (aka CAFs) they attended. We asked for their opinions of the shows and their gross sales (sales before expenses). The results were often surprising with many twists and turns. But also: graphs!

**In 2014, we had 107 participants!** We don't need a graph to tell us that is over twice the exhibitors over 2013. (Wait... or is it? Damn it, maybe we do need that graph.) Thank you to all the participants and to Heidi MacDonald at The Beat for making our dream of crunching numbers for several weeks a reality. If only our statistics teachers could see us now. Think of the extra credit!

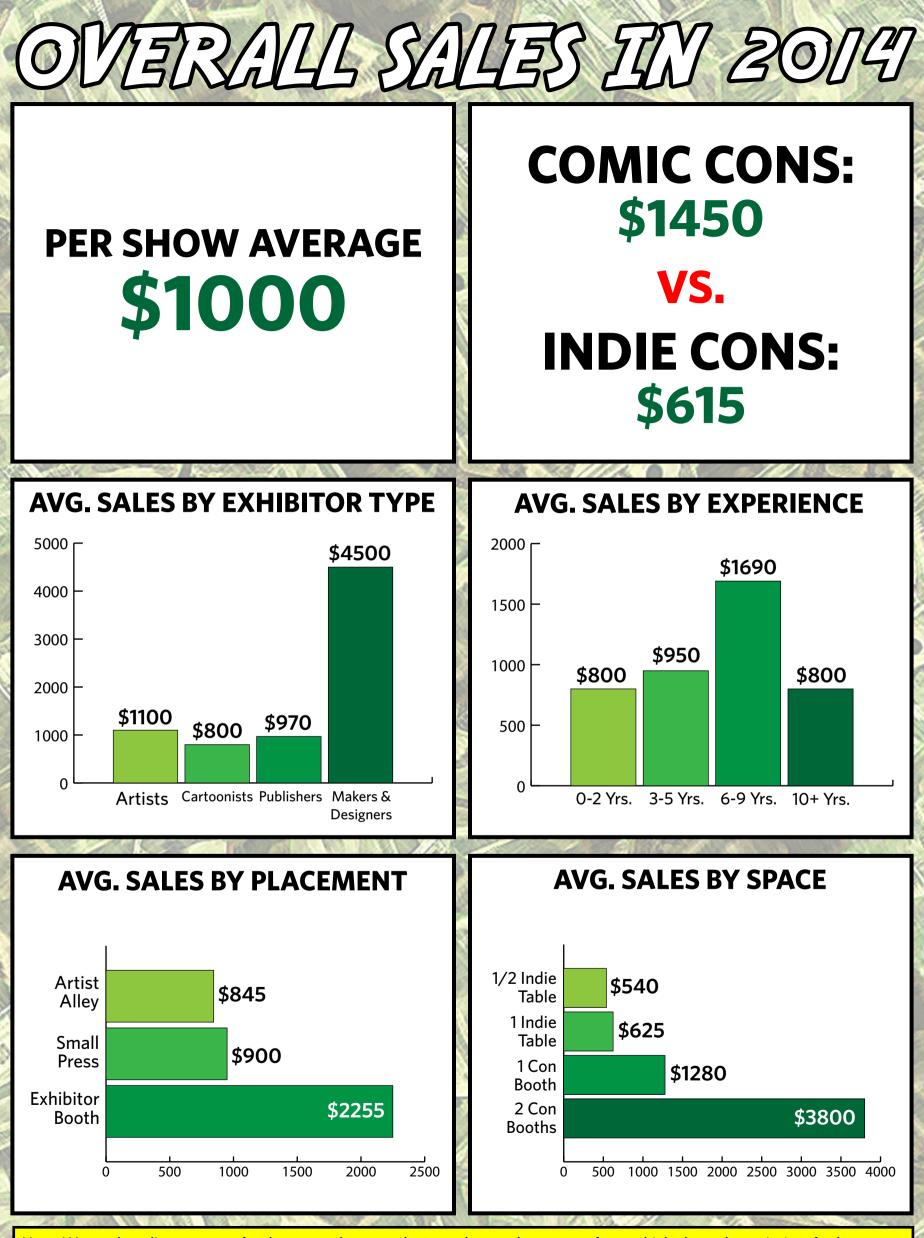
Our goal with this survey is two-fold:

• To give exhibitors a sense of how they are selling in relation to their peers.

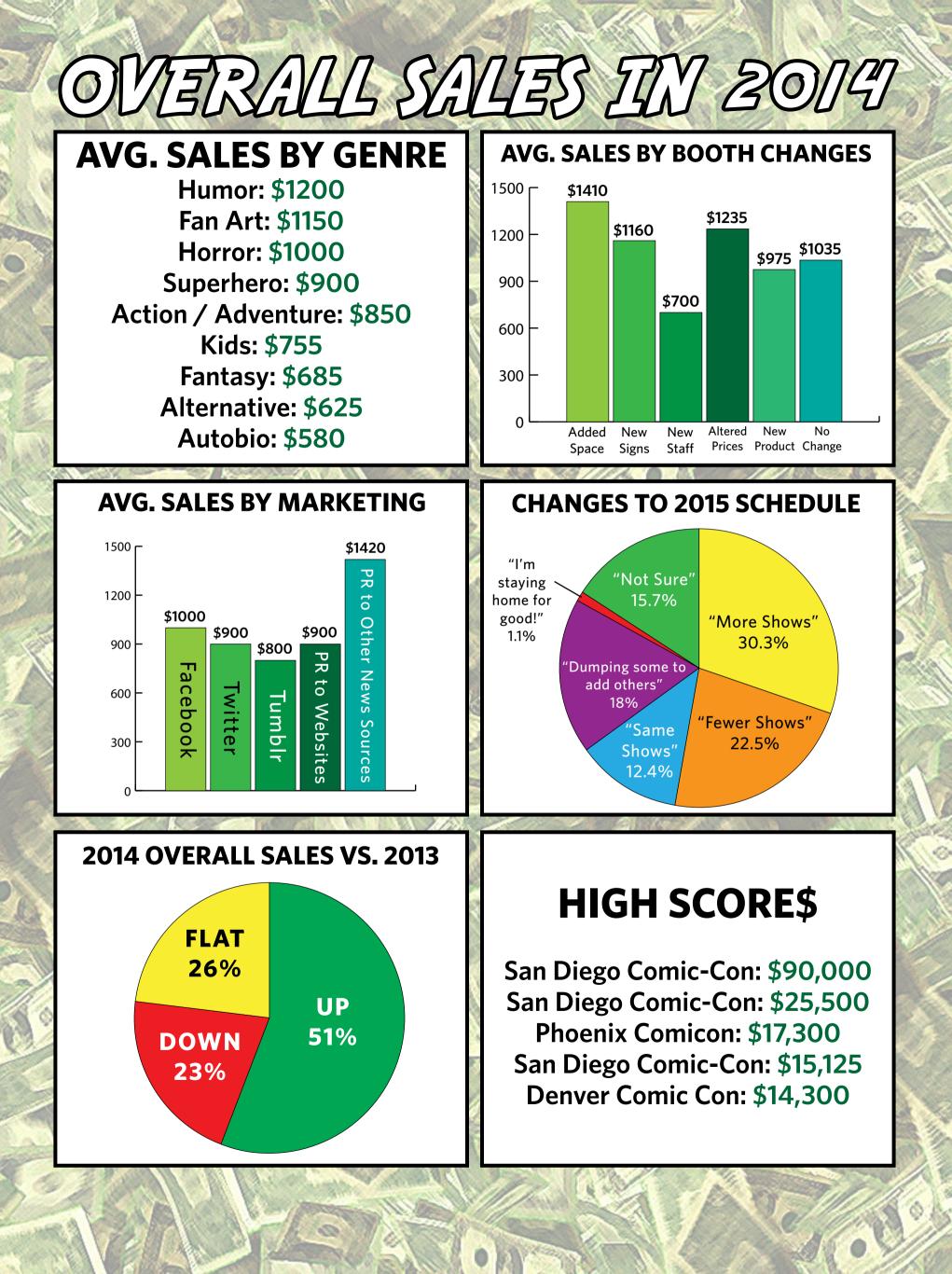
• To give exhibitors a sense of which shows are the best and which ones are "the rest," so they can make better decisions (and more \$\$\$).

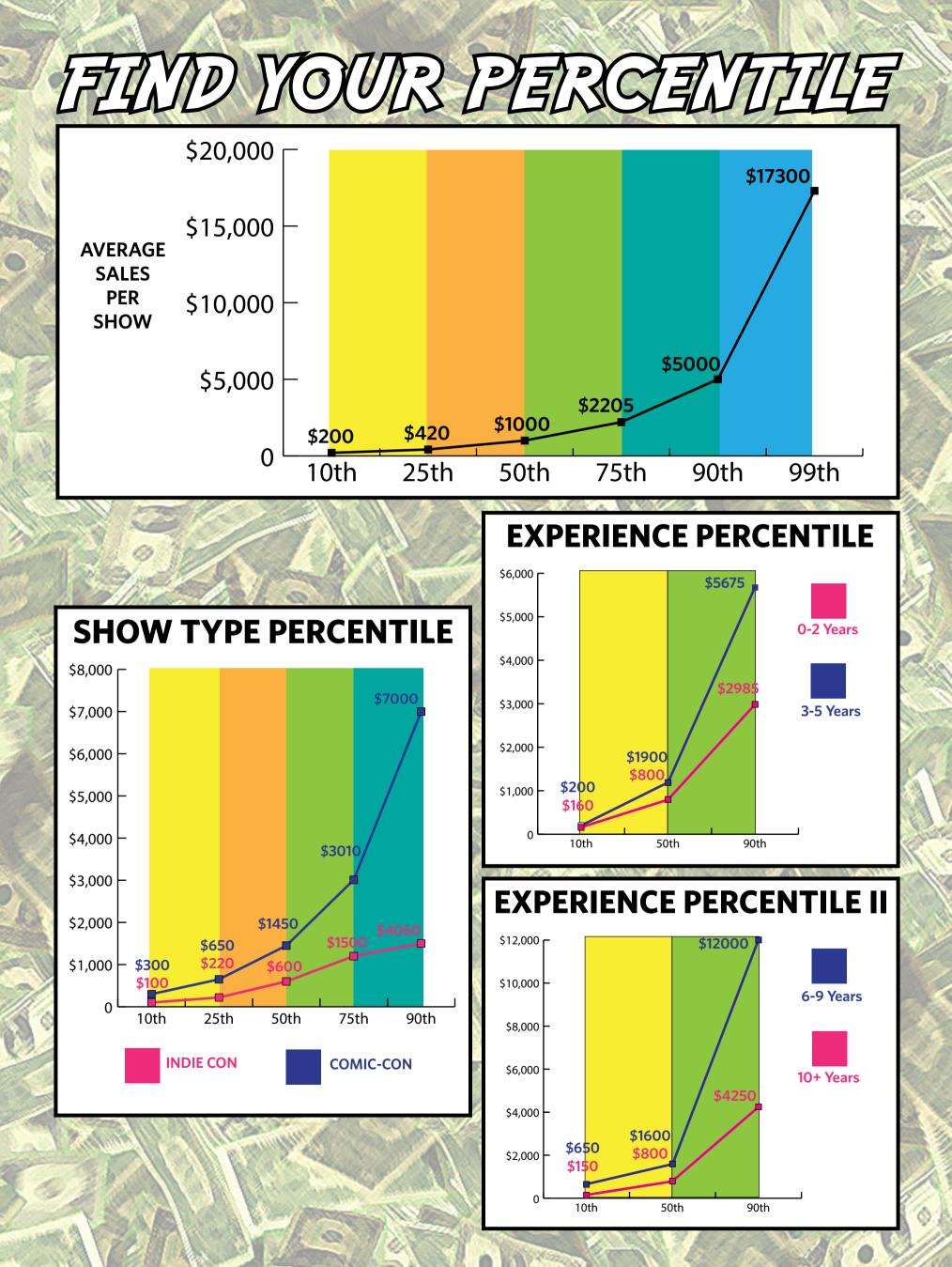
We asked exhibitors about 32 shows total. However, many of them to did not yield enough data to "break them out" into their own sections. If you don't see your local show here, the only way to fix that is to fill out the 2015 survey!

We hope you'll find this year's data illuminating. So, onward heroes! Your statistical destiny awaits...



Note: We used median averages for the survey, because the top sales numbers were often so high above the majority of sales responses that a mean average would be oddly skewed, giving a false representation of the "typical" convention selling experience.





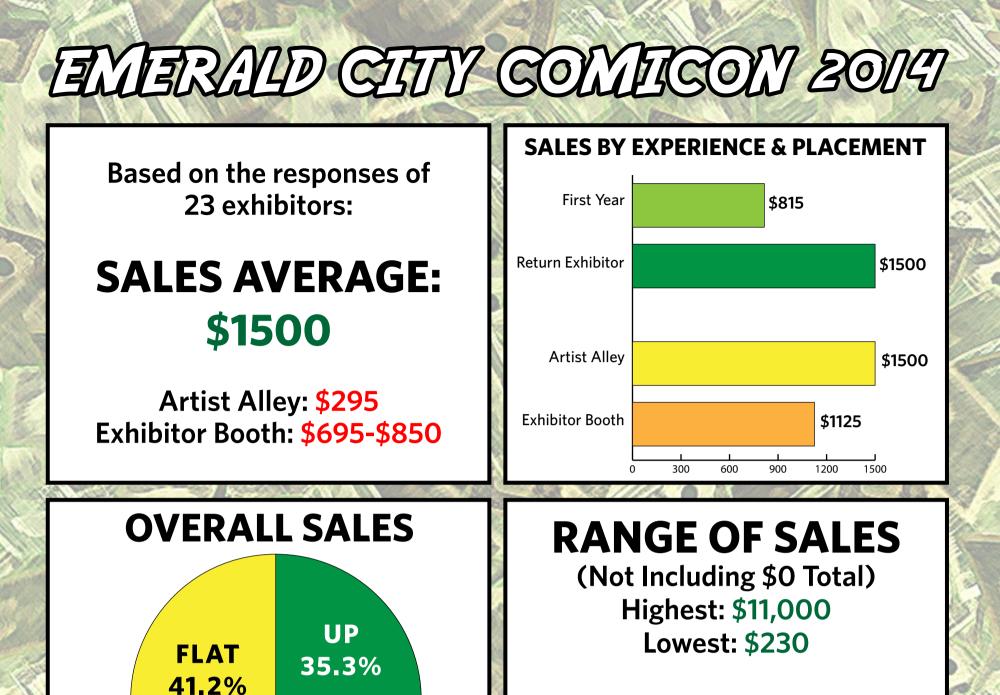
# OUR TAKE

ON THE WHOLE: It looks as though 2014 was a down year. Compared to the 2013 data, the per show average is down (2013: \$1000), the average for a comic con was down (2013: \$1940), and there were fewer "Up" sales reported overall (2013: 57.5%). Possible factors include: attendees spending less, a weak economy, most convention halls expanding, which tends to decrease every exhibitor's overall take; and less quantifiable, a sense of convention fatigue. Most likely, this downward trend could be partially due to an increase of data in 2014 providing a clearer picture of the scene.

WHOA: There were some shockers for us. Makers and designers (crafters, branded producers, jewelry makers) averaged almost 4x as much per show as publishers, artists and cartoonists. Perhaps they charge more for goods on average? Or is this a sign of attendee tastes? Another surprise was the dip between average sales for exhibitors with 6-9 years experience and 10+ experience. Is there an average "peak" for an exhibitor's sales? Whatever the reason for that one, it's an eye opener.

TIPS, BUT ALSO TRICKS: According to the data, jumping from Artist Alley / Small Press to an Exhibitor Booth could 2x your sales. Likewise, going from one booth to two could 3x your sales. However, going from one to two tables at a CAF doesn't do much for sales on average. Also, consider marketing your show appearances to news sources outside of social media – exhibitors who did tended to average higher sales.

FINAL WORD: \$1000 per show? Uh, is it too late to get an MBA?



### **REPORT CARD**

Organization: 4.2 Attendee Interest in Buying: 3.7 Overall Rating: 3.7

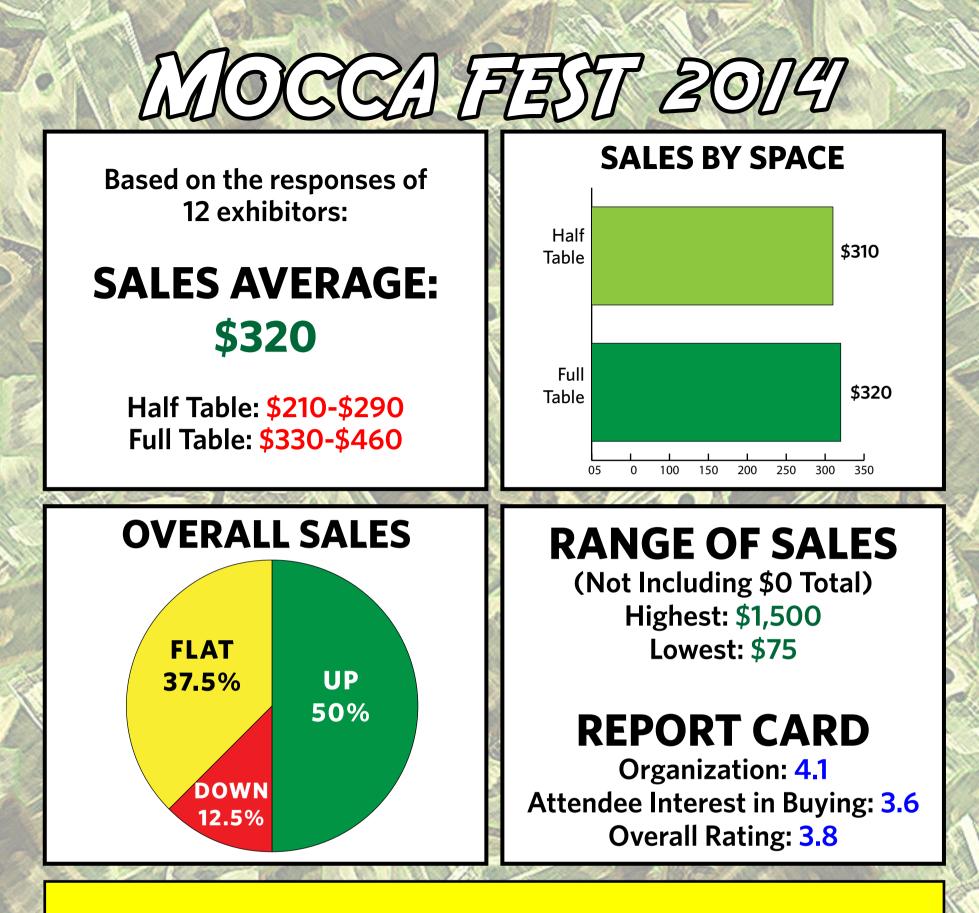
SURVEY SAYS: Most had high praise for the show's staff and volunteers. "ECCC is well managed, the organizers are great and it's a very well run convention." However, there is a feeling that "they are catering to the big publishers and pushing the little guys to the back." Exhibitors observe these back areas are poorly trafficked, perhaps because "most people think there is only one place for artist alley and therefore don't think to look for more."

DOWN

23.5%

OUR TAKE: The show's average sales are down from last year (2013: \$1700) and there were more reported flat sales overall (2013: 10% "Flat," 70% "Up"). If the show's superstar organizers find a way to encourage visitors to explore more of the hall, we suspect the average numbers will benefit.

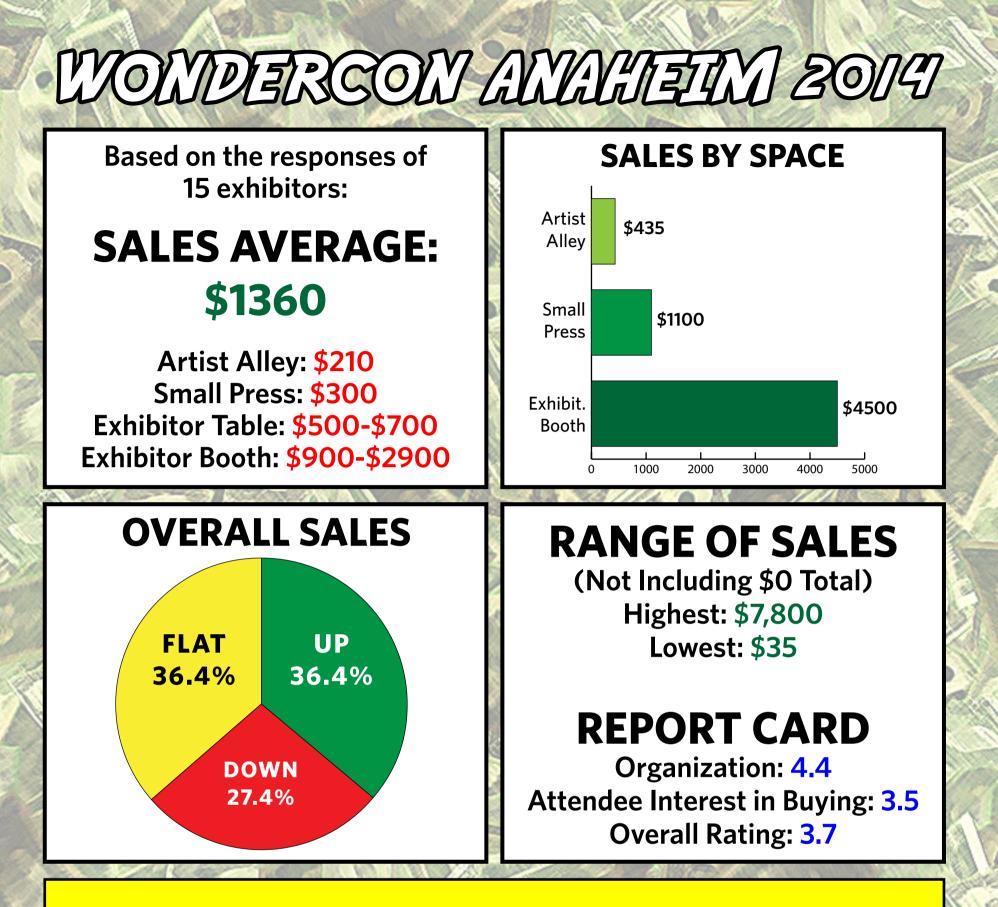
TIPS: If you're exhibiting in the back areas, be sure to bring a machete and a sherpa – your table is past many layers of thick vegetation.



SURVEY SAYS: The consensus is that the Society of Illustrators organized the show well, with "very attentive volunteers in the aisles," who "promptly handled any concerns or questions voiced," and "the crowd is really fun." However, everyone agrees "tables are WAY too expensive" and some folks "didn't even break even on the table."

OUR TAKE: Based on average sales and table cost numbers, it seems many exhibitors aren't profiting from this show. If you're tabling solely to network and share your comics, we're guessing you won't be disappointed. Otherwise...

TIPS: It'll be \$40,000 for a half table next year, but the cost includes a snazzy tote bag.



SURVEY SAYS: Folks described demand as "softer" this year for a variety of reasons: "the attendees were largely dismissive," "they had apparently added more exhibitors to the floor that year, which further sliced up the pie" and for small press, "poor placement" compared to previous years. Still, there were some sales success stories and people praising WCA staff for being "super responsive and great to work with."

OUR TAKE: The overall average was down from last year (2013: \$1680), and there were more "Flat" sales (2013: 75% "Up," 0% "Flat"). However, it looks like booth exhibitors fared better than last year (2013: \$3040). Hopefully, they won't keep expanding and messing with the floor.

TIPS: "Exhibitors, please get back to your booths and stop posing for pictures in the Mario Kart. Come on. We mean it!"

### TORONTO COMIC ARTS FESTIVAL 2014

Based on the responses of 10 exhibitors:

#### SALES AVERAGE: \$1075

Half Table: **\$175** Full Table: **\$350**  **RANGE OF SALES** 

(Not Including \$0 Total) Highest: \$1,800 Lowest: \$50

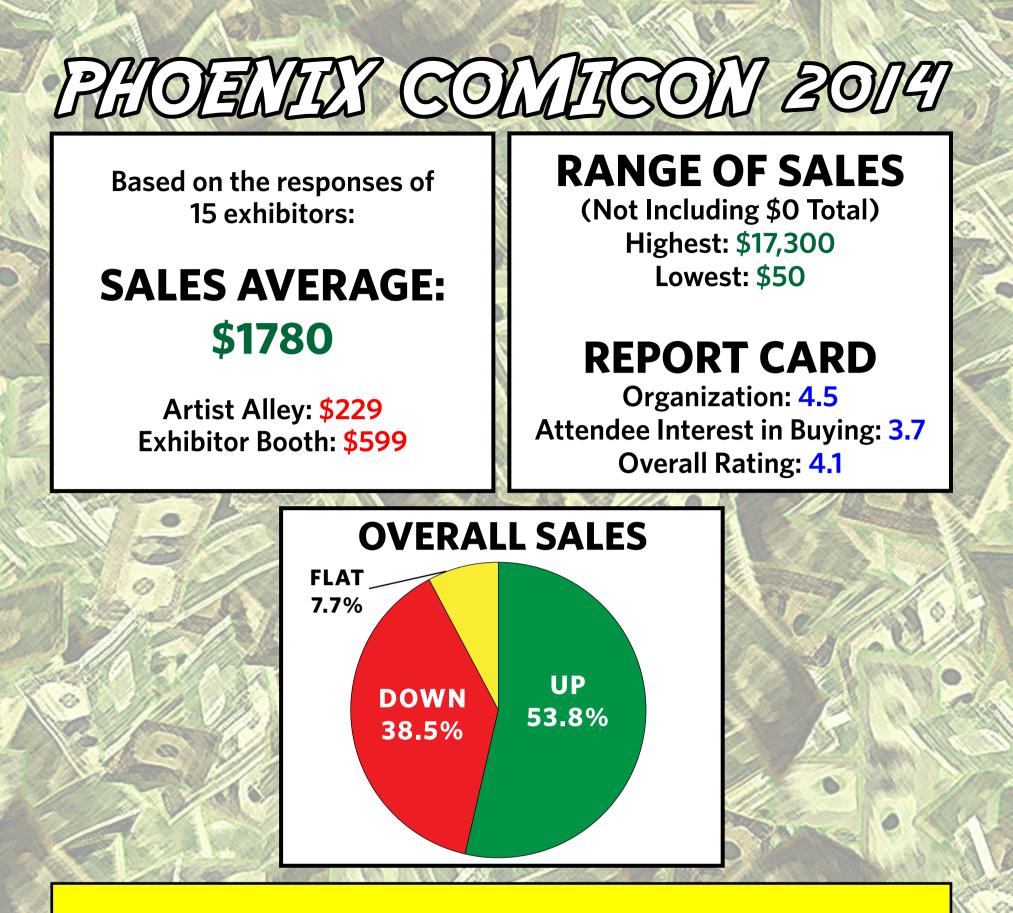
#### **REPORT CARD**

Organization: 4.1 Attendee Interest in Buying: 4.5 Overall Rating: 4.7

SURVEY SAYS: The few who left comments on this show didn't sell well, but noted that "the social experience was invaluable." NOTE: Because TCAF tends to change out the exhibitor line up every year, there were not enough respondents who also exhibited in 2013 to compare year-to-year overall sales.

OUR TAKE: TCAF got the highest overall rating, and the highest buyer interest rating. For a CAF, the show delivers a solid show average relative to table costs. Rather than expanding the floor, they're adding more programming and events. If you can get in, we recommend this one.

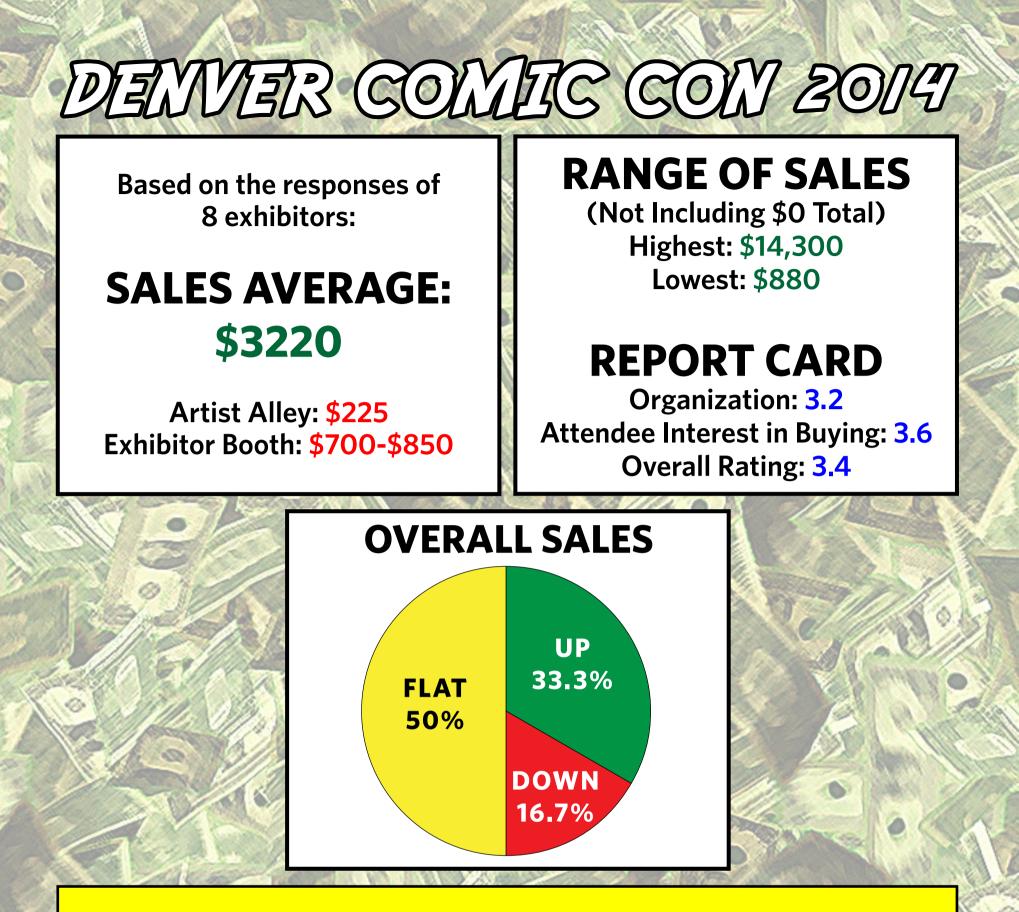
TIPS: Avoid inspection at the Canadian border by rafting your books across one of several finger lakes.



SURVEY SAYS: Overall glowing marks from exhibitors, despite sales being down. "The crowds are a fair mix of autograph seekers and true blue fans," and the show is "well organized" with a "good fan-base" who showed "genuine enthusiasm." However, folks pointed out their lower sales, one attributing it to "reoriented Artists' Alley tables" and floor expansion.

OUR TAKE: Indeed, average sales were off from last year (2013: \$2000) and overall reported sales were surprisingly "Down" (2013: 87.5% "Up," 12.5% "Down"). Even if they are down from last year, the show is still a winner overall with high marks and high average profits. \*Recommendation Stamp\*

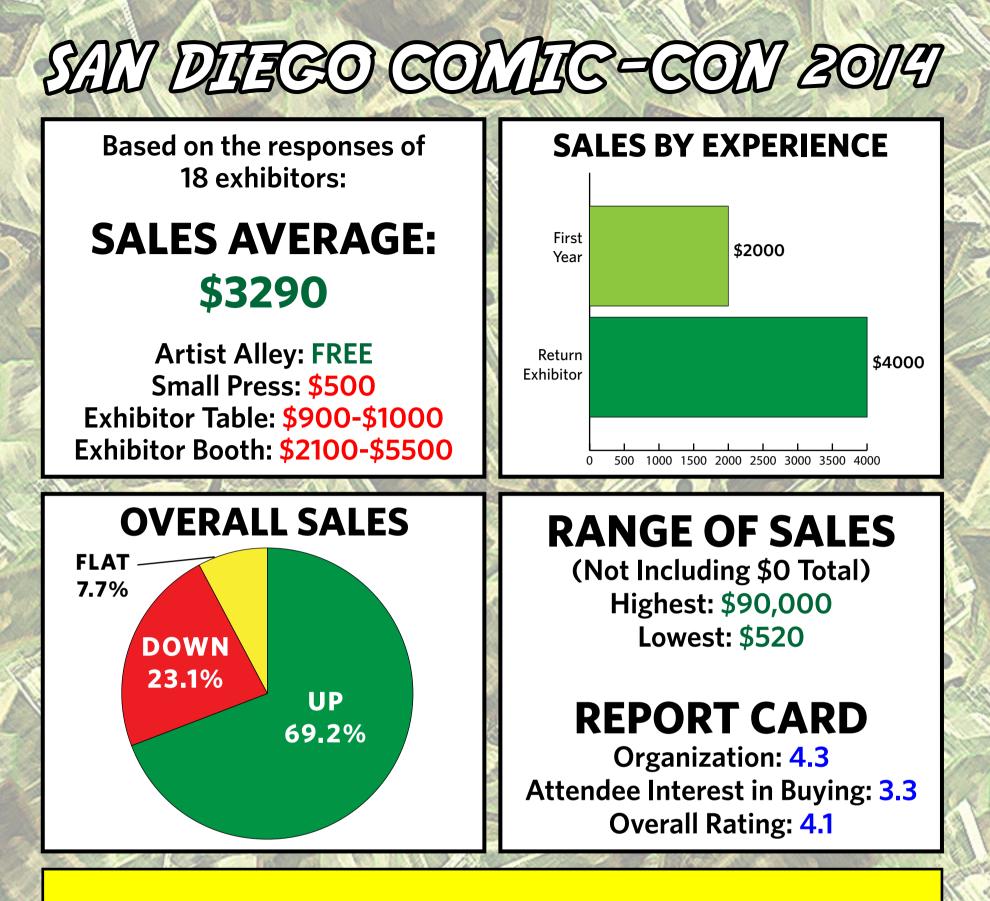
TIPS: Looking for free parking? Conveniently located just a few blocks from the convention center are many sketchy streets to choose from.



SURVEY SAYS: Exhibitors mostly praised the fans, saying they're "great" and "VERY interested in buying art and supporting local talent." However, they also cited the show's organizational shift as having "a devastating impact on the exhibitor floor experience." The hall was "madness" with "way too much stuff happening on the floor," including a marching band. (?!)

OUR TAKE: Intriguingly, the show's ratings are way down from last year (2013: 4.4), but average sales are way up from last year (2013: \$2100). Yet, most people reported "Flat" sales compared to last year. It's a mix of good signs and red flags. We'll need more exhibitors to share their sales for DCC in 2015 to get a better picture.

TIPS: WHAT?! SORRY, WE CAN'T GIVE YOU A TIP OVER THIS F%#&ING MARCHING BAND!



SURVEY SAYS: "It is really difficult to compete with some of the larger media presence at San Diego," or to put it bluntly, "you can't beat any of the big brands." Also, attendee interest in freebies "bordered on the pathological," and the show is "expensive as heck." However, while some claimed they do "much better in a zine fest/small press setting," many described sales as "excellent" this year.

OUR TAKE: Average sales are up from last (2013: \$2800) and scores remain high (2013: Overall – 4.2), though perceived attendee interest took a dive (2013: 3.8). There is definitely money to be made: a high score of \$90,000 suggests the ceiling is very high. Bring your sales A-game and try not to let the looming shadow of multinational corporations harsh your vibe.

TIPS: It's still illegal to strangle someone for asking which of your books are free.



Based on the responses of 8 exhibitors:

#### SALES AVERAGE: \$1570

Artist Alley: \$200 Small Press: \$450 Exhibitor Booth: \$900 **RANGE OF SALES** 

(Not Including \$0 Total) Highest: \$7,160 Lowest: \$600

**REPORT CARD** 

Organization: 2.4 Attendee Interest in Buying: 2 Overall Rating: 2.2

SURVEY SAYS: Yikes. One exhibitor said it was "a pleasure to interact with the attendees." That was the only compliment. Here's what others said: "The entire vibe of this show is as a money-making vehicle for the organizers and nothing else." "It was basically a comic-con themed county fair." "The layout of the hall was terrible." "Placement of exhibitors appeared to be random." "Folks were there to spend money on photos and signatures, not art. Calling it a 'comic-con' is a misnomer." You get the idea.

OUR TAKE: This show had the lowest overall ratings, but above average sales. Though the booth cost is a bit high considering the average. Local exhibitors with low overhead could likely slog through the show with a marginal profit, but given the negative comments, it's probably not worth a trip.

TIPS: One of the biggest attractions on the floor was local TV comedy show Studio C. If you specialize in Studio C fan art, you will make a killing.



Based on the responses of 5 exhibitors:

#### SALES AVERAGE: \$300

Artist Alley: **\$250** Exhibitor Booth: **\$750-\$850**  **RANGE OF SALES** 

(Not Including \$0 Total) Highest: \$870 Lowest: \$150

**REPORT CARD** 

Organization: 3.2 Attendee Interest in Buying: 2.8 Overall Rating: 2.8

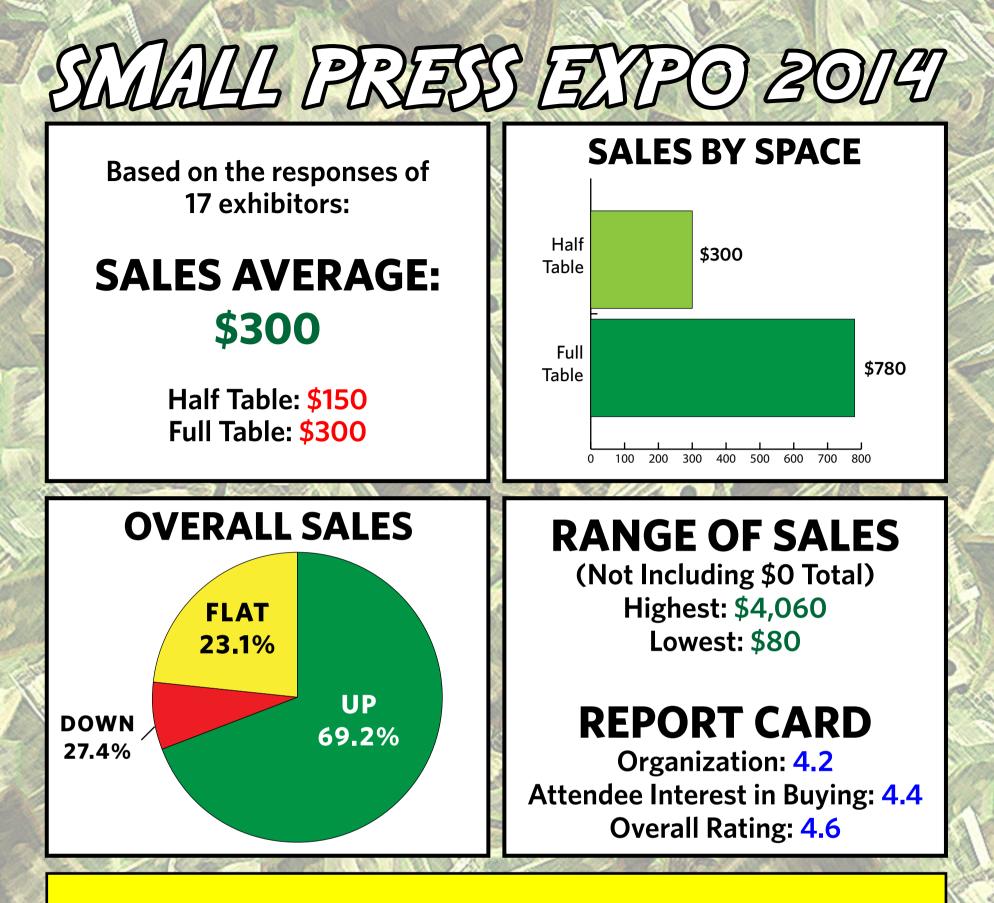
SURVEY SAYS: Attendee interest seemed low. "Attendees had little to no interest in purchasing goods of any sort," and surprisingly "even the vendors selling your usual geek merch seemed to be struggling." Blame was placed on the floor: "This year's way of organizing artist alley - putting all the 'big names' around the perimeter of the hall with all the lesser-known artists/publishers in the middle/back - made for an extreme ghettoization of the area." One exhibitor said they did well, but noted that "I was a guest at BCC, so I didn't actually buy my table and I was set up in the guest area."

BAUTIMORE COMIC-CON 2019

OUR TAKE: There weren't many survey respondents for this show. Even so, this is a shockingly low average for a comic-con and the ratings are poor. The highest reported sales were only slightly higher than the cost of booths. We will be avoiding this one.

TIPS: Baltimore is known for their crab cakes. Consider exhibiting at Crab Cake Con instead?

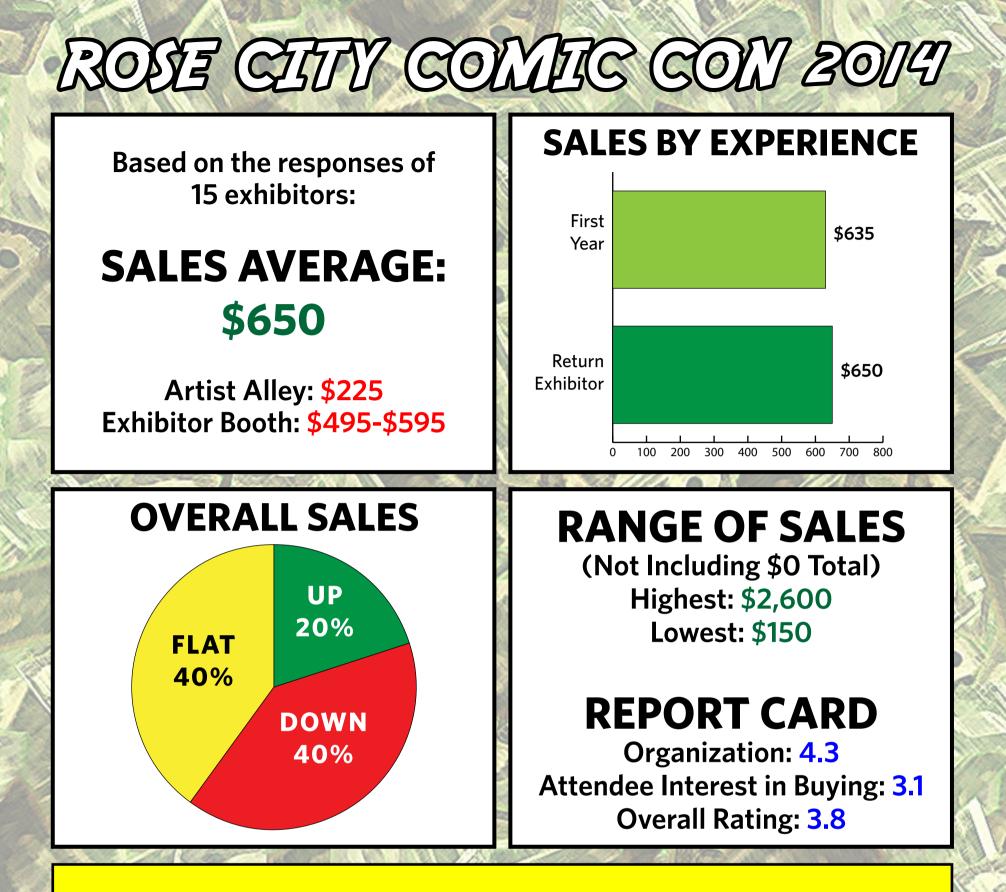




SURVEY SAYS: A lot of love for SPX. Several cited it as their "favorite convention," one exhibitor adding, "everybody is friendly and interested in talking about, making, and buying comics." Complaints included table rates being "a little expensive" and "the application process was tough to understand this year." Only one exhibitor talked about their sales, saying "I cleaned up at SPX: sold out of my new book in the first few hours."

OUR TAKE: The show's ratings have increased over last year (2013: Overall – 4), even if average sales have not (2013: \$300). On average, it looks like sales improve proportionately with a full table. (Apparenly not the case at MoCCA.) From these numbers, it seems like a small minority significantly profit here, but a majority have a good time.

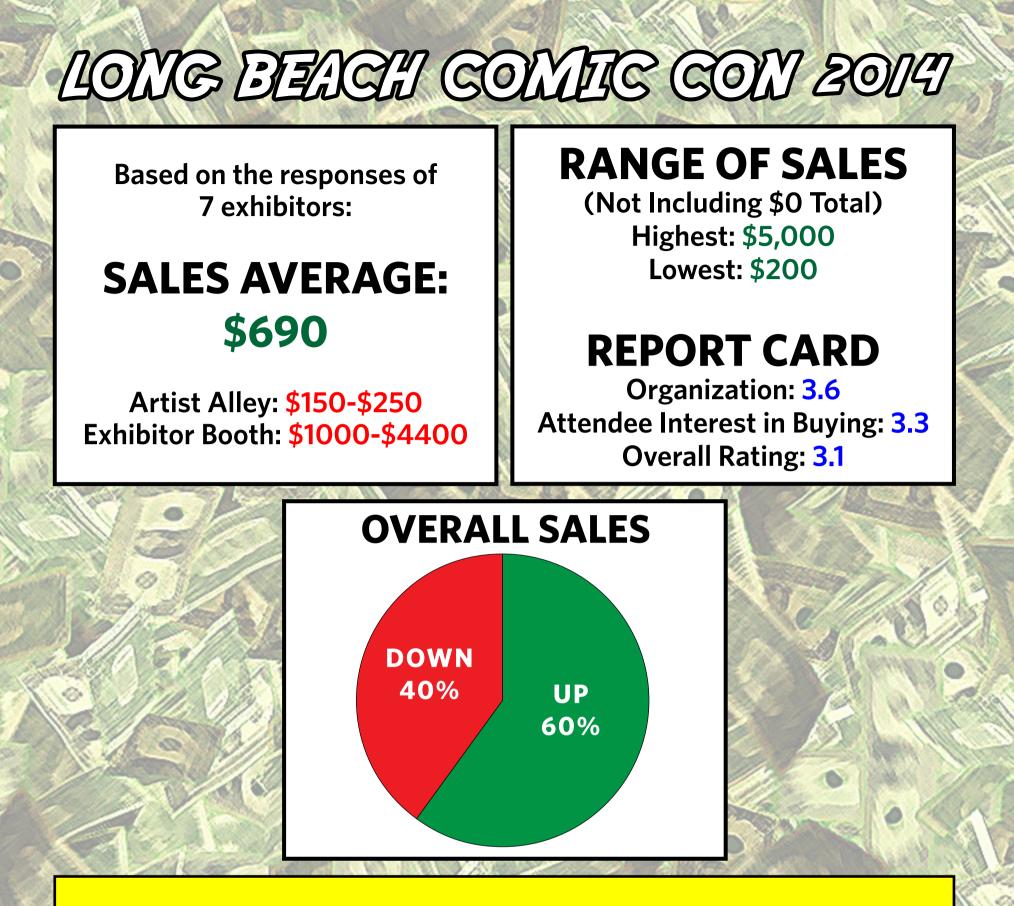
TIPS: Find a bank that will convert good vibes into US dollars. ;-D



SURVEY SAYS: Exhibitors called Rose City a "cute show" with a "friendly staff." Attendees were "positive and energetic," but they weren't "flush with disposable income" and "still don't really know how to buy art from artists." They weren't a "huge buying crowd."

OUR TAKE: These numbers don't look encouraging for growing profits, and not just the average show vs. booth costs. On average, return exhibitors didn't make much more than first year exhibitors, and 80% of those return exhibitors' sales were either down or flat. The show's solid organizers will hopefully encourage their attendees to buy more.

TIPS: Sales leave a bad taste in your mouth? Good thing you're in Portland, land of tater tots and elaborate donuts.



SURVEY SAYS: Some described the crowd as "really pleasant," and that "Saturday was great [for sales]," whereas others described it as "a bust." One said, "Ended up leaving on Sunday afternoon due to no traffic." Another said, "it's always a pleasure to both attend and table at LBCC," whereas another noted that "load in is terrible for artists alley. They give a two hour window and if you can't make it that's that." The last comment was simply: "It's OK."

OUR TAKE: It's a lower than average show for both sales and ratings. Some like exhibiting at the show, others do not. On average, it's probably better to stay in Artist Alley for this one.

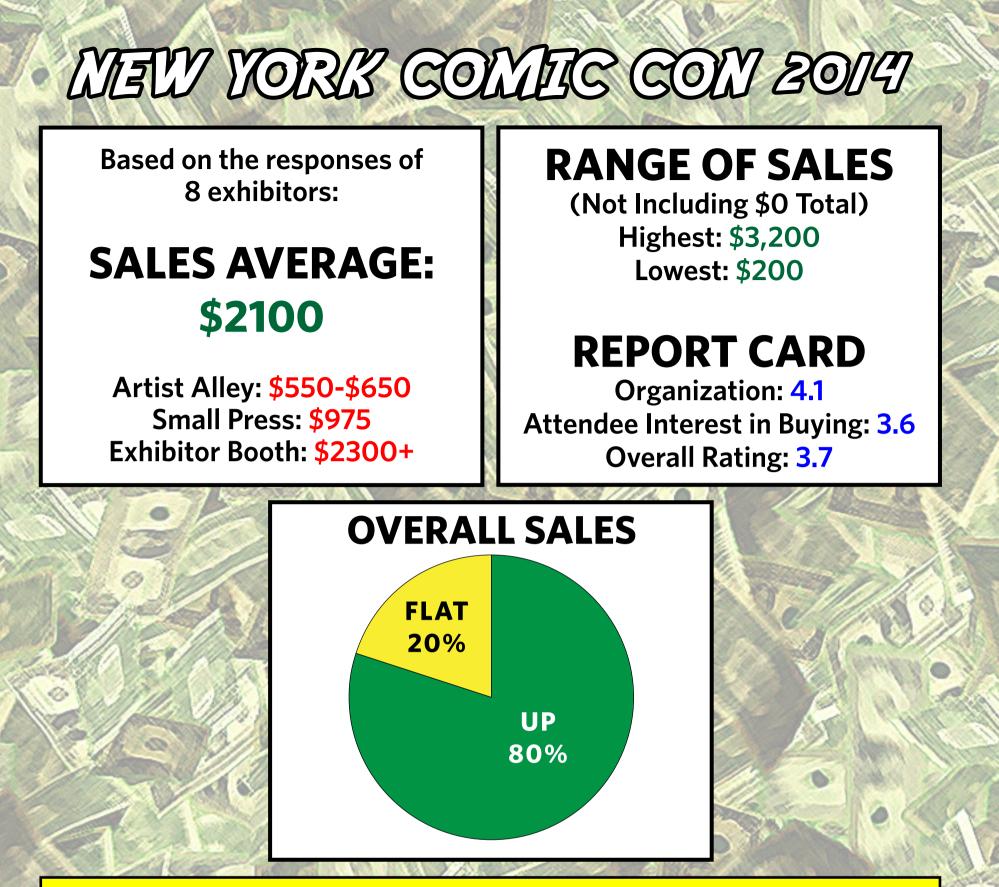
TIPS: It's hard for exhibitors to compete with the dollar book store across the street. You can get the "It's Pat" book and a Math Blaster CD-ROM together for just \$2!



SURVEY SAYS: Not many comments, but they were all mostly positive. One exhibitor said APE was "much better this year in the well-lit hall" and that the show got "a much-needed shot in the arm." Compared to other shows, sales are "slow," but overall folks were "pleased."

OUR TAKE: It's hard to argue with the spike in average sales (2013: \$790), reported "Up" sales (2013: 37.5%), and overall rating (2013: 3.4). This gets our vote for Most Improved. But with the change in city and organization next year, who knows what the future holds for APE?

TIPS: Get a crystal ball and tell us all how APE will be.



SURVEY SAYS: Not many comments, but they were mostly negative regarding attendee interest. "The big problem is no one there seemed to care much about comics," and that "there's a big drop off in casual purchases." However, there apparently were "many destination sales."

OUR TAKE: There was a small increase in average sales from last year (2014: \$2000) and a small increase in ratings across the board. The most encouraging sign is 80% reporting "Up" sales. Very high table costs vs. average sales makes this show a gamble in our humble opinion. NYCC has surpassed SDCC in attendance, but even accounting for the fewer responses, the highest sales for NYCC are much lower than SDCC, suggesting that NYCC may not have as strong a buying community among its attendees compared to SDCC.

TIPS: If you feel like you're getting pushed around by the crowds, just shout, "Ayy, I'm exhibitin' over here!"



Based on the responses of 7 exhibitors:

#### SALES AVERAGE: \$830

Artist Alley: **\$75** Exhibitor Table: **\$200** Exhibitor Booth: **\$325**  **RANGE OF SALES** 

(Not Including \$0 Total) Highest: \$2,900 Lowest: \$350

#### **REPORT CARD**

Organization: 3.4 Attendee Interest in Buying: 4.4 Overall Rating: 4.4

SURVEY SAYS: "I love this con" was a common sentiment among exhibitors. "This one feels 100% like a safe and fun space all the time," and the overall "vibe is wonderful." Some grumbled about Artist Alley not being on the same floor as the Exhibitor Hall, which was "not an ideal experience," and that "vendor organization felt a little off (as compared to other years)," but most enjoyed the show.

OUR TAKE: This was one of the highest rated shows, which is great, but sales are lower than average, which is not so great. However, the booth prices are quite reasonable, so locals with low overhead could make a nice profit here and likely enjoy themselves.

TIPS: Don't be fooled by the insidious FakeGeekGirlCon, which pretends to like Batman in order to trick men for all kinds of unsubstantiated benefits!



SURVEY SAYS: A few exhibitors liked the show ("Overall, I saw a lot of traffic at Comikaze and had a fantastic experience") and more hated it ("One of the worst cons I've been to. Very little interest from con-goers, especially considering its size"). Everyone agreed the organization left "a lot to be desired," and that "the show floor layout was worse" than previous years.

OUR TAKE: Both the sales average was down (2013: \$650), the overall rating was down (2013: 3.1) and "Up" sales were down (2013: 37.5%). We received an email from Comikaze boasting "Over \$5,100,000 spent on the show floor!" How much of that was on nachos?

TIPS: 1. Acquire Halloween Candy. 2. Pass it out to children at your booth. 3. ??? 4. PROFIT!!!

# 2014 CONVENTION RAMSS

## BY AVERAGE SALES BY AVERAGE RATING

1. San Diego Comic-Con	\$3290	1. TCAF	4.43
2. Denver Comic Con	\$3220	2. SPX	4.40
3. New York Comic Con	\$2100	3. Phoenix Comicon	4.10
4. Phoenix Comicon	\$1780	4. GeekGirlCon	4.07
5. Salt Lake Comic Con	\$1570	5. APE	3.97
6. Emerald City Comicon	\$1500	6. San Diego Comic-Con	3.90
7. WonderCon Anaheim	\$1360	7. WonderCon Anaheim	3.87
8. TCAF	\$1075	8. Emerald City Comicon	3.87
9. APE	\$975	9. MoCCA Fest	3.83
10. GeekGirlCon	\$830	10. New York Comic Con	3.80
11. Long Beach Comic Con	\$690	11. Rose City Comic Con	3.73
12. Rose City Comic Con	\$650	12. Denver Comic Con	3.40
13. Comikaze Expo	\$550	13. Long Beach Comic Con	3.33
14. MoCCA Fest	\$320	14. Comikaze Expo	3.13
15. SPX	\$300	15. Baltimore Comic-Con	2.93
16. Baltimore Comic-Con	\$300	16. Salt Lake Comic Con	2.20

### THE SUPER RANKING

A Ranking That Takes Into Account Both Average Profits and Ratings (% Profit Based on Avg. Sales Minus Table Costs) x (Avg. Rating)

1. TCAF	9. Rose City Comic Con
2. Phoenix Comicon	10. Salt Lake Comic Con
3. GeekGirlCon	11. New York Comic Con
4. APE	12. SPX
5. Denver Comic Con	13. MoCCA Fest
6. Emerald City Comicon	14. Long Beach Comic Con
7. San Diego Comic-Con	15. Comikaze Expo
8. WonderCon Anaheim	16. Baltimore Comic-Con

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