

This guide is for Stroll vendors, including SAA members on Solano Avenue.

It excludes basic information found on the website. This document is broken down as follows:

- A Brief Introduction
- Demographics and Character (Getting to know the locals)
- Items for your Consideration
- Any Business can Benefit from a Crowd of a Quarter-million People

A Brief Introduction:

The Solano Avenue Stroll began in 1974 and is now produced by the Solano Avenue Merchants Association – a group comprised of fifteen volunteers who are business owners on (and near) Solano Avenue. Average attendance reaches 250,000-300,000 people. This free community event is a closed-street festival that spans 26 blocks (1 mile long) and is located in two cities - Albany and Berkeley [California]. It has a parade that begins at 10AM. Vendors and entertainers are strategically located all over the avenue, including some intersections. There is a five-block area of arts and crafts booths mid-festival. Along the entire street are information and fundraising booths for non-profit organizations; food booths (some put out by established restaurants, others from vendors or non-profits); merchants selling goods and services, as well as a significant number of children/family attractions including (but not limited to) inflatable and mechanical rides. This is an alcohol free event catering to families.

Demographics and Character:

The Solano Avenue Stroll is unique in many respects and one of them is that the 26-block long festival spans two separate cities: Albany and Berkeley. The two cities have differing demographics: Albany is primarily younger families with multiple children. Berkeley has in the past had a significant number of older/retired residents, but that demographic is also changing. Both communities are intelligent, community minded and politically savvy.

The crowd is diverse not only culturally, but more importantly with the sheer magnitude of the event, you are going to find a vast diversity of reasons why people come to the Solano Stroll and it is important to understand your potential “customers”.

People on the street can be there for several reasons - from seeing a friend perform in a band or dance troupe, or perhaps they are looking for a opportunity to volunteer for a community organization. (We have almost 200 non-profit organizations who attend the event). Perhaps you have come to the Solano Avenue Stroll to adopt a pet, talk to a political candidate, get a great deal on a new car, or maybe you are a teenager there to meet-up with friends.

What is for certain is that not everyone is going to stop at your booth. In fact a significant number of people “walking-by” are not going to stop for reasons ranging from being late for a performance or perhaps they are meeting a friend/family member down the block. Perhaps they are rushing to catch the shuttle bus, or just trying to find the closest restroom!

All of this suggests that your success at the event, however measured – is a numbers game. Out of this crowd of 250,000 diverse individuals – your targets and/or sales goals should be realistic and the following items carefully considered.

Items for Your Consideration:

Diverse Bay Area weather:

California weather is considered to be pleasant and September is no exception. It rains at the Solano Avenue Stroll about twice a decade but the weather is usually awesome. We recommend a canopy if you are sunlight-sensitive but since the average temperature is in the mid 70's; it is not considered to be “hot”. Due to our proximity to San Francisco Bay (about a half-mile from

shore) we experience an odd diversity of weather. The (Solano Stroll) day typically begins “foggy” and over-cast, it “breaks” to great weather, and in the afternoon it gets windy (sometimes significantly) and can become chilly. Food vendors may want to adjust their menus to serve warm beverages in the morning and later afternoon; non-profits you are going to want to put paper weights over any documents you are distributing. Please keep the varied weather in mind and consider how it may apply to you.

It is a mile-long event with vendors on both sides. You may not see the same person twice, so “close” when you can.

Closing means selling those earrings or a hot dog - or signing up a volunteer for shore clean-up day - “do it now”. If you are selling something large (keep in mind people might be hesitant to buy items that they are going to have to carry) they may not want to come back to you while you “hold” their item. Offer free local delivery. If the situation is right you may consider giving “concessions” when negotiating with someone who will “be right back”. (We note this as we want you to do well at the event and recognize that results are important.)

The average festival guest is money conscious.

People who attend the event are wise with their dollars. Yes, it is an affluent area and I would guess that the people in the area have money because they spend it wisely. Along these lines please consider this when pricing your goods and always consider an option for the “younger” crowd whether it is a “less expensive” line of earrings for that teenager on a budget or perhaps a student discount at the food booths, or something else creative may be in order. We do not want the reputation of being too expensive to attend.

A crowd attracts a crowd and an “empty” area keeps people away. Keep traffic as high as possible in your area.

Some ideas may include having the [Sunday] football game playing on a TV everyone can see, or having a big bowl of colorful candy to attract the kids who will of course drag their parents over for that free piece of candy. Perhaps you should have something for the little ones to do while you “talk business” with the adults. Keep some coloring books and cold water bottles on hand. Perhaps invest in a cold-water dispenser that everyone will see and encourage the public to stop and fill-up (the environmentally conscious do not use [plastic] water “bottles”) Keep people comfortable and they’ll stay longer. Maybe an “EZ Up” tent is a good idea just so people can stand in the shade?

There are considerable psychological reasons why you want to make sure your booth has traffic at all times, even if it is one of your own people standing “in front”!

Any Business can Benefit from a Crowd of a Quarter-million People:

You may not have a “now” item for sale and you may want to target clients for the future... Flowers do not sell at the Solano Stroll. They are too fragile to carry around and the car is too far away (or too hot) to store them. But we recommend that the flower shops on Solano put out a beautiful display that will attract attention and hand out (with a smile) coupons good for perhaps twenty percent-off “special event” flowers (for graduations, etc.) or perhaps a coupon offering a deep discount for the next 30 days. Have people enter a drawing (again, generating traffic at your booth) for a free bouquet – delivered...

Hold a “flowers 101” class every hour if you have to, the Solano Avenue Stroll will give back what you put into it.

Do not ignore the power of coupons. “Print” a discount postcard nice enough for people to actually put on their fridge, with a discount significant enough to keep it there. Distribute coupons good on a birthday, or a “two for one” good during “down time” for your business. Invest in your coupon, it projects your image – most photocopied “flyers” just end up on the street or in the trash and you don’t want your company associated with litter.

Be inventive. Ask a friend if your booth plans sound appealing or if your “give away” is worth stopping for. A considerable amount of freebies end up in the trash at the end of the day; maybe you want people to “earn” or “win” the freebie so they are more likely to keep it.

You can promote yourself now and set yourself up for the future whether you are selling flowers or mortgages. Though in some cases you will not have customers on the day of the Solano Avenue Stroll but that does not mean you should ignore the potential from marketing your product or service for the future to a crowd of 250,000 avenue guests.

Food Vendors including Solano Avenue Restaurants:

We do not invite food vendors who sell food types that “compete” with existing Solano Avenue restaurants, so what is left is junk food. At a festival - things you cannot (or should not) eat everyday are what do best. Half of your customers are going to want to eat with one hand and families and are looking for “value” meals. Do not overwhelm the public with a complex menu, Confusion leads to long lines. Have just a few choices including something vegetarian, beef, chicken, and then pork – the standard “fast” foods.

Solano Avenue restaurants should also have a simple “outside” menu. In fact outside dining is preferred. The restaurants that do the best set-up tables outside on the street after the parade passes.

Contact the Association for more suggestions; especially if you have any input that would help your fellow vendors. Thank you and see you at the Solano Avenue Stroll!

(V2.2 09/2012)