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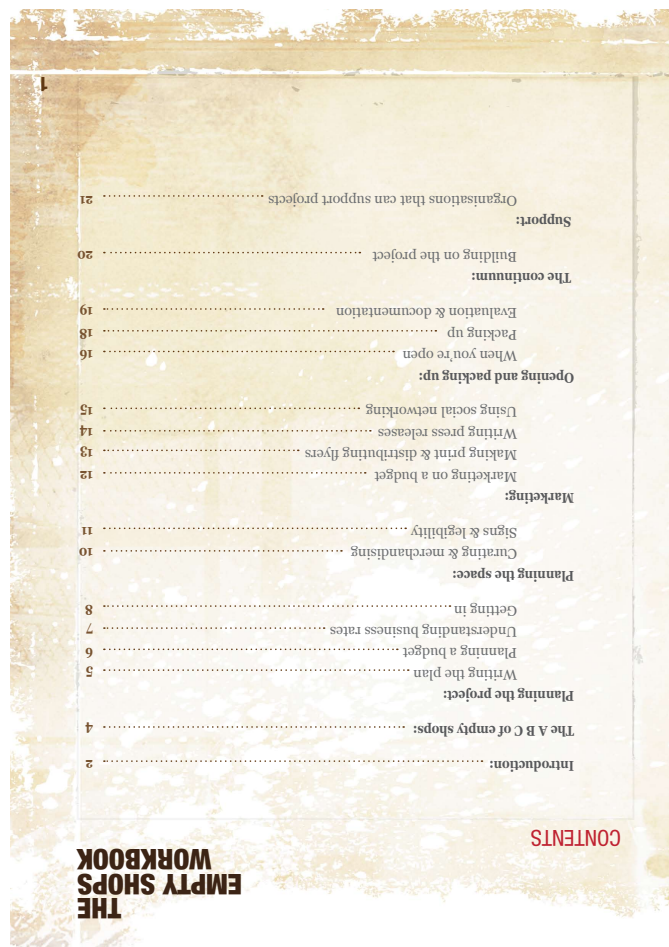
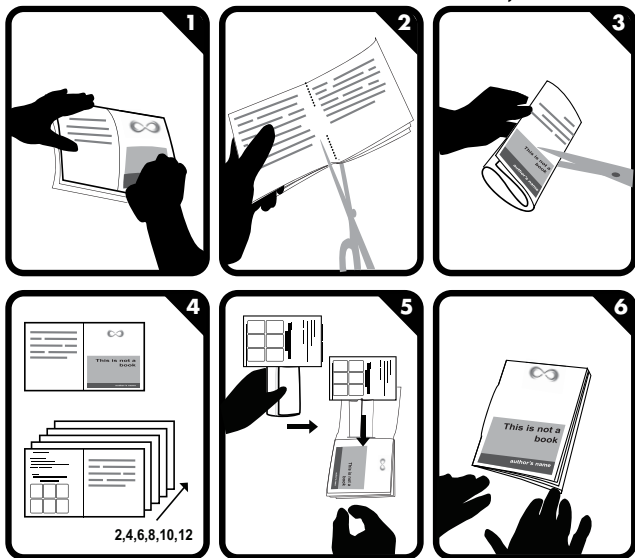
The Empty Shops Workbook is part of the Meanwhile Manual series, a collection of guides for using temporary spaces.

[www.meanwhile.org.uk](http://www.meanwhile.org.uk)

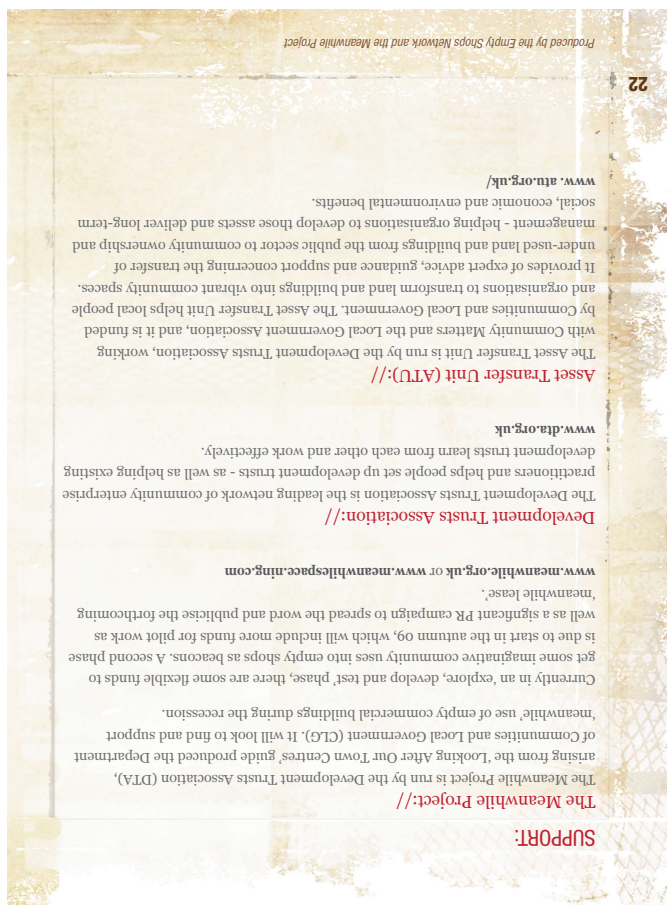
Produced by the Empty Shops Network and The Meanwhile Project

Based on research supported by the Revolutionary Arts Group, the Artists Information Company and Worthing Regeneration

made with [www.bookleteer.com](http://www.bookleteer.com) from proboscis







Produced by the Empty Shops Network and the Meanwhile Project

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[www.atu.org.uk/](http://www.atu.org.uk/)

The Asset Transfer Unit (ATU) is run by the Development Trusts Association, working with Communities and Local Government. The Asset Transfer Unit helps local people and organisations to transform land and buildings into vibrant community spaces. It provides of expert advice, guidance and support concerning the transfer of under-used land and buildings from the public sector to community ownership and management - helping organisations to develop those assets and deliver long-term social, economic and environmental benefits.

[www.atu.org.uk/](http://www.atu.org.uk/)

[www.dta.org.uk](http://www.dta.org.uk)

The Development Trusts Association is the leading network of community enterprise practitioners and helps people set up development trusts - as well as helping existing development trusts learn from each other and work effectively.

[www.dta.org.uk](http://www.dta.org.uk)

[www.meanwhile.org.uk](http://www.meanwhile.org.uk) or [www.meanwhilespace-ning.com](http://www.meanwhilespace-ning.com)

The Meanwhile Project is run by the Development Trusts Association (DTA), arising from the 'Looking After Our Town Centres' guide produced by the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG). It will look to find and support meanwhile use of empty commercial buildings during the recession. Currently in an 'explore, develop and test' phase, there are some flexible funds to get some imaginative community uses into empty shops as beacons. A second phase is due to start in the autumn 09, which will include more funds for pilot work as well as a significant PR campaign to spread the word and publicise the forthcoming 'meanwhile lease'.

[www.meanwhile.org.uk](http://www.meanwhile.org.uk) or [www.meanwhilespace-ning.com](http://www.meanwhilespace-ning.com)

**SUPPORT:**

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**Looking After Our Town Centres://**

This guide from CLG offers practical help which aims to make sure that town centres reach their full potential. It also looks further ahead, helping those involved in town centres - planners, service managers, businesses, local groups and communities - develop a clear vision, and actively plan to take advantage of new opportunities when the recovery begins. It recommends the use of empty shops by arts and community groups, and gave £3 million of government funding to 57 local councils in August 09'.

[www.tinyurl.com/clnpw4](http://www.tinyurl.com/clnpw4)

**Arts Council England ://**

Arts Council England (ACE) is the national development agency for the arts in England and has set aside £500,000 of their Lottery income as a fund to which artists can apply for grants to help them carry out artistic activities in empty shops. The money is available through the 'Grants To The Arts' scheme".

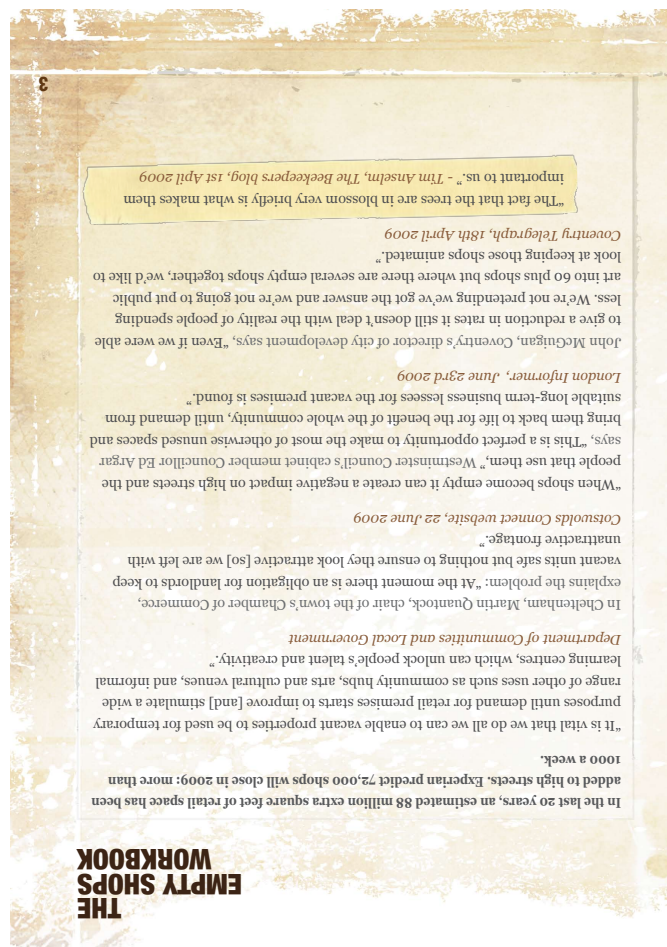
[www.tinyurl.com/qmz6tr](http://www.tinyurl.com/qmz6tr)

**a-n the Artists Information Company://**

a-n's publications and programmes are designed to meet the professional needs of artists and the visual arts sector, identifying changing trends and new needs. Founded in 1980, a-n the Artists Information Company is acknowledged as a leading UK agency supporting the practice of visual and applied artists, and is perhaps best known for producing a-n magazine and the sister website. It is supporting the long-term work of the Empty Shops Network.

[www.a-n.co.uk](http://www.a-n.co.uk)

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"The fact that the trees are in blossom very briefly is what makes them important to us." - Tim Anselm, *The Beekeepers blog*, 1st April 2009

Coverity Telegraph, 18th April 2009  
look at keeping those shops animated."  
art into 60 plus shops but where there are several empty shops together, we'd like to less. We're not pretending we've got the answer and we're not going to put public to give a reduction in rates it still doesn't deal with the reality of people spending John McGuigan, Coventry's director of city development says, "Even if we were able London Informer, June 23rd 2009

suitable long-term business lessors for the vacant premises is found."

bring them back to life for the benefit of the whole community, until demand from says, "This is a perfect opportunity to make the most of otherwise unused spaces and people that use them," Westminster Council's cabinet member Councillor Ed Argar "When shops become empty it can create a negative impact on high streets and the Coventry Connect website, 22 June 2009

unattractive frontage."

vacant units safe but nothing to ensure they look attractive [so] we are left with explains the problem: "At the moment there is an obligation for landlords to keep In Cheltenham, Martin Quantock, chair of the town's Chamber of Commerce,

learning centres, which can unlock people's talent and creativity."

range of other uses such as community hubs, arts and cultural venues, and informal purposes until demand for retail premises starts to improve [and] stimulate a wide "It is vital that we do all we can to enable vacant properties to be used for temporary 1000 a week.

added to high streets. Experts predict 72,000 shops will close in 2009; more than In the last 20 years, an estimated 88 million extra square feet of retail space has been

## THE EMPTY SHOPS WORKBOOK

## INTRODUCTION

**Does The High Street Have A Future?://**

It's cheaper online, it's easier out of town, it's two-for-one at the supermarket. The parking in town's expensive, the big stores have left anyway, and the streets are looking tatty and as Blur sang, inspiring an in-depth study by the New Economics Foundation, "All the high streets look the same."

But the traditional high street, the pattern of streets in our town centre, the character, feel and local distinctiveness, and the way we shop have all taken a long time to develop. The British shopping experience is unique, our relationship with shops special. We are, after all, a nation of shopkeepers, except for those of us that are shoppers.

And right now, that rich history is under threat. The overheads for shops, buying stock and paying bills, are rising - while customers, hit by growing debt, bigger bills and lower income, are spending less.

But the high street does have a future. To find it, we need to look to the past but also to the future. The old fashioned high street, with local shops tailored to the market, is still a sound idea. Allied to the future of shopping as a leisure activity, and the high street may come back to life again.

**'Entertainment is really key to bringing footfall to shops'**

Mary Portas

We need to revive, restore and ultimately reinvent our high streets, making them entertaining and enjoyable places to spend time. We need to recognise that the high street is a venue for events, an amphitheatre for family life, and make it a distinct place that's worth visiting. And that's where meanwhile use of empty shops comes in.

Dan Thompson  
Empty Shops Network

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Produced by the Empty Shops Network and the Meanwhile Project





Let's get started right now.

Let's do it ourselves.

Let's explore spaces that are dead, and fill them with life.

our town centres.

spaces that are social, so people can come together and find common ground. Let's find ways for people of every age, every shape, every size and every budget to fit in.

Let's create spaces that are nests, so small businesses can learn to fly. Let's make

business and local distinctiveness, as well as big business and branding.

flexible. Let's make them public, not private. Let's make town centres about local

Let's fill them with debate and discussion. Let's make town centres about ideas

and inspiration, as well as just investment. Let's make town centres friendly and

Let's make town centres places for swapping and sharing, as well as spending.

balance between business and community.

It's a recession, so we need to restore and revive the high street. But after that,

it's time to reinvent and reimagine our town centres as we try to find again the

## The Future Of Empty Shops: //

to chapter 3 to start planning your next project.

Well done, you've reached the end of your empty shop project. Now, once you've given the landlord or letting agent a box of chocolates and a thank-you card, go back

Building On The Project: //

THE CONTINUUM:

## THE EMPTY SHOPS WORKBOOK

### SUPPORT:

#### Funding, Resources, Websites & Organisations That Can Support Projects: //

New sources of support and funding pop up and disappear all the time (this is correct in November 2009!). Check out the 'news' section on some of the websites below, regularly check [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk) and don't overlook the occasional local authority initiative. And consider getting local business to sponsor your project, maybe with a small amount of cash but also by donating goods or services to help.

If funding is proving difficult to raise for your own project, try collaborating with other projects or working with your local town or city centre initiative, or even BIDs (Business Improvement Districts – find out more at [www.britishtbids.info](http://www.britishtbids.info)). Be enterprising in your project plan and try to clearly demonstrate how it could generate revenue itself.

#### Empty Shops Network: //

The Empty Shops Network provides an online listing of empty shop projects across the UK, and keeps them in touch with each other using an email list to send occasional bulletins, and an email discussion group. It also produces practical resources, like this Empty Shops Workbook.

The network acts as a central point of contact and has handled enquiries from national media, as well as individual artists, arts organisations and local authorities. It has also acted as advocate for the sector in discussions with the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG), the Meanwhile Project and local authorities.

[www.artistsandmakers.com/emptyshops](http://www.artistsandmakers.com/emptyshops)

- Writing A Plan (and being ready to throw it away): //
- There's a balancing act with empty shops; you need to plan ahead and be good at responding quickly to the unexpected (like finding the shop's full of rubbish, the roof leaks, or you're suddenly moved to a different unit than the one you expected!). So do plan – but don't spend so long on it that you're more involved with a plan than a project. Like the Pink Fairies sang, 'Don't talk about it, man, all you gotta do is do it'.
- So be ready to adapt to the space, embrace the temporary nature of the project and cope with a little bit of chaos if it comes. Remember as well that you may be required to leave at short notice.
- Here's a set of simple questions. Answer them – it should take no more than one side of A4 – and you'll have a short business plan for your project. This will help you understand the project, keep it moving forward, and make sure that you can explain to landlords, letting agents and local authorities what the project's about:
- What's the purpose behind your project and why is an empty shop the right venue?
  - Does it need to be in the town centre, or would a location somewhere less visible be as good?
  - How long will your project last?
  - What will it cost?
  - How will you promote the project to get visitors?
  - Who will be the main organiser: are you working by yourself or as part of an organisation?
  - Does the organisation need a committee to approve your plan?
  - Who are the possible partners who can help make your project a success?
  - How will you record and measure whether the project's worked?
  - Why is your project good for a building? What does the landlord or letting agent get from it?

## PLANNING THE PROJECT: THE EMPTY SHOPS WORKBOOK

### THE A,B,C OF EMPTY SHOPS:

This is a light look at the when, why and how of empty shops based on years of experience. It's also an attempt to make it clear that not every project is perfect for an empty shop. These are special places, and the meanwhile shopkeepers are special people.

#### A. Embrace The Meanwhile: //

Like the Buddhists say, it's about living in the moment. Right now, there's lots of empty space and all the experts agree, by the time I finish writing this sentence there will be even more. 1000 shops a week are closing. When we're out of the current recession, there won't be as much. Enjoy it while you can – move quickly, be agile, and think on your feet, or you'll miss it. Grasp the nettle, grab the moment, and embrace the meanwhile.

#### B. Find The Character: //

Using empty shops for temporary pop-up projects is about much more than getting an idea onto the high street for cheap. The best projects are celebrating the local, finding the distinctive, engaging with the character of empty spaces, exploring new ideas and exciting the neighbourhood. As such, they are useful for community groups, local authorities and central government wanting to address a variety of different agendas. These projects and the places have their own character – find it and embrace it, don't try to make it look like everything else on the street – or like everything else you do, either.

#### C. Enjoy The End: //

The success of an empty shop project may be measured in many ways. It can increase footfall for a neighbourhood, supporting local traders. It can raise the profile of a community event. It can bring together a new partnership, whether that's a group of excited, inspired and engaged individuals or a working relationship between organisations and authorities. And it's quite alright for a project not to work. Like Becket said, "Try again. Fail again. Fail better." Empty shops make great laboratories for new ideas and new businesses. And in a week, a month, or half a year it will all be over. Look forward to the end, it means it's time to start planning a new project.



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When you've finished, you need to make sure you'll be invited back by the landlord or letting agent and that means filling a few black sacks, getting the polythene out, and having a good scrub up.

First clear everything you've brought into the shop, and make sure you have black sacks to clear any rubbish. Of course - separate your recycling!

Spend some time with a tube of fast-drying filler, and fill any holes you've made in the walls. Repaint or touch up the paintwork.

Any shopfittings should be left neat and tidy for the next user. Leave furniture neatly to one side, and leave shelf-brackets and other fittings neatly stacked.

Vacuum, and make sure you clean under shop counters as well as the obvious areas, make sure they are clean and if there's a toilet, clean and leave enough toilet paper for the next person!

Make sure you show the landlord or letting agent the space before you return the keys, so there's no future dispute about the condition when you left. And make sure they get a box of chocolates or a bunch of flowers - it ensures goodwill for the next project.

Packing Up://

## OPENING AND PACKING UP:

## THE EMPTY SHOPS WORKBOOK

### OPENING AND PACKING UP:

#### Evaluation & Documentation://

Just because you've packed up and locked the door, it doesn't mean your project is over. You need to evaluate and document your project, for your own satisfaction, to show people when you're planning your next project, and to add to the nationwide empty shops map. If you have worked with project partners or received funding, you may need to provide them with certain evidence and evaluation as well.

As with everything else to do with empty shops, don't make your personal evaluation complicated, and keep it light-touch. It should include:

**How many people were involved: exhibitors or contributors, as volunteers, organisations, businesses and visitors?**

**Your own blogs, and any other websites which wrote about your project**

**Your project budget: what everything cost, and what money came in**

**Any key media coverage, with a note of date and the author, including local newspapers, national press, TV and radio**

**As many photographs as possible, ideally starting with an empty shop, through the setting up, to a full and busy space with people in it, and then an empty shop again**

**Comments, from exhibitors, contributors, visitors, neighbouring shops, that stand out - record the negatives as well as the favourable ones, as these are more useful and help you learn lessons for next time**

And write your own thoughts and feelings down; what worked, and what didn't? Why did some things swing while others were stuck in a rut? Was the project too long, or too short? When was the highpoint, and what was the low?

Keep all of this in a portfolio or folder, to refer to when planning future projects.

And contact the national Empty Shops Network at: [www.artistsandmakers.com/emptyshops](http://www.artistsandmakers.com/emptyshops) to add your project to their growing archive.

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For further business rate information visit [www.meanwhile.org.uk](http://www.meanwhile.org.uk)

Listed buildings are not liable for empty property rates.

Councils may choose to count "meanwhile" projects as community, arts or educational use and can therefore grant up to 100% reduction.

Small business rate relief applies to businesses that occupy one property and offers relief on a sliding scale. This can be up to 50% of business rates.

The council has discretion to allow up to 100% reduction in business rates for rates. Once shops are in use, they are eligible for 100% business rates.

Empty properties with a rateable value of less than £15,000 are exempt from business rates. Larger empty shops receive a 50% reduction in business rates for a void period of three months, after which landlords are eligible for full business rates. Once shops are in use, they are eligible for 100% business rates.

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Understanding Business Rates://

## PLANNING THE PROJECT:

## THE EMPTY SHOPS WORKBOOK

### PLANNING THE PROJECT:

#### Planning A Budget://

For your project to work, it needs to have a financial plan, which will help you make sure the funds you need are in place, and give you some outcomes to measure.

Firstly, write out what your empty shop project will cost. List every expense -

**Materials to do the shop up**

**Furniture, fixtures and fittings**

**Printed publicity**

**Paying for advertising**

**Overheads like electricity, water and business rates**

(You can estimate these by asking a nearby shop of a similar size)

**Tea, coffee and biscuits for staff, or refreshments for visitors**

**Toilet paper and soap, window cleaner and cloths**

Add all of those up and you have a figure for your expenses.

Now work out the costs of staffing the project:

**Planning meetings, get-togethers and workshops**

**Opening the shop**

**Writing up evaluation and meetings afterwards**

Even if you're planning to work on a voluntary basis - keep a timesheet, even if it's only a rough note to yourself. It's a useful figure to know, especially if you decide to move onto a more professional or full-time basis later on.

Now write up all the money that's coming in:

**Donations from the public**

**People paying contributions to the project**

**Small amounts of sponsorship from local business**

**Grant funding from local authorities**

**Meanwhile Project funding, Arts Council England grants or income from trusts and foundations. (See the end of this guide for more advice on funding!)**

Your total income should exceed your total expenditure.

You should be in profit!

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Don't eat food in the shop

Don't bury your head in a book

Don't huddle with friends in deep conversation

Don't ignore people when they come in

always works. It's all about engaging with visitors.

Once visitors are in, try to make them feel welcome without being too pushy! It's a fine balance, but a polite 'hello, look around and I'm here if you have any questions' open so it's comfortable for people to enter.

Make your venue stand out: homemade bunting, flags, or balloons, tell people exactly where you are and that something exciting is happening. Leave the door open so it's comfortable for people to enter.

or signpost.

Find out if there are any sites nearby where you can legally hang a temporary banner

upload to Facebook and Flickr.

Chamber of Commerce. Make sure the local papers are there, and if they're not get good-quality photos in their house style that they can use. Get your own photos to

invite the mayor, local councillors and the leaders of business groups like the

ambassadors for your project. You're working in a public space and a civic arena;

an extra buzz – and everyone who attends, will send more people. It helps create

Document visitors

Get feedback on your work

Build your mailing list

Attract future work

To make the most of opening your empty shop, you'll want to:

When You're Open://

## OPENING AND PACKING UP:

## THE EMPTY SHOPS WORKBOOK

### OPENING AND PACKING UP:

Try to collect details from visitors to build your own mailing list with a visitors' book or a simple 'sign up for our mailing list' form near the door. Ask people to sign up or leave a comment as they're leaving.

And make sure that visitors can take away your details too, by giving them postcards, business cards or a simple leaflet.



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the people behind Durham's emptyshop.org



people over every time.

the romance, the vision and the fire that, backed up with facts and figures, will win

polite, and friendly, and professional – but don't lose your passion, because it's

and people passionate about their charity are an intimidating bunch. Always be

One final thing. Never forget that to many people artists, community activists

member of the local allotment society.

Do try to join up the dots as well: it may be that someone you meet as the managing

agent of a shopping centre is a keen amateur photographer, or an estate agent's wife

is an enthusiastic mature student at art college, or that the landlord is actually a

## THE EMPTY SHOPS WORKBOOK

### PLANNING THE PROJECT:

### PLANNING THE PROJECT:

#### Getting In://

It's really not hard to get into empty shops if you lay good foundations. You need to meet property owners, landlord, managers and letting agents.

Business networking is the answer. You'll need to do this more than once; you'll need to do it regularly; in fact, you'll need to make it a normal part of your working week, at least until you're established.

- Use search engines to find business networking groups in your area
- Find your nearest branch of the Federation of Small Businesses
- Contact your local Chamber of Commerce
- Track down your town centre manager
- Use Social networking web sites to find other groups
- And find business or economic development officers at your council

Once you have a contact name, ask for either five minutes to speak at a forthcoming meeting, or just to be able to attend a meeting as a guest. Turn up looking smart and professional and with business cards.

If you have the chance to make a presentation, keep it short, sharp and focused on the problem, and your solution. Don't talk about the project itself, but about the benefits to the group you're making a presentation to. In short, answer the audience's only question which is 'what's in it for me?'

After attending networking meetings, keep business cards and make a note of any personal information on them – hobbies, interests and so on – and try to keep in touch by phone, email or by meeting occasionally for a coffee.

If you can't get into business meetings, it's time for another approach: find the shops you like, note down the name on the estate agent's 'To Let' boards and visit their office. Set up the meeting, and don't mention that you want a temporary lease and no rent until you've met them face to face! Be prepared to answer all the questions in the 'Planning Your Project' checklist in this workbook.

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Don't pay to get in the local papers - learn how to write a good press release. It's easy, and can be emailed to a large list of local news outlets at no cost.

As well as building a good list of email contacts in the local and regional media (buy newspapers, pick up free magazines, and scour websites for email addresses), send your press release to local, community websites (who love to receive great content for their sites), arts websites, and groups, clubs and societies in your area - they'll use it in their newsletters.

At the top of your press release, include the date and the words 'Press Release'. Add an attention-grabbing headline - a maximum of half a dozen words is ideal. Think tabloid... The first paragraph should be a short one (just one line is good) outlining the story in an interesting way.

Follow up with the story. Explain what's happening and why it's of interest to readers. Aim to write a press release that is between 300 - 400 words. Too short and it won't get good coverage; too long and it won't get read.

The press often like to have a quote - ideally from someone known or national. Feel free to ask the Empty Shops Network or Meanwhile Project for a supporting quote here!

Include your contact details, with a phone and an email address that are both answered.

Make it clear where the story ends and that any following information is additional and for the press only. Using /ends/ is standard and easy to understand. Add your contact details and any 'Notes for Editors', like the background to a project, or a brief history of a venue.

Offer a good photo to match the story, and offer interviews or live broadcast ideas for radio and TV.

#### Writing Press Releases://

#### MARKETING:

## THE EMPTY SHOPS WORKBOOK

#### MARKETING:

##### Using Social Networking://

For the first time in the history of humankind, we have the tools available to make networks of friends and colleagues - to bring together those who share common ideas, interests and aspirations - in real time, around the world and at low cost.

Social networking websites include names you're sure to be familiar with - **Facebook**, **MySpace**, **Twitter** and the older **Friends Reunited**. But there are many more, like photo-sharing website **Flickr**, the new site that lets you build your own networks **Ning**, teenage favourite **Bebo** and business site **LinkedIn**.

All of these let you build your own page to talk about what you do: and let people become your friends or followers to receive updates about what you're doing. They're usually free to use so they have a large number of users, putting you in touch with a large audience.

Pick the sites that best match the audience you want to reach, and spend some time building your page, adding content and inviting people to sign up. It's an investment in time that returns friendship and future colleagues alongside ambassadors for your project and a live audience!

Start by finding the Empty Shops Network at:

Twitter - [www.twitter.com/artistsmakers](http://www.twitter.com/artistsmakers)  
 Facebook - [www.tinyurl.com/dm54dc](http://www.tinyurl.com/dm54dc)  
 Moblog - [www.moblog.net/emptyshopsnetwork/](http://www.moblog.net/emptyshopsnetwork/)  
 And the Meanwhile Project at:  
 Ning - <http://meanwhitespace.ning.com/>



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- ☐ Signs
- ☐ Shelves
- ☐ Leaflet Racks
- ☐ Exhibition Boards
- ☐ Tables & Chairs
- ☐ Shop counter

#### Checklist://

Signs are important. Look at the shops around yours - they have invested in clear signs, corporate identities and clever displays to make it comfortable for customers to come in and spend money.

You may choose to spend money on custom-made shop signs or vinyl transfers for your shop windows. But for short-term projects this might not be economical. So be creative, and remember that a huge, homemade sign outside the venue is better than a well-designed A4 poster in a window. Alternatively, many copy shops can enlarge an A4 black and white page to an A0 poster for just a few pounds.

Design clear signs explaining what the project is about. Again, enlarge it at a copy shop for legibility. If you use your signs to explain the temporary nature of the project, it can attract people to get involved in this or future projects; and it can calm nervous visitors who don't understand your project, and are always the first to criticise you in the local paper's letters page.

#### Signs & Legibility://

#### PLANNING THE SPACE:

## THE EMPTY SHOPS WORKBOOK

#### PLANNING THE SPACE:

##### Curating & Merchandising://

When you're working on the high street, your presentation will be judged by higher standards than in community spaces. High street retailers spend a lot of time, money and effort 'merchandising' to make their shops look good - you can achieve similar standards on a budget by being creative and thinking sideways. If you don't, and your shop space looks shabby, expect to upset nearby shops.

Choose a style and stick to it. Find furniture and objects that match, and treat the space as one big display.

Don't worry about buying expensive furniture; embrace the temporary nature of the project and find furniture for free, using your local Freecycle group

Give it all a lick of paint - everything white looks stylish and professional, or if you fancy more fun try mis-matched primary colours

Use furniture and colours to make different areas of the shop distinct

And don't forget to utilise furniture, fixtures and fittings you find in the space as well

Larger local stores may also be able to help with the loan of shopfittings, shelving and so on. Find the 'Head of Merchandising' in your nearest department store and ask for their help.



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