

The Art Festival Newsletter™

News, trends, developments, resources and advice
for art festival artists.

The Tenth Art Festival Newsletter Survey:

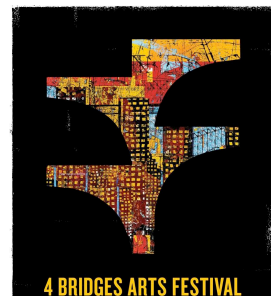
“The Art of Change”

Survey Report and Analysis

June, 2012

This nationwide survey is sponsored by: 4 Bridges Art Festival, Chattanooga, TN

Celebrating its 13th year, Chattanooga's 4 Bridges Arts Festival will be the place to be in April 2013! This exciting event will once again feature fine art and fine craft from over 150 local and national artists. Housed in Chattanooga's beautiful open air First Tennessee Pavilion, this stand-out show is not to be missed. Frequently top-ranked, 4 Bridges attracts a savvy art buying crowd from not only its local art smart patrons but also visitors from Atlanta, Nashville and Birmingham.



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INTRODUCTION

On May 17, 2012 we invited 8,359 artists, working in 13 different mediums and living and exhibiting in all areas of the nation, to take part in The Art Festival Newsletter's tenth national artist survey via the internet.

The subject of the survey was "The Art of Change." The survey is a reprise of the survey conducted in May, 2011, on the same subject.

The goal of the survey was to develop a broad-based understanding of what art festival artists believe has changed and will change in the art festival industry. The information we gathered also yields a comprehensive view of how artists see the industry today, as this reflects the effect of the last few years on the pursuit of their careers. Additionally, we conducted the survey to reveal any trends that have started to form in artists' viewpoints--and actions--as a result of the recession's impact.

Equally important, the survey results can inform festival operators--in a single document and at one time--of the importance artists place on the changes in the industry, and what festivals can do to enhance the festival experience.

The survey consisted of 20 questions, each with multiple-choice answers, and artists had the option not to answer questions if they so chose.

The Art Festival Newsletter is pleased to provide artists--and other industry members--with the results of its tenth national artist survey.

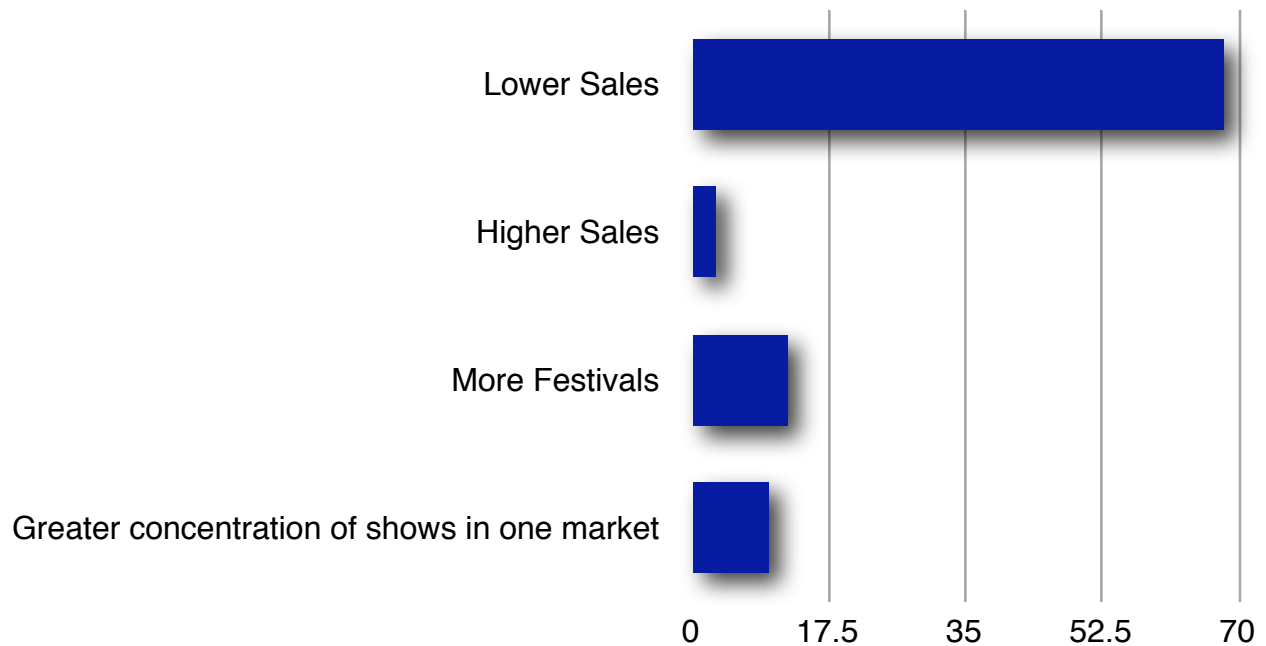
Survey Questions, Answers and Interpretation

The following pages contain the artists' responses to each survey question, accompanied by response levels in percentages and brief interpretations of the answers' importance to the art festival industry and the artists themselves.

A complete report and analysis of the survey results will appear in the Summer, 2012, issue of The Art Festival Newsletter.

(Note: All Numbers Shown in Charts are %'s)

1. What is the greatest change you have seen in the art festival industry in the last three years?

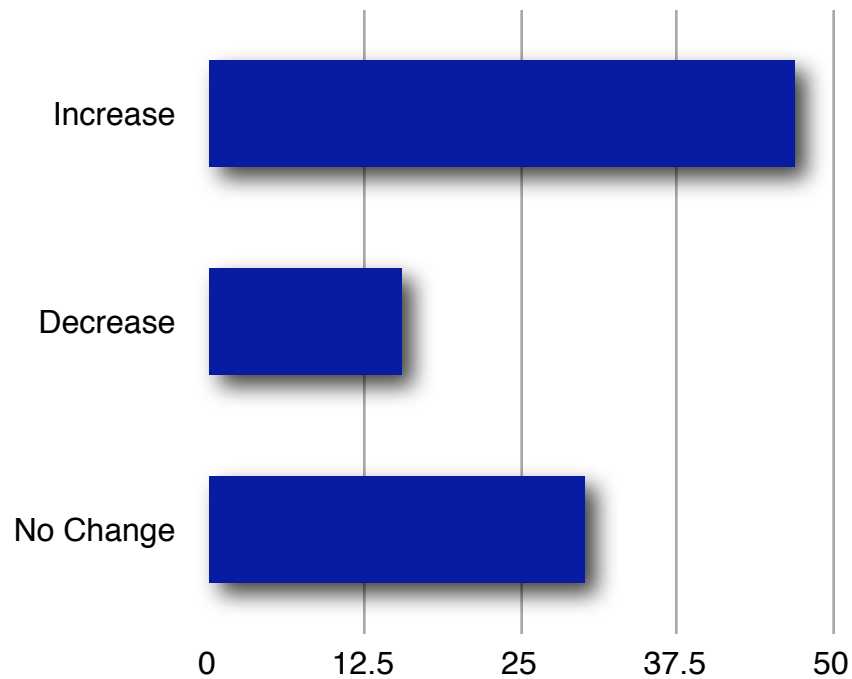


In a continuing sign of the times, most artists again (68.1%) said that lower sales mark the greatest change they have seen in the art festival industry in the last three years. The answer “More festivals” drew 12.3% of the artists’ votes, while a “Greater concentration of shows in a single market” was third at 9.9%. A very few artists (3.1%) said “Higher sales” represented the greatest change.

Artists’ answers, of course, here correlate with their personal incomes. Two-thirds of the artists who exhibit at festivals may have seen their sales fall by a large amount, with that deterioration being a bigger factor in their festival participation than any other element.

The converse may also be true: so few artists have seen their sales rise that it is an insignificant factor in their festival participation. The ongoing erosion in sales for festival exhibitors remains the single most problematic trend in the industry, one unlikely to change until the economy strengthens significantly.

2. Over the next three years, do you believe your sales at festivals will:



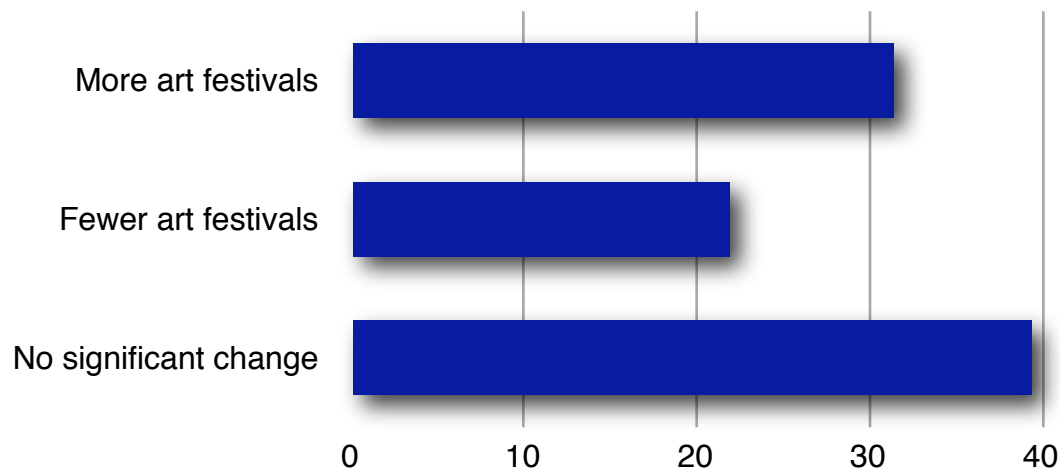
Nearly half (47%) of artists surveyed believe that their festival sales will increase in the near future. Another 30.2%, just over one quarter, foresee no change, while 15.5% think sales will fall over the coming three years.

With the economic wreckage wrought by the Great Recession still strewn around us, the optimism these answers imply is striking, especially given a lack of any evidence that the recession's technical end has increased artists' sales so far.

The response levels are nearly exactly equivalent to those in the last survey, However, artists responses to this year's survey do not show that their optimism last year came to fruition.

What artists intend to do in light of the continuing erosion of sales becomes clear in their answer to the questions that follow,

3. Over the next three years, do you expect there will be:

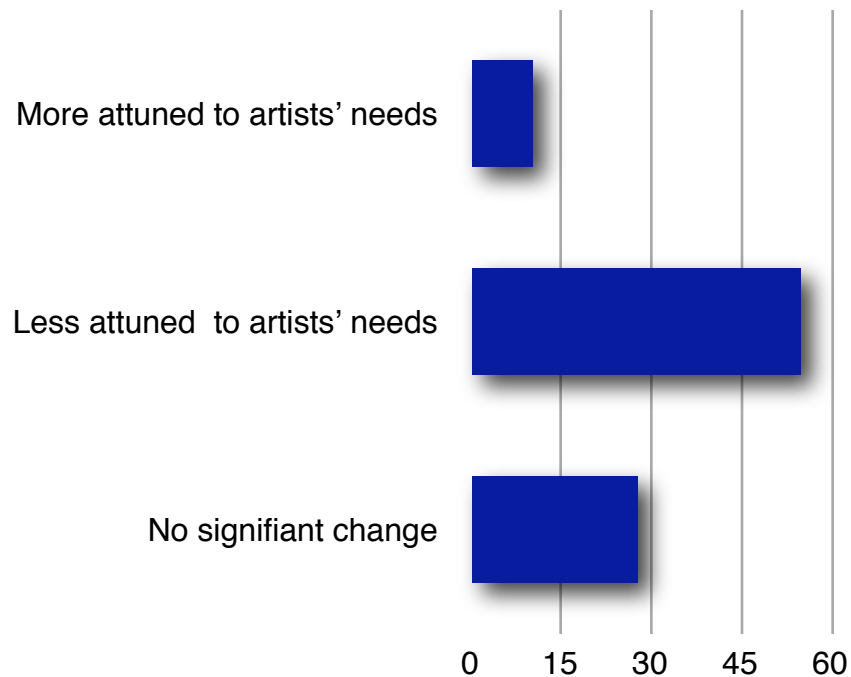


Artists' responses to this question present an interesting picture where they believe the industry is headed. One in five (31.4%) foresee more shows coming into being, while 21.9% believe the number of shows will diminish. Two out of five artists (39.4%) see no significant change in the number of festivals on the horizon.

Thus, more than one-fifth of artists responding must believe too many shows exist to support the artist community and, therefore, some will fail. Yet another sixty-plus percent see either no change, or an actual increase in the number of shows.

This last, in a recessionary era, is surprising. Typically, businesses fail during a deep economic downturn. The art festival industry may be different, since shows need not necessarily make a profit to continue their existence. Not-for-profit organizations, grant supported events and smaller shows with minimal operating budgets can continue for many years at or below breakeven. However, the viability of shows that do not produce enough income to support significant marketing efforts comes into question. Artists can, and do, stop participating when shows no longer bring in the patrons needed to create acceptable sales.

4. Do you believe art festivals are becoming:

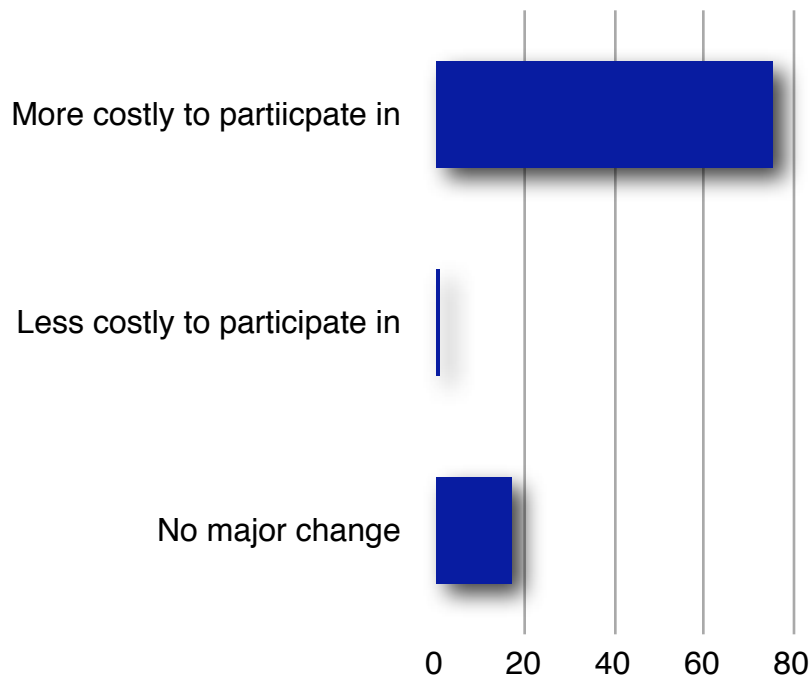


More than half (54.9%) of artists believe festivals are becoming less attuned to artists' needs, up by more than ten percent from last year, while only 10.3% think shows are more attuned to artists' needs and 27.8% see no significant change.

The responses are revealing, and in some ways unfortunate. While the “artists’ needs” mentioned are undefined, the answers indicate the way in which artists believe shows consider them. Historically, and perhaps more pronounced in the last few years, artists have voiced a certain distrust of festivals, displaying an almost adversarial attitude. Less than half of artists responding to the survey think there has been either no change or an improvement in festivals’ responsiveness to artists’ requirements. The already evident distrust (which, it should be noted, does not apply to all shows or all artists) may have deepened and hardened during the recession.

Many festivals--at times with good cause--will say, off the record, that dealing with artists can be frustrating. Many artists will say, again off the record and with good cause, that shows, especially during the recession, have done too little to drive paying customers into artists’ booths. When, during the downturn, shows increased fees, artists wondered why--and how the festivals expected artists to weather the economic storm if the shows were contributing to their financial difficulties.

5. Do you believe festivals, in the next three years, will become:



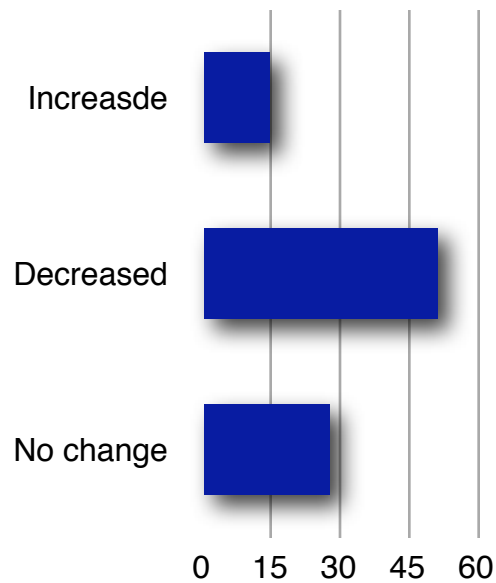
Three-quarters (75.6%) of artists believe the cost to participate in festivals will increase over the next three years. One in five (17.1%) think costs will not change much, while only 1.1% think they will go down.

On the heels of the prior question, the issue brought up here becomes important both in the facts that may make artists' answers come true, and in the implication it holds for the relationship between artists and shows.

Show costs are higher, by far, than just a few years ago. When artists' sales soared, festivals raised fees--a natural, if somewhat misguided, principle followed by many industries. When the economy slid, shows did not lower fees; indeed, some continued to increase them. Artists can be forgiven for not envisioning a different scenario over the next few years.

Both the increased cost trend itself, and the artists' belief that it will continue three years into the future are cause for concern industry-wide.

6. In your opinion, the quality of art exhibited at festivals in the last three years has:



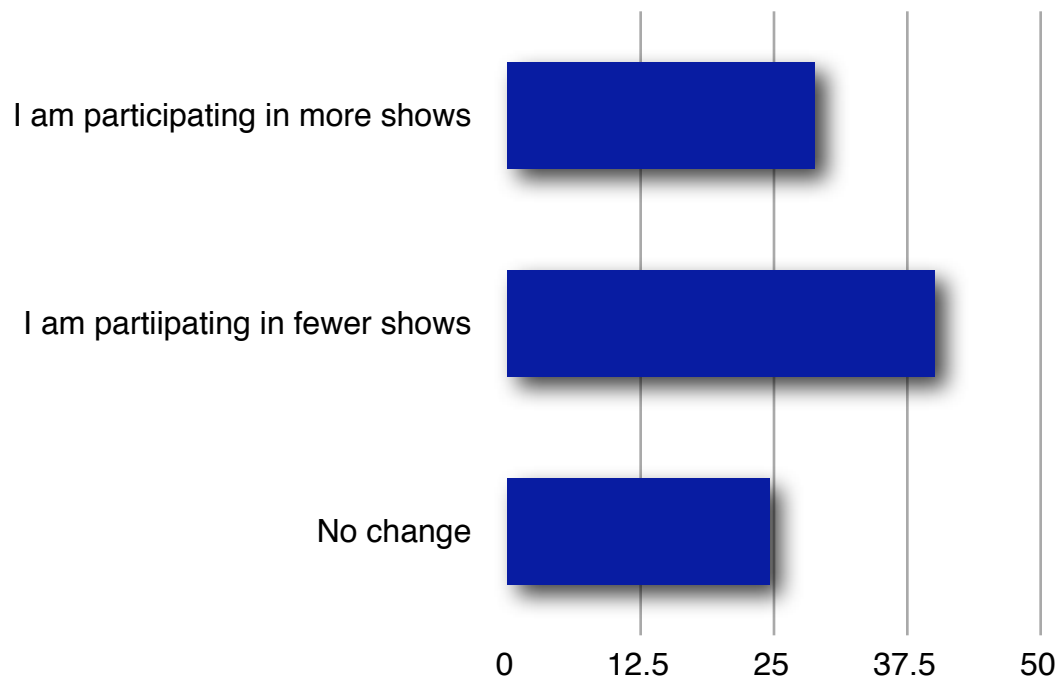
More than one half (51.3%) of artists--up five percent from last year--surveyed think the quality of art exhibited in festivals has moved downward over the last three years. Almost one-third (30.2%) have noticed no change, while 14.7% think quality has increased.

Assuming the artists responding are correct in their evaluation, the decrease in quality over the last three years holds a particularly thorny problem for the future. Lower quality art tends to attract audiences that spend fewer dollars; fewer dollars spent tends to keep high-quality artists from applying to a show; fewer applications leads to acceptance by festivals of lower-quality art for exhibition. Once begun, this cycle can be extremely difficult to reverse, since artists may simply refuse to reconsider a show that has had this happen.

Retirement, semi-retirement and financially-forced reduction in the number of festivals where artists exhibit may also play a part in this trend.

For some artists, there can be something of a silver lining: easier acceptance into festivals formerly difficult to jury into. However, the public can be extremely fickle in these situations, becoming unwilling to purchase at, or even attend, shows where they perceive the quality deteriorating.

7. Has the recession altered your festival participation?



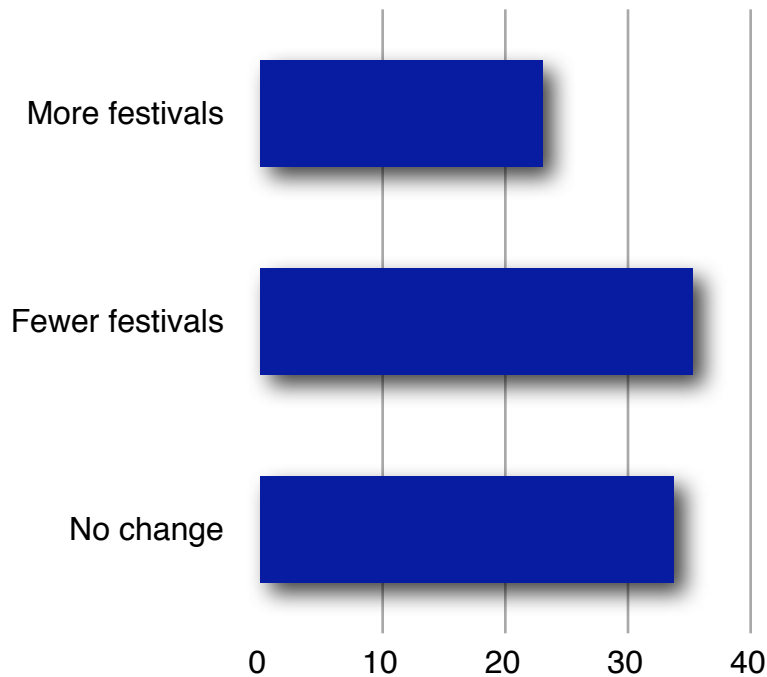
About one-fourth of artists (24.7%) responded that they have neither increased nor decreased the number of shows they do during the recession. More than two in ten (40.2%) are participating in fewer shows, while 24.7% exhibit at more festivals.

Looked at carefully, the answers to this question speak loudly about how artists have coped with decreasing sales. Two avenues presented potential: exhibit in more shows, or exhibit in fewer shows. These two camps--one believing that more shows would lead to higher, possibly essential, income while the other has been unwilling to invest in shows that might no longer return a profit--hallmark what artists have done over the last few years in response to the economic downturn, except, of course, for those who have left the profession to seek other sources of income.

The relative evenness of the response levels between those who increased and those who decreased their participation does not, however, provide a qualitative analysis: adding shows may not increase income, while subtracting shows may not reduce income. Key is that artists have taken action, rather than make no changes.

As a continuing trend, the industry is faced with a steadily decreasing pool of exhibiting artists, which, if unchecked, may leave many festivals without enough artists to fill their booth spaces.

8. In the next three years, do you plan to exhibit in:

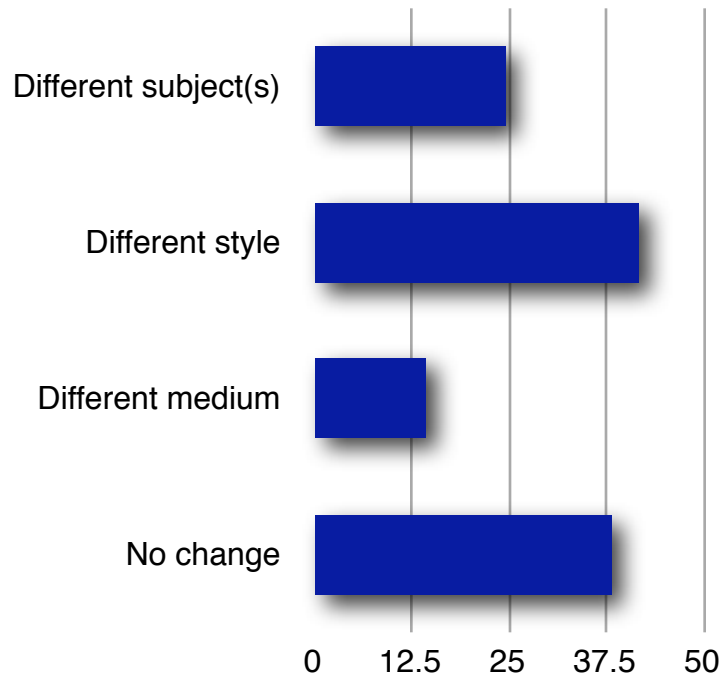


Just under one-quarter (23.1%) of respondents answered that they plan on entering more festivals in the next three years, while more than one-third (35.4%) will reduce their participation. About one-third of artists (33.8%) will not change their level of exhibition.

These answers represent a departure from last year's results, when artists increasing or decreasing their show participation were about equal. Why this is happening is more complex. Echoing the reduction in sales, it is logical that artists would reduce their festival participation--if lower sales made paying for show fees and travel became difficult or impossible.

It may also be true that artists are seeking other distribution channels for their work, or other forms of gainful employment.

9. In the last three years, how has the subject, style or medium of the artwork you create changed (you may choose more than one answer)?

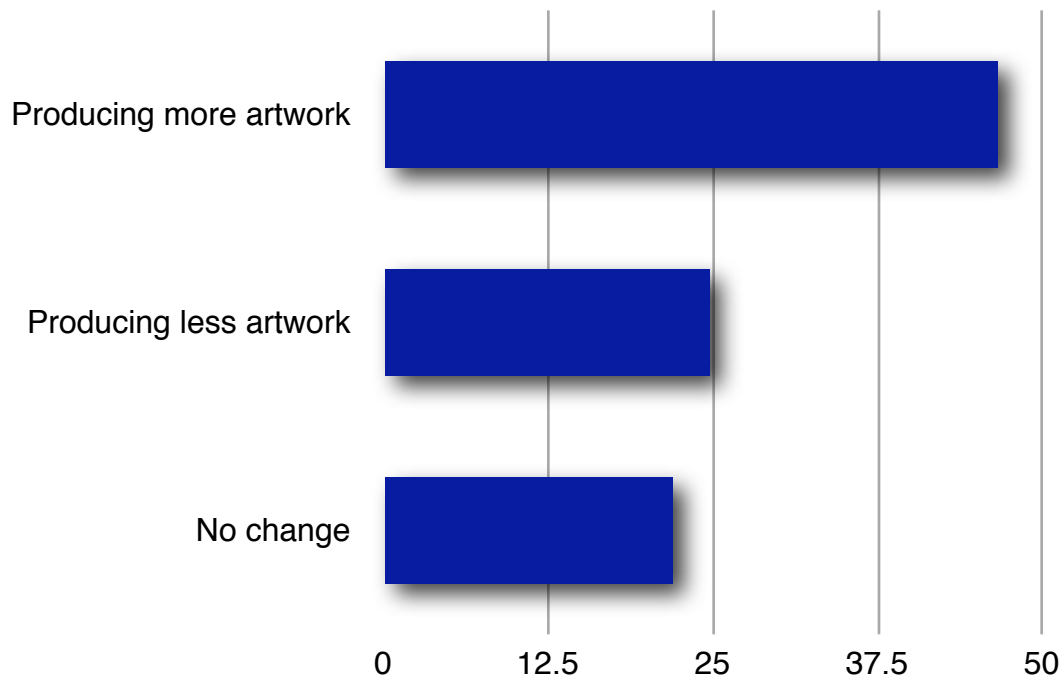


Artists' work, in the last three years, has undergone significant change. In large numbers, artists responded that they have changed the subject, or subjects, of their work (24.8%), their style (43.8%), or their medium (16.2%). Only 33.9% reported no change at all. Again, these results echo last year's survey.

How much of this remarkable transformation may be attributed to natural evolution of artists' work cannot be known, but a large amount of the change may be linked to searching for new ways to earn income through their art.

The answers open a broad area of thinking, and important questions: first, how have artists, whose work has changed, fared in gaining acceptance to festivals and, second, how have changes in subject, style or medium impacted their sales? We will explore these questions in future surveys. For now, it is safe to say that the changes must have an impact on the work exhibited in festivals--even, possibly, changing the composition of festivals and their presentation to the public.

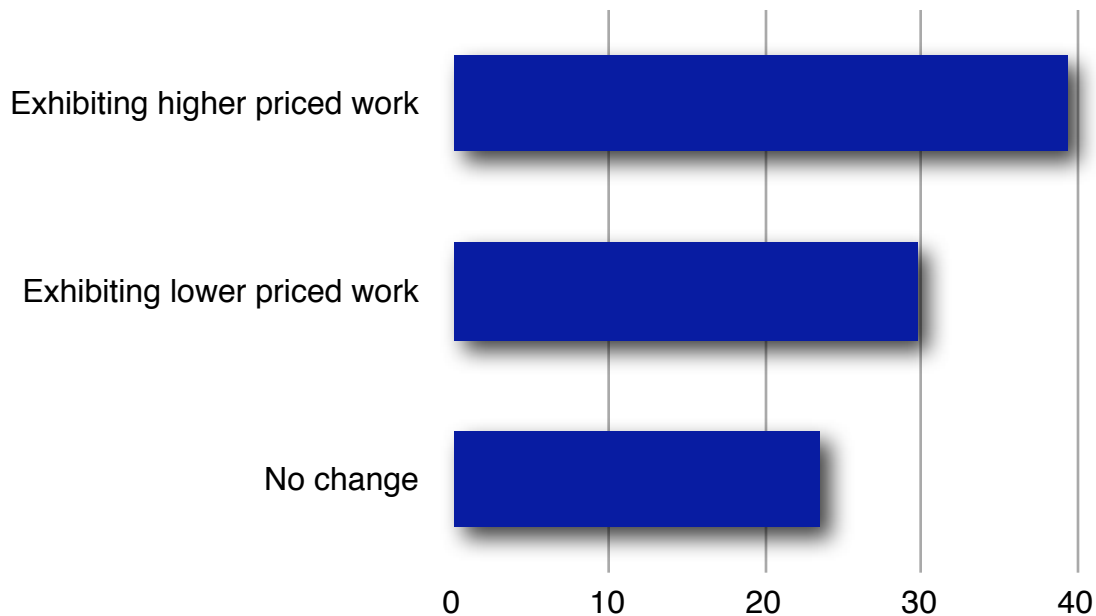
10. Compared with three years ago, are you:



Nearly half of artists (43.3%) report that their productivity has increased over the last three years, while about one-fourth (26.5%) responded that they are producing less artwork, while 17.5% say their output has not changed.

The recession may have induced some change in artists' output--but not necessarily for the worse. Artists who have lowered prices may be creating more art in response to sales, while those producing less work may be doing so in order to avoid excessive inventory. Since show participation is down, time would not seem to be a factor--unless artists have taken other jobs to make money and thus have less time to create.

11. Compared with three years ago, how has the price of the artwork you exhibit changed?

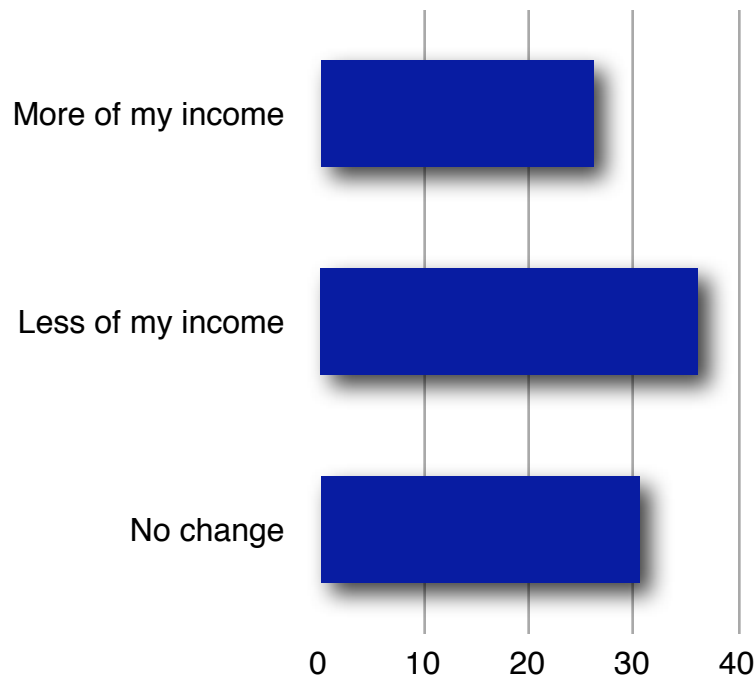


While one in four (23.5%) of artists have not changed the price of their work in the last three years, over one-third (39.4%) have increased their prices, while a smaller number (29.8%) have decreased their prices.

It is likely that the changes in price of exhibited work has been in response to market forces--less buying at shows, to be precise. While raising prices would seem to be counterproductive, doing so as a function of the recent economic conditions may not be. If only higher priced work is selling, the tendency would be to exhibit higher priced work, and vice-versa.

Lowering prices, a natural response to decreased sales volume, may also be a function of buying dynamics at shows.

12. Do art festivals represent more or less of your income than they did three years ago?

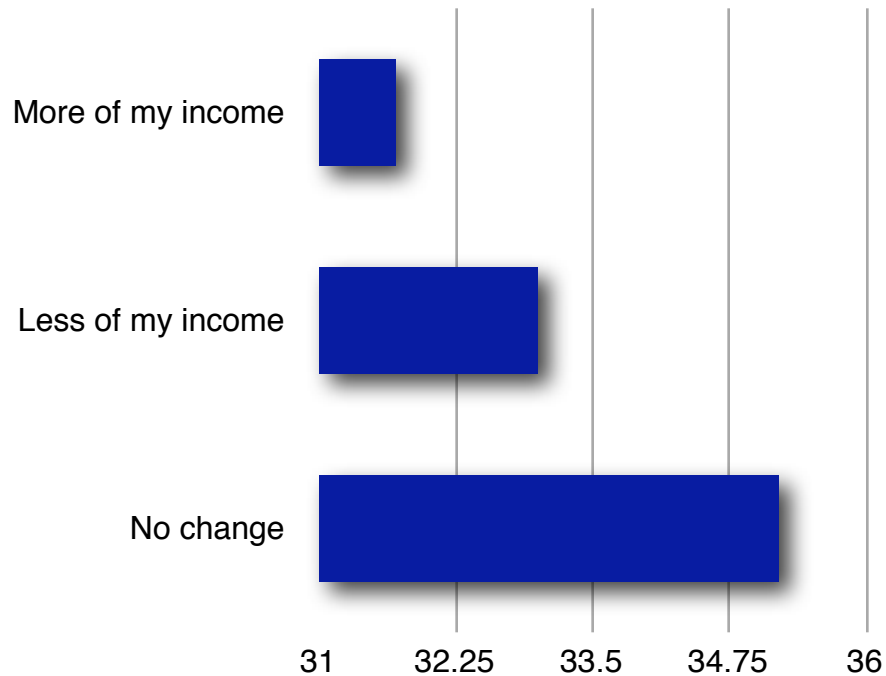


In this year's survey, the portion of their income represented by festival sales has fallen for 36.2% of artists surveyed (a four percent increase from last year), while it has risen for 26.2% and remained the same for 30.6% (these last two numbers almost identical to last year's).

The responses to this question are interesting. If sales overall have fallen, then why have almost one-fourth of artists seen the percentage of their income represented by show sale increase? The answer may lie in what the recession has done to their family income overall: possible job losses by a spouse or partner, less income from investments, falling sales in other distribution channels, such as galleries or the internet. It may also be true that purchasing at shows has become more concentrated--fewer artists selling a larger percentage of work sold overall.

Certainly, with more than half of artists responding that their show sales have either remained flat or fallen as a portion of their incomes, little progress toward increased revenue has been made by these artists.

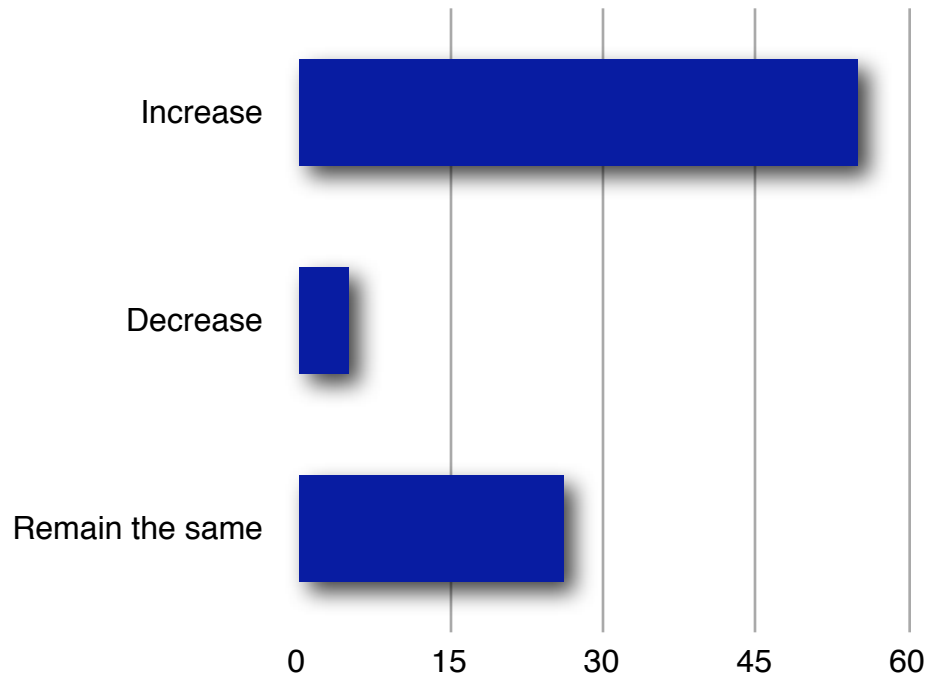
13. Do you expect art festivals to represent more or less of your income over the next three years?



Less than one-third of artists (31.7%) believe art show sales will become a larger part of their income over the next three years--down by seven percentage points from last year. Another 33.0% think the percentage will grow smaller (Up by four points), while one-third (35.2%) see no change coming (about the same as last year).

This set of expectations, while tracking somewhat near the artists' experiences over the last three years, last year showed some optimism that show sales will rise. It appears from artists' responses that their optimism may be waning.

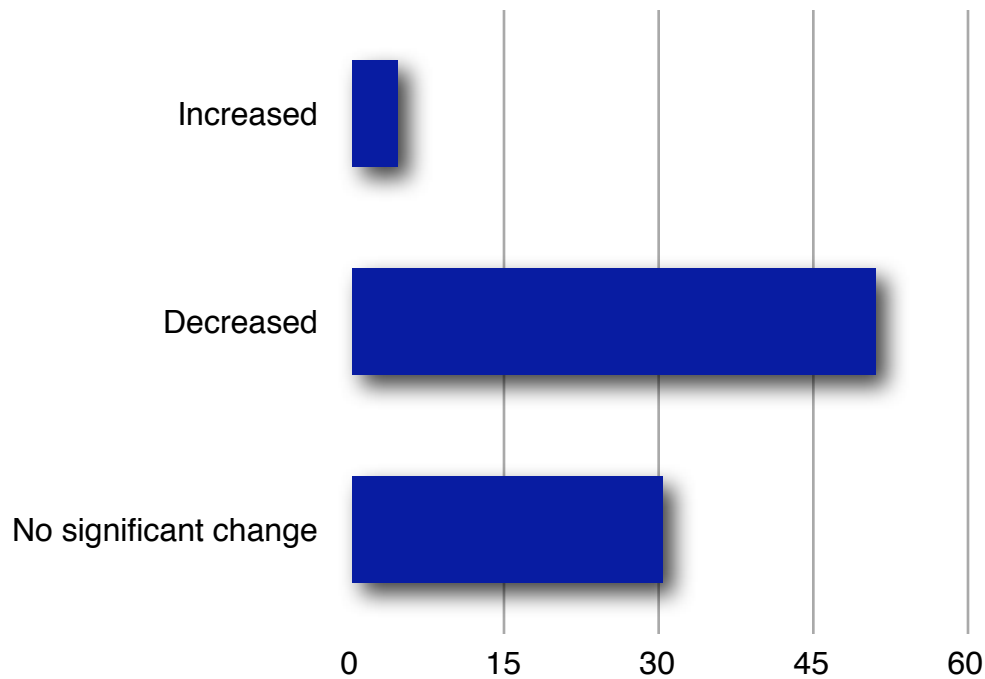
14. Over the next three years, do you expect art festival applications and jury fees to:



Nearly two thirds (61.7%) of artists believe show fees will rise over the next three years, up from just over half in last year's survey; only 3.5 percent expect them to fall, while 27.4% think they will stay the same.

Recent experience seems to be influencing artists' opinions here. The industry has little--nearly no--history of falling artist fees. Inflation will make production of festivals more costly and, traditionally, that cost will in a majority of instances be passed along to the consumer--the exhibiting artist.

15. In your opinion, over the last three years, has public attendance at art festivals:

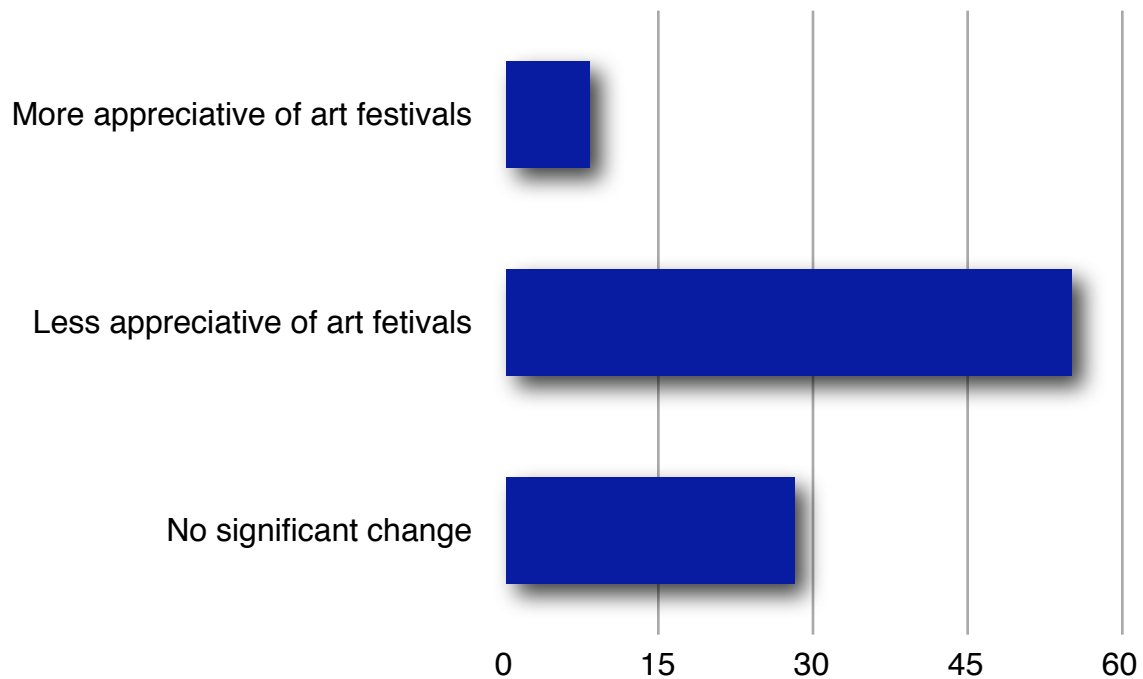


Few artists (3.5%) believe that public attendance has increased at art festivals. A bit more than one-third (33.8%) have noticed no significant change, while more than half (54.5%) think attendance has decreased. These numbers track closely with last year's responses.

Perhaps the single most important element of art festivals, in the minds of most artists, is attendance by the public. The economic downturn has surely played a large role in the downward trend, but artists--as seen in their answers to other questions--believe shows should devote more resources to attracting the public.

Attendance alone does not comprise all the influences on sales at festivals, but a lower level of public participation cannot but lead to less success for exhibitors.

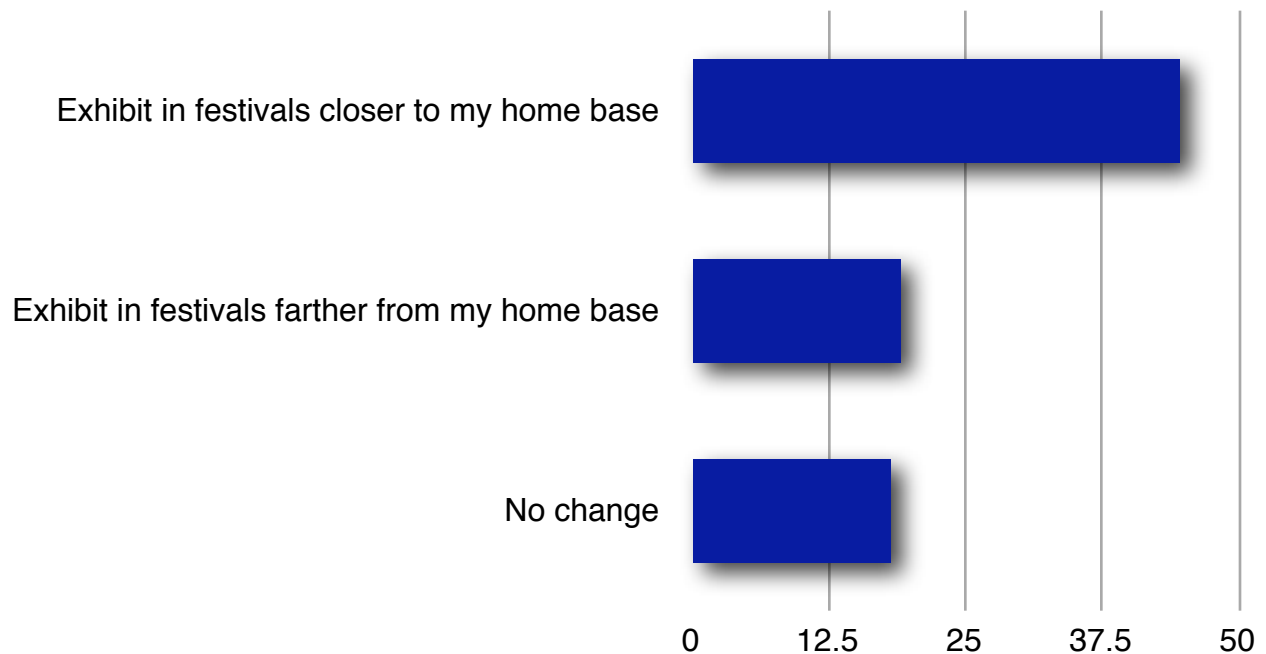
16. Do you think the public has become:



While fairly consistent with last year, more than half of artists responding (55.2%) think the public is less appreciative than a few years ago, while only 8.3% believe the public has grown more appreciative and 28.2% have noticed no change.

The term “appreciative” may relate to both sales and other forms of public support, such as time spent looking at an artist’s work, interaction with the artist and the number of visitors to an artist’s booth.

17. Over the next three years, do you plan to:

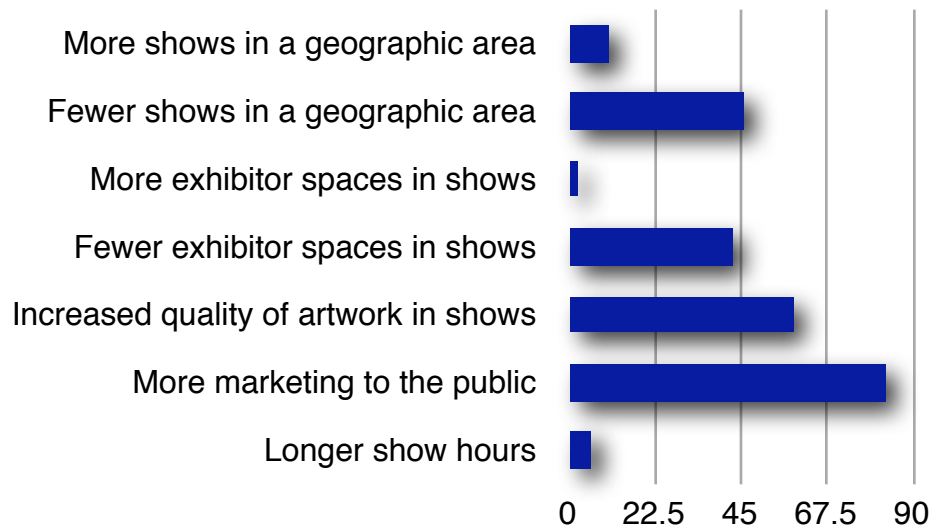


This year, two of five artists (44.6%) answered that they plan to curtail the distance they travel over the next three years, while one in five (19.1%) intends to travel farther from home to exhibit. Less than one-fifth (18.2%) plan no change in their travel.

As travel costs increase, and show income slows, it is natural for artists to look closer to home for festivals in which to participate. At the same time, if nearby shows fail to return expected income, some artists will choose to go farther away seeking sales.

For festivals, this continues to represent a potential lessening of artists who will apply--indeed, numerous shows are already seeing this dynamic take hold. For other festivals, artists who stay closer to home may increase application levels. While certainly not a trade-off--smaller, local shows are having more difficulty attracting applicants than larger, nationally known events--at least some benefit may accrue to the smaller shows. This may not, however, result in more income for artists who choose less travel over better known, if more distant, events.

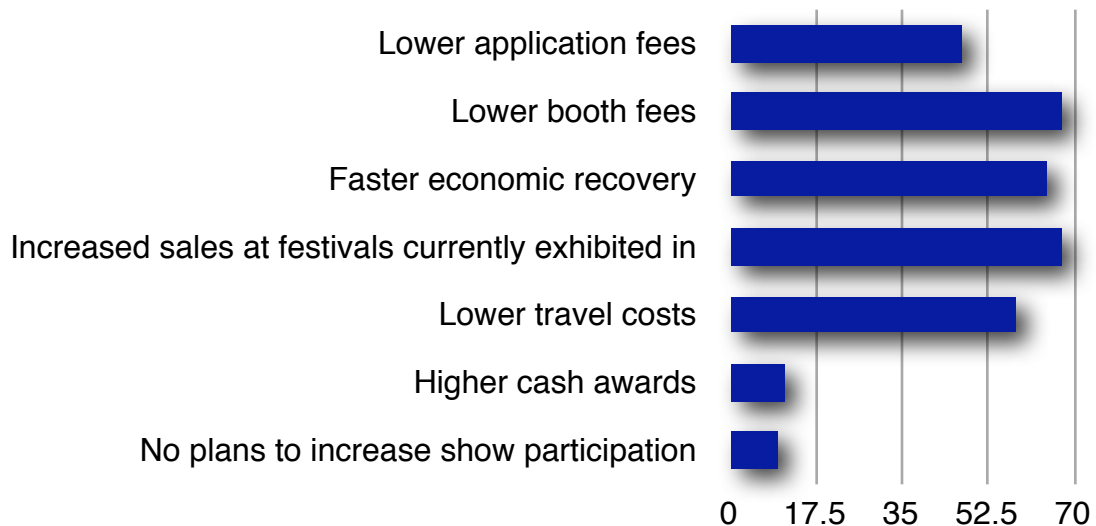
18. Which of the following do you believe would have the most positive effect on your art festival success (You may choose more than one answer)?



As in last year's survey, artists were offered the opportunity to check more than one answer to this question, which many did. First among the answers was More marketing by festivals to the public, which drew an 82.8% response, followed by Increased quality of artwork, 58.8%; Fewer shows in a geographic area, 45.7%; Fewer exhibitors, 42.9%; More shows in a geographic area, 10.4%; Longer show hours, 5.8%; and More exhibitors, 2.2%.

Overwhelmingly, artists continue to believe increased marketing is the single most important element that would have a positive effect on their show success. They also want to see higher quality of art, fewer shows in competition with each other for buyers' dollars and fewer exhibitors to share sales at festivals. By and large, they do not believe more shows, more exhibitors or longer hours would have a great impact on festival success.

19. Which of the following would encourage you to apply to more festivals (you may choose more than one answer)?

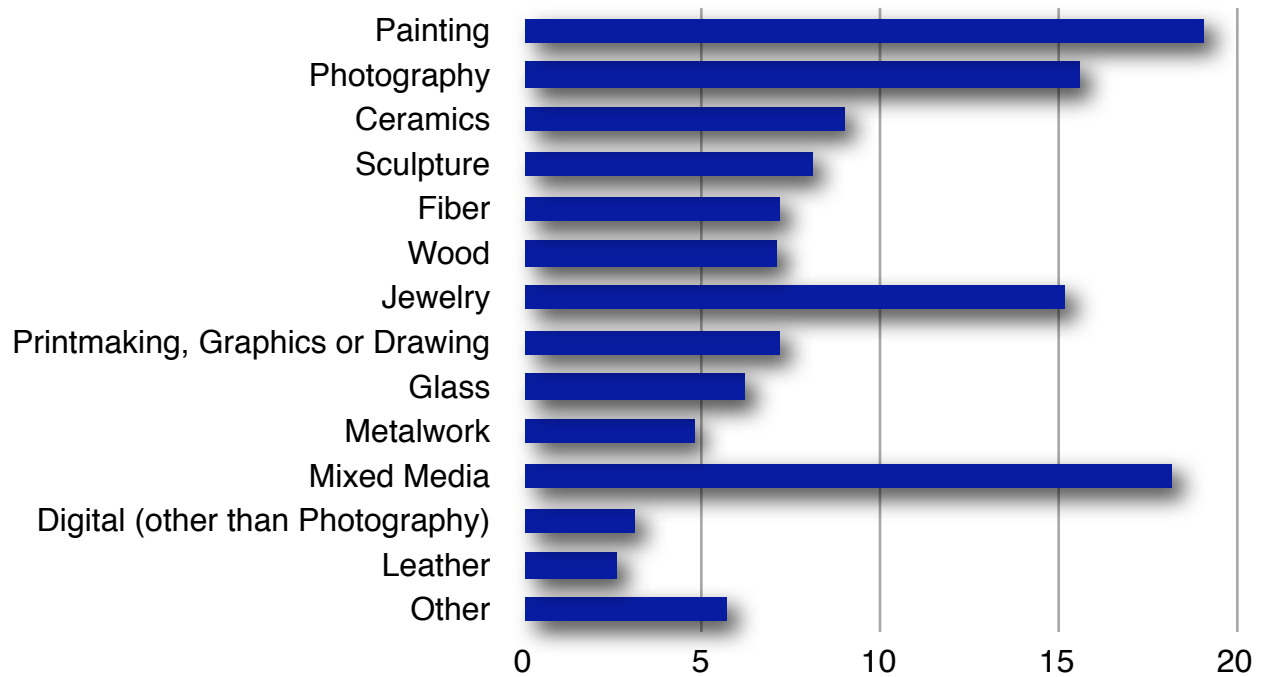


As with the prior question, artists could check more than one answer to this question and, once again, many did. Two answers, lower booth fees and increased sales at current festivals, received identical levels of response, 67.5%. Faster economic recovery followed, with 64.4% saying it would encourage them to participate in more shows, while 47.1% named lower application fees as a factor. Lower travel costs drew 58.2%, with Higher cash awards following at 11.1%. Nearly one in ten artists, 9.7%, have no plans to increase the number of shows in which they participate. These responses correlated closely with those reported in last year's survey.

Festival costs--and income--appear to be the deepest barriers to increased show participation. Travel costs concern over one-half of artists, when it comes to expanding their show schedules. Little emphasis is placed on awards offered--a potential signal to festivals that adding dollars to their award pools may not motivate more artists to apply.

Most artists--nearly two-thirds--are watching the economy for signs of faster recovery before committing to additional festivals.

20. Please check the medium or mediums of the work you display at festivals:



Artists who responded to the survey came from every medium usually represented in art festivals, both fine art and fine craft endeavors.

Medium percentages tracked closely to the percentages represented by each medium in most festivals, painters and mixed media artists leading with a combined total of 37.3% of respondents (painters: 19.1%; mixed media: 18.2%).

Other response percentages by media were: ceramic artists: 8.0%; jewelers: 15.6%; sculptors: 8.1%; photographers: 15.6%; woodworkers: 8.6%; fiber artists at 7.2%; printmakers: 10.5%, glass artists: 10.5%; digital artists 4.1%; metalworkers 6.3%, and leather artists: 2.2%. A small percentage listed their medium as “other.”

We offer our profound gratitude to all artists who took their valuable time to participate in this survey. Equally, we appreciate their thoughtfulness in considering and answering the questions it contained.

“The Art of Change” is the tenth artist survey conducted by *The Art Festival Newsletter*. We hope all artists who receive invitations to the surveys will respond and contribute to the overall knowledge available to art festival participants. This report will be made available to more than 1,500 art festivals, to enhance their knowledge of artists’ experiences, opinions, needs and desires. We believe that artists, and the art festival industry at large, will benefit from the information and insights the survey provides.

The Summer, 2012 issue of *The Art Festival Newsletter* will offer extensive analysis of the survey results, in addition to outstanding editorial content on topics vital to the industry and artists’ success. If you are not already a subscriber, please visit www.theartfestivalnewsletter.com for more information.

We welcome your comments and suggestions. Our email address is:
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