

Jeremy Baras

Pop Up Republic

How to Start
Your Own
Successful
Pop-Up
Space, Shop,
or Restaurant



WILEY

PopUp REPUBLIC

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Own Successful Pop-Up
Space, Shop, or Restaurant*

JEREMY BARAS

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PopUp REPUBLIC

Preface

QUITE OFTEN, A revolution takes place right before our eyes without our even being aware of it until it has already taken place. To understand why this occurs, think of a connect-the-dots drawing. The dots are all there in front of you, but until you connect them, you have trouble discerning what the picture actually portrays.

We are living in just such an era. The makeover is taking place in a confluence of four commercial sectors: retail; public dining; commercial and public property; and events. And it's happening because of a movement that is so new and fragmented that it doesn't have a definition, is spelled three different ways, even though it is only five letters, and its size depends on what you include within its umbrella, something that up to now is a matter of opinion.

The movement we are referring to is pop-ups, a/k/a pop ups, a/k/a popups. However you spell it, what can't be argued is that pop-ups are changing how artisans are making money; how commercial property owners are leasing their spaces; how big brands are launching new products; how celebrities are promoting themselves; and how e-tailers are marketing the merchandise they sell online.

And that is from the supply side. The convulsions are happening on the demand side as well. Consumers are now favoring locally made products, both for environmental reasons and because

of a desire to know more about the merchandise they buy—where, how, and by whom a product was made. They want an antidote to the homogenization of choices that are offered by chain stores and chain restaurants. And while e-commerce offers convenience, it does that by eliminating the shopping *experience* that many shoppers feel is just as integral to the buying process as the items that are for sale. Pop-ups are the physical manifestations of popular trends (and trending hashtags) such as “Shop Local,” “Small Business,” and “D-I-Y.”

The emergence of pop-ups is also being driven by economic factors. To borrow a phrase from the late Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Honorable Tip O’Neill, it’s not only true that “All politics is local,” but the same can be said for economics—all economics is local. Main streets, neighborhoods, communities, cities, regions, states—all have different problems and different elements that contribute to or detract from their financial well-being. Local economic development offices are tasked with providing the programs by which commerce should be strong and sustaining, but almost invariably, these offices have constrained budgets and few resources available to them. Pop-ups are proving to be vital tools—low-budget but highly effective—that are being used by economic development professionals to boost the local economies over which they have responsibility.

The objective of this book is to connect the dots. In Section 1, I aim to define what pop-ups are and, by virtue of that definition, what sub-sectors belong to the pop-up industry. With that accomplished, I attempt to determine the size of the industry, prevailing trends, who the key players are, and what factors are affecting its growth and direction.

In Section 2 I examine pop-ups in terms of how they relate to individuals—the opportunities they create for the merchant and the consumer as well as the venue owner. I attempt to answer the question: Are *you* a good candidate to launch a successful pop-up? And I explain how you can skew your odds toward that success.

In Section 3, all types of pop-up categories are analyzed, and I discuss how to execute various pop-up concepts.

In Section 4 I look at the future of pop-ups. The horizon is already coming into view as big brands and big malls look at the new omnichannel movement as the cutting-edge way that goods are marketed—a trend in which pop-ups have a major role to play. We are also putting forth a prediction—that when it comes to venues for pop-ups, there is a great, untapped potential for *personal residences* to serve as a primary source of spaces available for pop-ups.

Another intangible reason that pop-ups are becoming so pervasive is that they provide texture and discovery to what otherwise has become routine and even monotonous. Mention that you are going out to dinner at a restaurant around the corner, and it barely raises any eyebrows. But say you are going out to a pop-up restaurant around the corner, and everyone wants to know about it. Say that you are going shopping at the local supermarket and ask who wants to come, and you find that suddenly everyone is busy. But say that you are going shopping at a nearby farmers market, and suddenly you have to take the SUV to have enough room for everyone who wants to come along.

Pop-ups are quite frequently once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. They come, they go, and if you missed them, you probably won't be able to experience them ever again. But pop-ups also illustrate a great realization—that life is full of once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. So if you missed one pop-up, don't fret. Another one is likely to pop up next week!

Acknowledgments

THIS BOOK COULD NOT have been written without the help and guidance of a number of incredible individuals.

First, my family—my wife Marissa, my parents, Robyn and Larry Baras, my sisters, Samantha and Rachel, and, of course, (and arguably most importantly) my dog, Betty. You all have been tremendous sounding boards for me during this process, and the support that you have given to me throughout my career is immeasurable.

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My entire PopUp Republic team is phenomenal. Obviously, I wouldn't be in this position if it weren't for them. They have helped me build an outstanding company that is at the forefront of a growing, multi-billion-dollar industry, and I'm extremely grateful to work with them on a daily basis.

David Ghysels is an iconic figure when it comes to creating once-in-a-lifetime pop-up dining experiences. He is the founder

of Dinner in the Sky (who also let me include some incredible photos!), an innovative dining experience that suspends patrons, via crane, over some of the most beautiful cities in the world.

I have great appreciation for the Community Entrepreneurship program at the University of Vermont, in particular Dr. Jane Kolodinsky and Dr. Chyi-Lyi (Kathleen) Liang. They are world-class professors at one of the premier schools in the country, and the Dollar Enterprise projected has singlehandedly helped form my entrepreneurial zeal.

Last, but not least, to every person who has been a client of PopUp Republic, organized a pop-up, attended a pop-up, or done something to help advance the industry, thank you. You are the reason why this book is written and what inspires me to do what I do every day.

Introduction

IN OCTOBER 2011, I had a reason to go to London and play tourist—my younger sister had started her junior year abroad at the London School of Economics, and I had some available vacation days coming from my job working for the Boston Red Sox. Although the job itself was rather low on the totem pole—I was a sales associate in the ticket office—it was nevertheless a dream come true and, as far as I was concerned, it was a stepping-stone toward a lengthy career in professional sports, my lifelong ambition.

My father tells of the time when he was talking to an old friend whom he hadn't seen in a while and, when the friend asked how his three kids were doing, my father replied, "Well, my oldest daughter is in Harvard Medical School, my youngest daughter attends the London School of Economics, and my son works for the Boston Red Sox."

"*Your son works for the Boston Red Sox!*" the friend exclaimed. He didn't care, nor did he probably even hear about what my sisters were doing. It was my association with the Red Sox that he found so incredible.

Anyway, my sister was engaged in her schoolwork, so one evening I sauntered over to The London Eye, the massive Ferris wheel that provides a birds eye view of the city. But as I neared the Eye,

I saw that it had been commandeered for some special event and that no tourists were being allowed to board.

The event?

Ticketed patrons (I found out later that tickets were about £15,000) were getting into the capsules for the trip around the hub, and as they circumnavigated, they were fed unbelievable courses by Michelin-starred chefs.

What I was watching was something I hadn't encountered before, certainly not in the United States—it was a pop-up restaurant!

It was one of the coolest things I had ever seen, and I started to look into it. Apparently, pop-up shops and pop-up restaurants were already the “in” thing in London, each one trying to outdo the other. But as my research continued, I saw that pop-ups were more than just clandestine, exclusive opportunities. They were also serious businesses, providing incremental income to brands, outlets for artisans, exposure to landlords, and tools for economic development offices to revive economically challenged high streets.

It immediately hit me that there both a problem and an opportunity were associated with pop-ups. The problem (it turned out there was more than one obstacle to overcome) was that there was no easy way for the public to find out about upcoming pop-ups, and few avenues through which merchants could promote them. This hit my entrepreneurial urges head on, and suddenly my job with the Red Sox didn't seem like such a stepping-stone after all. This was a service business I could embrace and about which I could be passionate, and I decided right then and there to start a business serving the pop-up industry in the United States, hoping to create a platform on which pop-up merchants and property owners could build a sustainable industry.

PopUp Republic was born when I returned to our shores, and there was no turning back.



Pop-ups are starting to become an accepted member of the mainstream economy. No matter where you live, it's not too difficult to find a pop-up shop, pop-up restaurant, supper club, or food

truck in your neighborhood. In fact, when taking into account the market size of all of the categories that constitute a pop-up, including farmers and flea markets, yard sales, traditional pop-ups (shops, restaurants, and events), lemonade stands (yes, we consider those pop-ups as well), and food trucks, it reflects a sizable industry that measures between \$45 and \$50 billion, according to a study released by my company, PopUp Republic (which appears later in this book).

Additionally, cities like Oakland, New Orleans, Pittsburgh, Boston, and Detroit are all using pop-ups as a means to revitalize urban areas and spur economic growth in their communities. In some cases, local governments are even subsidizing the development and creation of pop-ups! Whether they're being used to launch a new product or draw incremental foot traffic, the increase in pop-ups over the last several years can be tied to several recent phenomena:

- **The “Buy Local” Movement:** Lately, there has been a large emphasis placed on locally made products. Customers like to know that the scarf they are buying is made by the person who is selling it—that it's not “Made in China” but instead is “Made Down the Street.” By being made locally, not only is that scarf going to be cheaper, but it's also likely to be made with more care than one that is mass produced in a sweatshop on the other side of the world.
- **The “Fear of Missing Out”:** In this day and age, people are continually striving for “bigger and better.” Apple releases a new iPhone virtually every six months, and because it has a new feature that may or may not be useful, consumers often scramble to buy the newest, updated version, while the previous model, which may be just as functional, suddenly becomes obsolete. Similarly, if a pop-up opens in a vacant storefront, customers often flock to the shop before it's too late and they miss out on the product or service that is being offered.
- **The Economy:** In the economic crisis of 2008, the unemployment rate and the percentage of vacant storefronts on city streets increased dramatically. Because of this, the need of individuals to find creative ways to support their livelihoods

arose as much by necessity as opportunity. As a result, pop-ups became one of the solutions to all three of these issues. They created income-producing businesses and jobs, the former for those who organized them, the latter for the on-demand, temporary staffing that is usually needed to meet the influx of customers who attend pop-ups. Pop-ups have proven to be quite lucrative for landlords seeking to fill empty storefronts, providing commercial property owners with temporary rent, the ability to “stage” the venue while looking for permanent lessees, and, in some cases, turning temporary pop-up lessees into permanent tenants themselves. On top of all that, people are learning that they can make money from their hobbies, talents, and sheer ingenuity—many are finding that they can turn their hobbies and passions into new profitable businesses—a win for the merchant, a win for the landlord, and a win for the community!

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