

How to organise a jumble sale

Whether you're holding a car boot sale to raise funds for an association or a jumble sale for a group of friends wanting to make a few needed cents, hunt for bargain baby kit or clear out your attics, French law restricts how and how often you can do this.

There are an estimated 50,000 flea markets (*marchés aux puces*) and jumble sales (*vide-greniers*) organised by non-professionals in France each year. The law L 310-2 of the 'Code du commerce' governs these events, along with *braderies* and bric-à-brac fairs, which are reserved for professionals.

On the other hand, professional, registered *antiquaires* and *brocanteurs* (antiques and junk dealers), who are often vocal about amateurs selling at *vide-greniers*, viewing them as unfair competition, may perfectly well set up their stalls at an amateur event.

Selling

The main restriction for car boot and jumble sales is that amateurs are only allowed to sell at up to two such events in each calendar year; more than that is considered to be illegal (undeclared) trading.

You can sell virtually anything at a *vide-grenier* provided it is second-hand and private property. Food being subject to strict hygiene laws may not be sold. You are not allowed to sell goods specially bought for selling on, nor new craftwork or products (as you'd need to be registered to do this).

While the organisers of the sale might restrict participants to residents of their *commune* there is no law against selling at a sale outside your *commune* of residence.

To run a stall you'll need to book your pitch with the organisers, usually for a modest enrolment fee of a few euros per metre.

You will be asked for ID, perhaps also proof of residence, and a signed statement that you have not participated in more than two *vide-greniers* in the year. The penalty

for not respecting this restriction or for lying about your sales activities can end you up with a fine of up to €30,000 and six months in prison.

Tips

Check out prices before labelling your wares clearly and don't forget to leave a margin for bargaining.

You can receive up to €3,000 in cash as payment, or up to €750 if you sell to a professional. See article L. 112-6 of the 'Code monétaire et financier'. For higher sums you'll have to accept cheques so beware of bouncers.

Organising

Sales can be organised in any public place or from vehicles, or premises except those used for selling second-hand objects commercially. However, the same place cannot be used for more than two months of such sales in one year.

The *maire* of the *commune* must be notified in advance:

- if it is to be held in a public place by a *déclaration préalable* sent R/AR or by hand with a receipt, at least three months before the sale, at the same time as the request for use of the public place;
- at least 15 days before the sale if it is on private property (article R. 310-8 du Code de commerce).

In both cases, the organiser should send a photocopy of his ID.

The perforated register

So that the tax people, customs, police and fraud watchdogs can keep track, and to help limit the movements of stolen and counterfeit goods, organisers of *vide-*



greniers must keep a proper register of all stall holders, and make it available to the authorities on request.

If the organiser is a private individual, the register should include for each participant:

- their full name, occupation and home address;
- the number, name of the issuing authority and issue date of their ID card or passport;
- a signed statement (*attestation sur l'honneur*) that they have not sold at more than two such sales in the calendar year and are not a professional tradesperson.

If the organiser is a body (company, association etc), the register should include the name and official address and the full names, address and ID details of the legal representative.

Within eight days of the end of the sale, the register should be taken to the *mairie* of the *commune* where the sale was held, to be numbered and initialed (*coté et paraphé*).

The register must then be handed in to the *préfecture* or nearest *sous-préfecture*.

The organiser must keep the stallholders' *attestations* in case they are needed for inspection by the authorities.

Tax-free generally

The good news is that the stallholder, as a private individual, doesn't have to declare the earnings from the sale as they aren't taxable. However, for the organiser, nothing is that simple!

If an association is running the sale, the organiser must warn the tax authorities local to the association's headquarters three days before the sale starts and must supply a report of money spent and taken within 30 days of the end of the sale. Associations are not generally taxed on the profits of such sales either but better check with the tax office to make sure.

Information courtesy of <http://vide-greniers.org/> which also has a very complete and useful calendar of events and a map showing flea markets, bric-à-brac fairs and other sales all over France, and downloadable models of the obligatory attestation, déclaration and register

blogosphere

Extract from www.survivefrance.com

The Apprentice – *vide-grenier* style

When the rain eventually stopped, we ventured forth, found another *vide-grenier* and unloaded a whole load of utter crap on unsuspecting French punters. We managed to clear €230 which was no mean feat, as the average selling price was €1. It was also pretty impressive when compared to the people who had a stall to our left (total for the day €8) and the people to our right (total for the day – no euros). I suspect this was due to our aggressive pricing and Anglo-Saxon sales tactics. After all, we Brits do know about *le marketing*...

The French are very reluctant to ask for prices at car boot sales. I suspect this is because things are generally so over-priced that it is hard to keep your face straight. Typical prices included a child's bike – new list price €85 – being sold second-hand, complete with damaged paintwork for the bargain price of €70. Guarantee not included.

I especially liked the revolting fold-away sofa bed. This was in a state such that the dogs would have wrinkled their noses if invited to sleep on it. Yours for only €250.

Our problem is that our prices are so low, the French are suspicious. So we go for a sell, sell, sell approach. I'd borrowed a couple of extra kids for the day itself. This meant my sales team was eight strong. I parked the WC (complete with cistern) that we were selling, in front of the stall, sat one child on it and got them to hold the 'Everything Must Go' placard. Another couple were stationed at either end of the stall with more placards and the rest were told to create a buzz around the stall and accost any passing trade. When they slacked off, I got all Alan Sugar like on them and reminded them they were here to sell!

It was funny watching the neighbouring stall holders. During the course of the day, their expressions went from shocked to amused to quietly impressed. I was quite impressed with the kids too. I think car boot sales and the like are a great way for kids to learn about just how hard it is to earn money. And about how important it is to re-use and recycle stuff.

What French Week's correspondents say

Sue Barber, in the Hautes-Pyrénées, is an adept of *vide-greniers*. She observes: "The travelling *brocanteurs* crop up at all but the smallest *vide-greniers* and are a pain. They bring boxes of old junk, rusty tools and broken, dirty crockery, for example, whereas the local stall-holders usually only present clean stuff for sale. This type of *brocanteur* rarely puts prices on his rubbish and casts a grubby shadow over what should be a casual, friendly sale organised by local people for local people."

Michael Frankel, in the Ile-et-Vilaine, adds: "I've been running one for 20 years with the local France-Grande-Bretagne club, inside buildings mostly. Regulations have become more demanding in recent years with the *préfecture* and local town halls becoming involved. We have always paid for special insurance to cover any third-party accidents – people tripping over or damaging the building or contents while having a good rummage. We carefully split up the area for the stands into individual lots, the price of each being calculated per metre (eg, €5 for two metre frontage). We also ask stand holders to bring their own tables if possible. Start-up and closing times are to be strictly adhered to and also the clean-up of the building/field etc must be planned in advance. We ask standowners to do their best to leave the place as they found it but...well...the organisers end up doing lots. If you accept professionals (antique dealers etc) then it's another ball game and heavy admin-wise."

Catharine Higginson, in the Basque country, has organised loads of sales: "Admin varies hugely from having to photocopy your passport and declare that you don't do more than two a year to a free pitch and no paperwork whatsoever."

James Cole, in the Tarn, advises organisers to mind their manners and to make sure all correspondence and publicity materials are in French (as well as English if relevant too of course): "An invitation to the mayor and councillors should be automatic. Always express formal thanks at the time, and afterwards in writing. Tidy up afterwards and do not leave litter and garbage for others."