INTRODUCTION

I was first introduced to the idea of a "do it yourself events calendar" while visiting Bloomington, Indiana. They make a monthly calendar called "let's go!" that lists different punk shows, pot lucks, bike rides, movie screenings, and more. It was a great way to visit a new place and have "hey, what's going on while I'm here?" answered so easily. It was also a good feeling to have a piece of paper in my hands, rather than be recommended a website or message board to search out local events. As I traveled more, I noticed that people in other cities had similar projects.

THE BEGINNING

In 2004 my friend Mary started a little events calendar in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania called "do it!". It listed different events happening over the winter. The calendar didn't last for long, just a few months. It wasn't until spring 2007 that I decided to get some people together and start up the "do it!" calendar again. It seemed like so many things were happening in Pittsburgh and it was hard to keep track of them. All most people looked to the Internet. Personally, I found that frustrating. I wanted to produce something tangible that could be hung on walls and refrigerators. I wanted to list all kinds of events and hopefully stir an interest beyond one's regular comfort zone. I seemed like there were so many different groups of people with all the same interests: doing things yourself, seeing live music, free events, cheap food specials, crafting, etc.

Maybe the calendar would bring tribes together? Was I being too idealistic? It didn't matter, it was an idea that I cared about and did my best to make happen.
THANK YOU:

the roberts street social centre/anchor archive for inviting me to do a residency and make this 'zine, everyone who donated calendars for examples, mary mack, barry chad, ashley brickman, madi, lisa, sweet sweet southside chris for being an editing machine, and YOU for reading this and being interested...

go start your own damn calendar!

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GETTING THINGS STARTED

the first step was letting people know about the calendar. I made small handbills encouraging people to describe events that they knew about/were promoting all to one e-mail address. The fliers also encouraged people to get in touch if they wanted to help out with the calendar itself. The response was good, there was a group of about 5 people that seemed fairly committed to the idea. Some people were into distributing the calendar, others wanted to make the artwork, and some agreed to send out mass e-mails to everyone they knew encouraging them to submit events. Despite the group effort, the list of events was still a little thin. This got me searching out events in the city: looking at fliers in windows, scanning the Internet, and talking to event promoters in town. This ended up being the most daunting task of them all. It was challenging, but living in the same city for so many years was a big help. I usually had a good idea of local happenings already.

...AND ONTO PAPER

Once all of the events were collected for the month, they were then transferred onto paper. Most of the calendars were made on 11 in x 17 in sheets of paper, but some were made on 8 1/2 x 11 (legal sized) as well. Every month a different volunteer would design the calendar. We had a running list of people signed up. Every month the calendar looked different: sometimes all handwritten and drawn, sometimes made on a computer, other times a little bit of both. A mission statement about the project and the name "do it!" always appeared on them, along with contact information.
COPYING AND DISTRIBUTING

Once the hard copy was finished I would usually make around 200 photocopies. It was important to me to not spend money on the project, there's usually a way to find free copies with a little creativity and scheming. It was a great feeling to have a tangible project that didn't cost anything but time. The copies were distributed to the same places every month: show spaces, coffee shops, art galleries, book stores, and collective houses.

DILEMMAS AND QUESTIONS

As the calendar continued on, we consistently got more events than we could deal with! The dilemma of "what to list" versus "what not to list" came about. It seemed like most music events were already listed in the stupid alt-weekly paper. What's the point in re-listing events already in print? The calendar's popularity caused another problem: people were reluctant to share more personal events. Did you want everyone in the city coming to your potluck? Did you want everyone knowing about the punk generator show down by the river? Some events are meant to be low key, so listing them on a public forum can arise problems. This may not happen in a small town, but in a large city it can definitely be an issue. When starting the calendar I didn't think about this even happening, but it did. I wanted to list less music shows and more free events, like group bike rides, outdoor games, meteor showers, all that stuff. How do you judge what to list and what not to? It'll depend on your calendar and your community.
DYING DOWN

After about a year of working on "do it!" the project's momentum started to slow down. Events were still happening, and Pittsburgh was as busy as ever, but the excitement for the calendar just wasn't there. I seemed to be the only one still committed to the idea. The locals were still glued to the internet and finding a calendar's worth of events myself every month began to wear on me. I didn't want "do it!" to stop, but I also didn't want to work on the project alone. In the beginning I envisioned a collaboration and in the end it felt more like a solo effort. I decided to throw in the towel and put the project on the shelf.

DO IT, AGAIN!

A few months had passed, winter was starting, and a small group of friends approached me about the calendar. They had seen "do it!" and wanted to start it back up again. We addressed the problems and frustrations I had, and talked about taking the calendar in a new direction. There were four of us involved now, and we decided to focus on small group events. We'd list the potlucks and movie screenings, live music in basements and houses (not clubs and bars), weekly soccer games under the bridge, etc. No one person would be responsible for seeking out events, we all would. We'd sit down once a month and make the calendar together. It felt a lot better this way, having a core group of friends to work on the project with. It was also fun to just hang out for hours, making funny little drawings and calling our friends' bein' all, "hey, what do you got going on next month?" Putting the calendar together was an event itself. We also tried using the internet as a positive resource instead of a negative one. There is a website called freecal at http://freeeal.browns.lex.com where you can make a free interactive calendar that anyone can post on. Google also has a similar calendar program at http://www.google.com. We'd send out e-mails encouraging people to post events online and then make the hard copy from this version. Although the calendar is on the internet, the paper one is a lot nicer to look at. Instead of leaving the calendar all across town, we hand-distribute them to friends, collective houses, and common spaces.

TIPS

This isn't a totally comprehensive calendar guide, it's just what I've learned by getting out there and "doing it!" here's a thing or two I've learned along the way:

* Having an active member in the community (read: scenester?) be part of the calendar is a great help. Also, having someone who puts together events is helpful too. Getting information from the original source is the best way!
* Distributing flyers with a small "mission" statement and contact information about your calendar works wonders! These can be left at different events, passed among friends and acquaintances, or hung on bulletin boards and in windows.
* Starting an e-mail account specifically for the calendar is an easy way to collect events.
* Talk to different groups in your town: infoshops, bookstores, food not bombs, college radio programs, books to prisoner groups, diy show spaces, collective bike shops, punk houses, etc. Ask when their events are and if they'd like to have them listed.
* When in doubt, ask. Maybe the host of the backyard movie night wants the event to be on the calendar, but maybe not. It's always important to ask permission.
* Make sure all of the responsibility doesn't fall on one person! It can be stressful for a single person to search out all the events, design artwork, photocopy and distribute. If different people are doing the various tasks, it makes the whole process easier and less of a drag.
* Don't let the idea of a "calendar" limit your artistic ability. Calendars can look like the one you see on a wall, or could be in a haphazard list. You could make drawings all over the place and put things out of order if you want. (See calendar examples)
* Making a "weekly" section saves a lot of room and just makes sense.
* Don't be afraid to go big! Photocopiers can print up to 11 x 17. A bigger calendar means more room for events or artwork. It's also easier on the eyes to look at large text.
* Make a list of spaces in town that might be good "drop off" locations. Check in with these places and see if they'd be okay with you leaving a stack of calendars each month.

let's go!

February 2008 by richd
Bloomington, Indiana

CALENDARS IN OTHER PLACES

The calendars I've seen in other cities have plenty in common to "do it!" but have their differences too. There isn't a "right" way to start a calendar, it's entirely up to you!

Bloomington, Indiana: whoever designs the calendar for the month is responsible for finding events. This person also chooses who makes the calendar next month.

Athens, Ohio: this calendar is put together by a group called "the action committee" that sets up different events in town. The events listed are all through TAC and each month someone new designs them.

Columbus, Ohio: different people volunteer to design the calendar each month. Only shows in houses/basements are listed!

Knoxville, TN: one person is responsible for compiling events, but different volunteers design the calendars each month.