

10 questions you should ask before buying a pop up marquee

1. Where is the marquee made?

With very few exceptions, most pop up marquees are designed & manufactured down to a price in the Far East and distributed by small companies in the UK; often the same frame & canopy is distributed under several different brand names. Whilst this is not necessarily an indicator of poor quality, it does mean that there is a greater likelihood of problems in areas such as customer & after-sales service, delivery of spare parts (in fact we know of one company that does not supply parts at all), UK Fire Certification and perhaps most importantly, suitability for use in UK weather conditions. At Instant Marquees, we manufacture in the UK using UK or EEC sourced materials where possible.

2. All pop up marquees look the same. Why is there such a wide range of prices?

Just as with cars or any other capital investment, generally speaking you get what you pay for. You can buy a Chinese made 3x3m for around £200 or less, and it might well serve its purpose as a garden shelter once or twice a year in favourable conditions. In all likelihood it will be wobbly and break/leak/blow away at the first sign of a good old British gale; and £200 would not even pay for the raw materials alone for an Instant Marquee, which is designed to take on and beat the UK weather. For year round professional use, the key issue is value for money, not price; buy cheap, buy twice. Carefully consider the level of performance and reliability you expect from your unit, and purchase accordingly. Six years ago we sold 4 6x3m units to a market trader who goes out 4-5 days a week. He complained about the price at the time of purchase, but after using his units 1200 times or more each he is now our best salesman for market stalls!

3. How are marquees printed and can I have an all-over canopy print?

Asking questions about printing marquees is a good ploy, because it can really sort out the men from the box-shifters. Basically, there are 3 different systems for printing polyester marquees: dye-sublimation, screen print & heat-applied vinyl. Direct printing on to polyester is not yet good enough, although amusingly we have seen one Chinese effort at direct printing where the cloth was turned around so that the proofing was on the outside! Screen printing is OK for relatively simple artwork but is nowhere near as durable as dye-sub, a process whereby the ink is drawn in to the cloth at around 200 celsius. Dye-sub print is vibrant, near-photo quality, machine washable and super-tough: it will never crack or fall out of the cloth, and an experienced operator can produce colours to pantone. Heat applied vinyl is a cheap and cheerful process for single colour logos.

The other question you should ask is how the branding is applied. Distributors who do not have their own canopy manufacturing facility usually get a 3rd party to print a panel and "badge" it over the existing canopy. At Instant Marquees all our canopy branding is made up from flat panels of cloth which are then made in to a canopy. Not only does this look much better, it also eliminates the chance of leakage from the patch and allows us to flow the logo/message/print over the whole canopy if required.

4. Do you do your branding in-house or via a sub-contractor?

Out-sourced branding can lead to problems. In a dispute over branding issues, who are you going to deal with? We don't

outsource - so you won't be let down. In fact, we offer an unconditional warranty on branded tents. If what you get is not what you expected - say there are colour issues or logos in the wrong place, we will replace it immediately or give you your money back!

5. How long is the warranty and what does it cover?

As with any other consumer item, it is comforting to know what is covered by the warranty. It also shows the degree of confidence the supplier has in his products. Instant Marquees offers a 24 months warranty on frames and PVC canopies, and 12 months warranty on polyester canopies. It covers material defects and faulty manufacture, but not abuse or mishandling.

6. What is the position on spare parts and repairs?

If your pop up tent is a working tool, it is of course essential that your supplier can either get spares to you overnight or offer a rapid repair service in the event of a mishap. Many of the box-shifters do not offer this degree of service; and some don't offer spares or repairs at all. At Instant Marquees we offer a next day delivery on parts, a same day frame repair service if you bring your frame back to us, and a canopy repair service within a working week.

7. Is your canopy 100% waterproof?

Anyone who claims his polyester canopy is 100% waterproof is probably a salesman! The fact is, no matter how well made or proofed it is, any polyester canopy will eventually allow a very small amount of water to wick in through the stitching. It is just a question of how long it is exposed to water; it may

take an hour, a day or a week, but eventually you will get a drop through a thread somewhere. If a 100% waterproof canopy is required, you have to specify a welded (not stitched) PVC canopy. But remember you will still have to deal with condensation, so the odd drop will still fall from the canopy in the right conditions, even if it is not leaking through.

8. Polyester or PVC - which is best?

Horses for courses. Polyester is lighter and more shapely, infinitely better for printing, and has a greater range of colours. It does not last as long as PVC, nor is as resistant to wear and tear. PVC is more expensive and much more durable, and is certainly what you should specify for really hard working units like market stalls.

9. How strong are your tents?

A lot of suppliers appear to bang on about leg size, hexagonal tubing being better than square and having the strongest frame on the market. The fact is any leg tube of 40x40x2mm or greater is strong enough to cope with compressive and bending loads in normal use; the strength and rigidity of this type of structure comes from the scissor frames section and construction, **NOT the legs**. Most scissor tubes are 30x15mm. Ours are 40x20mm, and we have tested the roof section of a 6x3m by hanging 300kgs off it without damage or permanent deformation.

10. Can you supply references?

Here's one of many we can supply: *"I just want to thank you for the hard work you and your team put in to get the marquees and flags to us in time for the weekend. Especially the guys who drove them up to London late on Friday night, it was much appreciated!"*