Mediumship Matters — Bonus Episode

Podcast transcript

The Truth About Spiritual Expos (And Why I Lost £8k)

Hello and welcome to Mediumship Matters, I'm Hannah Macintyre. This is a bonus episode, and it's a business one — so if spiritual business isn't your thing, go do something more fun, no hard feelings.

I've had a really rough month. I can't wait for 2026 to be over. There's been good stuff and there's been horrible stuff, and the horrible stuff might be its own episode one day. You may have noticed I've pulled back from things a bit — I've found it all really energetically challenging.

Today I want to talk about the London Expo I did recently. If you've listened to this podcast before, you'll know I was probably insane to go back. You'd be right. It's the triumph of hope over experience. Will I ever learn? I don't know. But I think it's important to talk about the misinformation that gets banded around with these big expos. I've only done one, so I can't say this applies to all of them — but I couldn't find any honest information online about what it's actually like, so let me talk you through it.

The Numbers

In a nutshell: I made an eight grand loss. Woo! Let me explain how and why, because if you're thinking about doing a spiritual fair or expo, this is important stuff.

The stand itself was only a couple of thousand pounds — I want to be really clear about that. It was advertised to me as a show with 20,000 visitors. Big show, exciting. Except it wasn't. It was really, really quiet.

The stand was £2,000, but then you get hit with extras: £100 for internet for one device. If you try to be clever like me and think “I'll just hotspot off my phone for the other devices” — it shuts hotspot off. Doesn't work. So I paid £100 for internet I couldn't even use, when I should have just put it on my till. And £300 for a plug. Just one plug. No lights, just a plug.

Then there were other costs. I had three wonderful ladies who volunteered to help, out of the goodness of their hearts, unpaid — and thank God they were there, because when it was quiet and depressing and I'd lost the will to live, they kept me going with the good vibes. They worked so hard because they believe in Spirit Social. I didn't want there to be extra cost to them for volunteering, so I covered their hotel and dinners. I think that's fair, and I'll die on that hill.

I'd also had this brainwave about a sticker vending machine — anyone who signed up for Spirit Social at the stand got a random sticker. Genuinely a great idea, worked really well. But there are costs with a sticker machine, and stickers, and getting them designed, on top of tablecloths, signage, flyers, t-shirts, all of it.

All in, it came to eight grand — but £1,500 of that was book stock, because with 20,000 people I was convinced I'd sell a fair few, and I had another fair the following weekend to stock up for too. So that £1,500 isn't really a loss, it's stock I now get to look at indefinitely. I'm looking at it right now. Nothing

like being reminded of your failure every time you walk into your office. So depending how you want to frame it, it's a six-and-a-half grand loss or an eight grand loss. Either way, money's tight right now.

Getting There

I had an inkling things weren't right before I'd even set off — too late once you've paid, though. I kept getting emails about 50% off, buy-one-get-one-free, discount codes. I thought, this doesn't sound good, but I'd already committed, already paid for the hotel. You might as well see it through.

It didn't help that I'd been really unwell for nine days beforehand — think I had a touch of the Covids — so I was exhausted before I'd even started. The sticker machine got stuck being shipped from China (no expense spared over here, clearly) and I was convinced it wouldn't arrive in time. It turned up an hour before I left and it felt like a miracle. My daughter and I put it together, tested it, it worked — I nearly cried. It felt like a sign from spirit that this was all going to be great. Of course, as you can tell, that was not the case.

I fitted an absurd amount into my Fiat 500X — £1,500 of books, the sticker machine, all the stand stock, lighting, the till. My satnav took me through some genuinely intense parts of London to get there, and I was so stressed with people driving aggressively and not letting me in that I asked Spirit for a song to help me through the traffic. The next song up on my 5,000-strong playlist was “Smack My Bitch Up” by The Prodigy, which made me laugh, and also gave me exactly the energy I needed — I just learnt to drive at people after that.

The Fair Itself

We got to London and set up the stand — Lorna did an amazing gymnastic move to stand on a table and hang up the signage, health and safety entirely out the window, while I held onto the table going “please don't fall.” It was lovely, honestly.

Friday was really, really quiet, and I started to panic a bit. I went round interviewing all the other stands, as is my nature — my husband laughs at me for it — and the more I asked, the more worried I got, because 95% of the stands were first-timers. That shouldn't be the case if a fair's any good. A lot of people told me it was smaller than usual, that they'd changed the layout because of it.

Everyone kept saying Saturday is the day. And that's when this cult-like energy started creeping in — we weren't allowed to say it was rubbish, because that's not positive energy, we had to say tomorrow will be great. I'd go up to people and ask how it was going, they'd say “amazing!”, I'd say “really?” — because it was rubbish for me, I'd sold one book on day one — and they'd go “oh no, it's terrible.” Why are you saying amazing, then? Who are you worried about offending? If it's rubbish, it's rubbish.

Saturday came and it was more of the same — like a ghost town. I started asking Spirit what on earth was going on. A guy from a dog food stand (nothing says spirituality like a dog food stand) came over and said he does loads of these fairs and has never seen one this quiet — on a Saturday afternoon in London you shouldn't be able to see from one end of an aisle to the other. Everyone had left their stands and was just mooching around chatting because there was genuinely nobody there.

The Award Ceremony

A little aside: I'd been shortlisted for an award, which I knew was a bit of a formality since only people with stands get shortlisted. I played along, shared it on social media as asked, didn't expect to win. One of the organisers came over and told me — twice, insistently — that I needed to be at the award ceremony that afternoon, and that the girls on my stand needed to be there too, we didn't want to miss it. So we thought, maybe it's good news.

We left the stand — Karen stayed, bless her — for 45 minutes, leaving a stand that wasn't making a profit, to go and watch someone else win. I did get a glass of champagne. But I felt embarrassed. I think I'm talking about this because it's almost too embarrassing not to — I thought I was going to win because they'd invited me so pointedly, but really they just wanted an audience, wanted it to look full in the photos. They didn't care either way.

To be clear, the right person won — they'd had a stand at that fair for ten years, invested a lot of money, they deserved it. But I felt misled. Not in a way that would hold up in court, just — why come over and say you have to be there, wink wink, no one wants to miss this? It felt like a spectacle, open to the public, everyone gathered round. Genuinely tough energy in that room — the only place all weekend where I felt that same toxic-spirituality energy Amanda and I once got pickled in. Ego spirituality. I'm aware that saying someone has ego spirituality sounds like I have ego spirituality myself, so make of that what you will. But it was Rob Hulse, and I will die on that hill too.

Hitting a Wall

By then I was feeling pretty defeated. The girls went and got me a frozen rum punch from the Jamaican stand in the vegan hall — stronger than anything I'd drunk since I was sixteen — and I figured if I kept drinking my taste buds would adjust, so I did. Spent the last two hours of the day, with about thirty people left in the whole venue, buzzed, taking the edge off, wandering round interviewing people and giving some poor guy an enthusiastic pep talk about writing a book. Can't be trusted in that state, honestly.

We went home Saturday night feeling okay. Then Sunday morning I woke up genuinely defeated — exhausted, still recovering from being ill, with none of the usual buzzing-day energy to carry me through. Flat and vulnerable, on the shuttle bus in, and I'd asked Spirit to answer some questions for me, because the strangest thing kept happening on the Saturday: people walking up to my stand to say they weren't interested in anything, but what could they have for free. Loads of people had brought kids — not really a kids' venue — and were just looking for something to entertain them. One woman got properly angry that I wouldn't give her child a sticker from the machine, because he wasn't old enough to use the app it required. I'm not a big business that can afford to give stuff away for brand awareness. By the end of Saturday I'd sold eight books, and I was already dreading loading them all back into the car.

What Spirit Sent Me

Sunday morning, close to tears, bottom lip betraying me, trying to hold it together — Spirit does this thing where if I ask a question, they send someone to answer it for me. On the shuttle bus, a woman from the vegan end of the hall told us it had been a financial write-off for her too, and mentioned that if

someone visits Friday, Saturday and Sunday, they get counted three times as an attendee. I don't know if that's actually true, but it would explain how “20,000 people” translates to this few opportunities to sell to anyone.

At the fair, I went for a walk because I couldn't stop crying and didn't want to bring that energy to my own stand. Met a guy who does loads of these fairs, properly fuming, who dropped the next nugget: did I know the tickets had been sold on Groupon? I checked — they had.

So, to be really clear on numbers: we got 56 app sign-ups over the weekend, against my normal average of six a day — so maybe eighteen of those were genuinely fair-driven. Of those 56, one has converted to paid, and eight have already unsubscribed. I sold 21 books. And it wasn't just me — the lady opposite did a handful of readings all weekend, the group of readers next to us hadn't covered their stand cost. Very few people I spoke to broke even.

The Bit I Actually Want You to Hear

What I really want to talk about is the misleading story we all buy into with these fairs. If you're running this as a business, you can't justify it on “getting your name out there” — and I don't think you should try to. A fair needs to cover your costs and your bottom line to be worth doing. So many people told me it had been a success because they'd handed out lots of flyers, or people had taken their tote bags. That's not success — that's you giving away a freebie. How many times have you looked at a tote bag and then bought from the company on it? That logic works for huge brands. It does not move the needle for you.

And I couldn't say any of this out loud at the time without feeling like the most negative person there. But it's simple business: if you've covered your stand cost and all your extras — petrol, travel, staff, meals (three pounds for a Twix, honestly) — then fine, call it a bonus win for brand awareness. If you've just given stuff away to people who are only there for freebies, it will not move your bottom line.

On Speaking Slots

This is why I refused to do talks this year, having done them with Amanda previously — I think they're the most snake-oil part of the whole thing. While queuing to check in, a woman ahead of me asked the car park attendants “do you even need my name, I'm one of the guest speakers” — classic ego-led spirituality. And I want to say this clearly: it is not an honour to be a guest speaker. It will not move the needle of your business. What you're doing is giving away, for free, an experience the company is then selling tickets to. They offer the same slots to everyone with a stand — some people did three slots because the programme wasn't varied, not because they'd been handpicked. Yes, you get your name in the leaflet. How many people actually read that leaflet when they get home, instead of putting it straight in the recycling with the rest of the junk mail?

It breaks my heart, honestly, because it's preying on people the same way Meta does — people pouring their heart and soul in on the hope of going viral and changing their business. Even if you got a thousand new followers from an event like this, they're not going to see your posts anyway. It won't move the needle. If you want to do a talk because you want the photos of yourself doing it, fine — just don't pretend to yourself it's an honour or a gift.

One More Fair, One More Lesson

I also did a demo at the weekend, at a fair organised by someone I know — I wanted to help them out, and ran straight into the same old story of doing things for free not being valued. It's a hall where I'd normally sell a hundred tickets at £20 a head. I had eight people. Eight. It's not anything you're doing wrong — it's smoke and mirrors.

A couple of people at that fair told me they didn't understand it, this fair was supposed to be brilliant, and I said, well, it's not, is it — we've been lied to. Then I saw them posting on social afterwards about what an amazing day it had been at the MBS Fair, so great to meet so many people. I was careful with my own posts — lovely to chat to people, lots of fun — but I didn't pretend I'd been busy, because I hadn't been. The dog food guy said fairs overall are on a downward trajectory everywhere, which was devastating to hear. On the Sunday, still trying to recover from the exhaustion, I went back and sold three books.

Where That Leaves Me

So fairs are off the table for me for now. I'm sure some are brilliant, but if you're going to do one: ask them where they're advertising, what budget's behind it, whether they're on the radio, in the paper. Ask what they're actually doing with your money. And think carefully about whether you can afford to leave your stand empty to go and do a talk to almost nobody, or to work for free for somebody else's event.

It leaves me with a genuinely tricky question about how to get Spirit Social in front of people, because Meta ads don't really work for paid conversions, only free sign-ups, and expos clearly don't work either. I don't have an answer yet.

I met a woman at the expo who'd had reading after reading telling her to leave her well-paid corporate job, and it isn't working out for her right now. I had no words of wisdom, other than that I know that feeling. So if that's you — you're not doing anything wrong. It's an illusion, all of it, this need within people to be seen, to be reposted, to be liked. None of that makes a fair a success or gets more people through the door.

When the organiser came round asking how it was going and I said honestly that it was terrible, it would take me six months to recover financially, he was shocked — no one else had told him that. I pointed out that the person two stands over had done one reading in two days, and the six readers next to her had six readings between them. “Oh, well, yeah,” he said — because everyone else had told him “great, fantastic” when he did his rounds. This is why I'm not popular.

Anyway. I hope this helps if you're considering doing a fair. I've tried to be honest, including about my own mistakes in it. Maybe if I'd done a talk it would have been brilliant, maybe I'd have had thirty app sign-ups — but I genuinely don't think I would have. Something in me just doesn't think I should work for free for someone else to make a load of money when I'm already paying to be there.

I don't know. All smoke and mirrors. I hope this has been a scintillating and interesting episode for you, and I'll catch up with you again soon when I've had some more spiritual slaps to tell you about. Have a great day.