

# What Is a Pop-Up?

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BY DEFINITION, a pop-up is any event that is temporary and involves people taking part in it as hosts and attendees. As long as it has a given start and end date, it can be considered a pop-up. But as with just about everything in life, there are exceptions. For example, a driver's education course—while temporary in that it is likely to have a beginning and ending class—is not a pop-up, since it is an educational event that is only applicable to a certain demographic of individuals (those who are learning to drive). A lemonade stand, however, is a pop-up, since it is a business offering a product that is available to the public for a short period of time.

What constitutes a pop-up has a complex answer. In England, farmers markets are always considered sectors within the pop-up industry. In the United States, an explanation is needed as to why this was so in the U.K., and why it should likewise be deemed appropriate in the United States. The answer to the question “What is a pop-up?” probably can only truly be answered by the reply given by Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, who, when asked to describe what is meant by “hard-core pornography,” replied that it was hard to define, “but I know it when I see it.”

Using our stipulation that, whatever it is, its core element is that a pop-up is ephemeral, we have found ourselves debating the inclusion of food trucks. Are food trucks, which usually are at

different locations at different times and can often appear at one-off food truck festivals, included in the definition of a pop-up? Or, because many are at the same location all year long, day in and day out, are food trucks excluded?

We decided that they are in, and for what we think is a very good reason. When we find ourselves explaining what we do and, specifically what a pop-up is, we give our fairly simplistic answer about it being a temporary shop or dining option. To which, as often as not, we would hear a response: “Oh yes! Like a food truck!” After hearing that enough times, we decided to let the public be the arbiter and to include food trucks among those sectors that fall under the pop-up canopy.

Once we defined, at least for our own edification, what a pop-up actually is, we had another question. How big was the industry? Was this a passing phase, or are temporary pop-ups, um, permanent? We had heard various numbers thrown around as to the size of the industry, but invariably, we discovered that each one referred to either too many retail and dining sectors as being part of the pop-up industry, or too few, so the market size they came up with was inherently erroneous. Not having a study to refer to, we decided to conduct one ourselves, and found a startling number: by best estimates, acknowledging that hard-and-fast empirical data were sometimes unavailable, it became clear that the monetary value of the pop-up industry was much higher than we thought—it is likely to be in the \$45 to \$50 billion dollar range, and perhaps a lot larger!

Another issue we confronted: Not only was a definition for the term “pop-up” needed and it was important to determine its size, but there wasn’t even a consensus as to how to spell the five-letter word! Was it “pop-up?” Was it “pop up?” Or was it “popup?” We had seen all three spellings used. So we decided to check Google Analytics, and lo and behold, the preferred usage statistics were a dead heat between “pop-up” and “pop up.” At least one spelling—“popup”—which happened to have been our preference, was eliminated!

Although not definitive, our sense is that “pop-up,” with the hyphen, has emerged the victor, and that is the spelling we use for common, everyday reference. It still doesn’t help us when we receive

Google Alert e-mails referring to articles that include allusions to pop-ups—we have to subscribe to Google Alerts for all three spellings to get a complete compendium, as even the almighty Google itself hasn't yet figured it out.

Even with such scrutiny and demarcations, the Google Alerts we receive also include the kinds of unwelcome pop-up advertisements that appear on web pages. No, we are not in that business, thank you. Nor are we involved in baseball, where pop-ups are one of the ways a hitter goes out. *Our* pop-ups are the good kind, and the kind that are re-inventing retail!

