

Starting and Running Conventions

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Why should we listen to you?

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- Creator of AnimeCons.com and FanCons.com
- Attended 142 conventions
- Founder of Anime Boston and Providence Anime Conference
- Staffed 5 different conventions

In this presentation...

- Why start a convention? (Seriously. What's wrong with you?!)
 - Research
 - Starting Up
 - Planning
 - Promoting
 - Common Mistakes
 - Convention Statistics

Why Start A New Convention?

- Too much free time.
- Enjoy having a personal life.
- Can't get enough stress in your life.
- Enjoy answering the same questions over and over.
- Love having people complain about everything you do.

Why You *Shouldn't* Start a New Con

- It will not make you rich *or* famous.
- Conventions are very expensive to run!
- Good help is hard to find.
- There's already a con within driving distance of every major US and Canadian city.
- There's already at least one con on every weekend in the US or Canada.

Wrong Reasons to Start A Con

- “There’s no cons in *my* 30,000 person town!”
- “There’s *only one* con in my town!”
- “I can’t get to [large nearby con].”
- “I want to meet Vic Mignogna.”
- “[Fandom] is popular, so a [fandom] con will be huge! Also, a ball pit!”
- “There’s a con near me, but it sucks.”

Greg Ayres says...

If you don't like something about a convention....

Before you start:

complaining....

campaigning...

threatening people...

changing the guest line up...

or anything like that...

TRY VOLUNTEERING INSTEAD!

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Posted on LiveJournal
February 24, 2006

Research

- Visit existing conventions.
 - Watch how they operate.
 - Take note of what works and what could be improved.
 - Consider visiting cons outside your geographic area as well.
- Help out at a con as a “gopher” or “volunteer”.
 - You’ll get a better look at the inner workings of a convention.
 - You’ll meet other people (with con experience) who may be interested in helping you with your own con.
 - You’ll also get occasional perks like a T-shirt, free admission, food, and/or crash space!

Research

- Staff a convention yourself.
 - The experience is *absolutely invaluable!*
 - You get a peek at the inner-workings of a convention.
 - You get to see a lot of the planning and preparation behind the scenes that most attendees never see.
 - You'll also meet lots of other experienced people who might help you staff your own convention.
 - Use staffing experience to decide if starting a new convention on your own would be something you are ready, willing, and able to do.
- Talk with other convention organizers.
 - Most conventions prefer to collaborate with fellow conventions rather than compete against them.

Starting Up

- Iron Man needs the Avengers
 - Superman needs the Justice League
 - ...or the Super Friends
 - ...or the Super Powers Team (Wow! Superman sure gets around!)
 - ***You need a core staff!***
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- *Before* you sign any contracts, pick a date, choose a location, or even decide on a name, assemble a core group of your own “super friends” to help.

Staffing Up

- Traits to recruit:
 - Trustworthy
 - Reliable
 - Experienced
 - Wealthy
- Delegate responsibility
 - Assign work based on experience and ability.
 - Don't try to do it all yourself!
- Collaborate with others
 - Schedule some planning meetings
 - Work with each other online between meetings

Staffing Up

- Essential Staff to Start:
 - Lawyer
 - Reviews contracts with venue, vendors, etc.
 - Helps with founding documents
 - Negotiator
 - Improves the contract for the venue
 - Accountant / Treasurer
 - Keeps track of money and pays bills
 - Loves to do taxes
 - Clerk / Secretary
 - Takes notes and keeps a record of meetings
 - Web Guru
 - Create and maintain web site and social media

Starting Up: Selecting a Venue

- School or University
 - Inexpensive (or free), but can be limiting
 - No hotel rooms which discourages out-of-town attendees
- Hotel
 - All-in-one solution
 - Costs money, but cost for function space at many hotels can be based on a sliding scale tied to the number of rooms booked.
 - Enough space for all but the largest conventions
- Convention Center
 - ***Very expensive!***
 - Lots of space
 - Hotels not included

Starting Up: Paperwork

- Lawyer up!
 - Review the facility contract, AV contract, and any other contracts you receive
 - Draft and/or review the dealers' room contract and any other contracts you send out
 - Help with incorporation, non-profit status, etc.
- Rent a mailbox in a convenient location
- Sign up for a business bank account
- Register your domain name
- Consider hiring an accountant
 - Non-profit taxes are complicated and *not fun!*

Starting Up: Picking a Date

- What time of year?
- Advantages/disadvantages of holidays
- When are other conventions in the area?
- What other cons have announced (or are usually near) the dates that you want?

- Most important:

DO NOT ANNOUNCE DATES UNTIL *AFTER* SIGNING THE CONTRACT FOR THE LOCATION!

Starting Up: Point of No Return

- Start grabbing all the experienced and enthusiastic staff you can find!
- Set up a site with essential and updated information:
 - “About this Convention” mission statement
 - Dates
 - Location (with links to the hotel and directions)
 - Pre-registration and Registration dates and rates
 - Programming information
 - Staff recruitment
 - Contact information
 - Links to the con’s Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, and any other social media you use.

Planning: Budgeting

- Income:
 - Registration
 - Dealers' Room
 - Artists' Alley and Art Show
 - Merchandising
 - Program Guide Advertising
 - Sponsorships

Planning: Budgeting

- Expenses:
 - Facilities (function rooms, staff & guest bedrooms, etc.)
 - Tech equipment (compare buy vs. rent vs. contract)
 - Printed material (flyers, programs, badges, signs, etc.)
 - Registration expenses (EventBrite, PayPal fees, lanyards, etc.)
 - Guest and staffing expenses (hotel, staff shirts, food, etc.)
 - Web site and domain registration
 - Mailbox rental and postage
 - Office supplies (paper, pens, posterboard, cash boxes, etc.)
 - Storage space and truck rental
 - Taxes, lawyer expenses, insurance, bank fees, PayPal fees, etc.
 - ...and *much, much more!*

Planning: Programming

- Figure out what events you can run with the staff and budget that you have.
- Different events have different staff and budget requirements.
- Decide if the payoff is worth the effort.
- Don't plan beyond your resources and don't promise too much!

Promoting

- Keep your convention's web site updated!
- Get the con listed on FanCons.com
- Make sure you're on Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr
 - You can automatically cross-post announcements and don't need to post to each individually
- Ask to leave flyers at local retailers
- Leave flyers at other conventions in the area
- Visit area clubs or meetups
- Reach out to local newspapers and media
 - Best case: Article on your convention
 - Worst case: Listed in their event calendar

Promoting

- Send out press releases when there is news to announce...
 - Date/location announcement
 - Guest announcements
 - Other notable achievements
 - Make sure there is *actually news to announce!*
 - *Don't spam them!* Space out your releases.
- Get listed in the local paper's event section.
- Invite the local press to attend.

Common Mistakes

- Put the convention's name, dates, and location at the top of *every* page on your web site.
- Plagiarism is bad. *Very bad!*
 - If you want to use content, ask first.
- Don't announce anything until it's confirmed in writing.
 - This includes a wish list for guests.
- The web site isn't updated. **Ever.**
 - Do not limit your updates to Facebook!
- After the con is over and you update your site for next year, pull down old content.
 - Seeing 2015 guests listed on a page with your 2016 logo is misleading

Common Mistakes

- Don't promote your con on another con's Facebook page without asking that con's organizers first.
- Make your web site mobile-friendly! (Also Guidebook!)
- Don't procrastinate. Start promoting immediately.
- Set deadlines and hold people to them.
- Don't be afraid to cut ties with people on staff that aren't working out. It could save you trouble down the road.
- Plan for the worst and hope for the best.
 - Set your convention's budget as if your lowest attendance estimate will be your income...but buy enough program guides, lanyards, and badges in case your high estimate shows up!

Convention Statistics

1990: 1

1991: 2

1992: 3

1993: 5

1994: 8

1995: 12

1996: 10

1997: 13

1998: 17

1999: 19

2000: 25

2001: 29

2002: 44

2003: 71

2004: 77

2005: 100

2006: 111

2007: 125

2008: 142

2009: 158

2010: 191

2011: 233

2012: 263

2013: 272

2014: 274

2015: 253*

* Numbers from AnimeCons.com
as of July 29, 2015 and include
USA and Canada only.

Convention Statistics

Common trends in smaller cons that are popping up:

- Usually pop up near existing conventions
- Entire event sometimes runs 8 hours or less
- Some are “me too” events
 - Sometimes run by overly ambitious fans such as Kami-Kon or TandokuCon
 - Sometimes run by corporations trying to leech off an existing fanbase
- Some are cons run by one organization in multiple cities
 - SukoshiCon, Animeland, Anime Getaway, [City Name] Anime Day, Anime Getaway, Black Materia conventions, etc.

AnimeCons.com and FanCons.com

- Anime-Cons.com created in November 2003
- Became AnimeCons.com in February 2006
- FanCons.com launched in January 2012
- Currently lists:
 - Over 6,000 conventions going back to 1936
 - Over 5,500 guests from “A for-real” to “ZZ”
 - Over 18,000 registered members
- AnimeCons TV video podcast added in January 2009
 - 171 episodes
 - New episodes every Monday
 - Available on iTunes, YouTube, and AnimeCons.tv

Additional Resources

- AnimeCons.com and FanCons.com:
 - Event lists, forums, podcast
- We Run Conventions Facebook Group
 - Invite-only
 - For current con staffers
- We Run Anime Cons (WRAC) Facebook Group
 - Invite-only, membership is verified by group admins (not me)
 - For current anime con managers and organizers (department or division heads, must supervise other staff)
- WRAC Execs Facebook Group
 - For current anime con chairs only with the convention taken place at least once

Questions?