

Convention* Marketing

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*Convention in this workshop can mean a local, Worldcon or other type of convention.

So you're putting on a convention and you want to spread the word. Now what?



What's this? Well we're glad you asked, it's a swamp full of gators. 'Nuff said.

It is our hope you come away from this Workshop with a basic knowledge and understanding of how to make a plan to market your convention. We could go deeply into marketing for nonprofits in an ever competitive marketplace, complete with marketing goals, strategies, tactics and metrics (for measuring your success). However, we only have this day and convention marketing is a unique animal with it's own challenges and rewards, so we want to make sure that people have at least an understanding of how to go about making a plan that can assist you with making your convention successful.

Historically, when (if) conventions start thinking about marketing, it's already too late. By the time it's realized that more effort needs to go into advertising and outreach, there is little budget or bandwidth to do a thorough job and almost no time to carry anything out. It is our hope that this workshop will help you in understanding when to start marketing, what goes into a successful marketing plan as well as provide you with the tools to create one which is tailored to your convention (small, large, repeated, Worldcons, etc).

Keep in mind when thinking about marketing for a convention, it's an experience you're trying to promote, not sell a ticket or a t-shirt. There is a wealth of content behind the message you want to send out. Your advertising should educate as well as inform, be visually arresting and stand up in a marketplace of multiple conventions all competing for some of the same attention.

Workshop Overview

1. What does a Marketing Plan involve?

A marketing plan is simply an overview, preferably with a timeline, to layout in advance the strategy you will use. This allows for budgeting and also helps keep everything timely.

- a. A typical marketing plan will identify your 4 starting points:
 - i. Who are you?
 1. Identity? What is this convention?
 2. Logo and Branding, why is it so important?
 - a. Consistent look and feel across multiple platforms.
 - b. Example of Good vs Problematic branding (Chicon vs LSC 3)
 - ii. What are you trying to achieve (goals)?
 1. Increase Membership?
 2. Draw in new types of attendees?
 - iii. Who is your audience?
 1. Repeat offenders?
 2. Lost attendees (example: They used to come to cons but now, after having kids, they no longer attend).
 3. The new and untapped?
 - iv. How will you reach them?
 1. What do **you** do for leisure when not attending conventions?
 - a. Bookclub?
 - i. Can you contact the local library and organize a reading? Or hold book clubs featuring your GoH's works for that year? Repeat this every year.
 - b. Movies?
 - i. Can you sponsor a movie night (Alamo drafthouse style)? Maybe a Scifi Movie fest? Get the college age kids into it with a midnight movie-thon.
 - c. Meetup group?
 - i. Organize outings for the local scifi groups. Get the local groups involved in your convention, use them as volunteers. They get new people, you get new staff.
 - d. Charitable Work?
 - i. Perhaps you can team up with a local genre group and help out a local charity?
 - e. Board or Online Gaming?

- i. Hit the local gaming stores and run a intro to games night. Offer membership discounts or freebies.
 - 2. Targeted marketing (waits until your programming, events and exhibits can be helpful in designing something with a narrower focus).
 - a. Families
 - b. Young Adult
 - c. Genre related
 - 3. Reciprocal Marketing
 - a. Amazon and Hugo Books
 - b. Charities and Fan Groups
 - c. Transportation Ads
 - 4. Traditional Fannish Marketing
 - a. Tables
 - b. Parties
 - c. Ads
 - 5. For Worldcons, the plan is set 3 phases:
 - a. Phase One is Bid Marketing (runs until a winning vote)
 - b. Phase Two is Pre-Con Marketing (Vote won but it is someone else's time for glory). *A very important aspect of Phase Two is not overshadowing or drawing too much attention to yourself.*
 - c. Phase Three is Convention Marketing, the last year, end of previous Worldcon to beginning of yours
- 2. There will frequently be multiple goals, multiple audiences, and multiple contact paths.**
- 3. When establishing a plan and timeline, you have to look at Creation, Production and Distribution.**
 - a. Anything you use to market will need to be created (designed)
 - i. Do you have a graphics person or team?
 - ii. Do you have a website designer?
 - iii. Videographer?
 - b. How will you produce those creations?
 - i. Printing costs?
 - ii. Filming costs (hopefully not any!)
 - iii. Website Development
 - iv. 3rd party contracts (sales to members)
 - v. Staff for tables and parties
 - c. How will you distribute them?
 - i. Online?
 - ii. Mailing?
 - 1. Where will you get the names?

- iii. At Con handouts?
- iv. Published in something?
- v. Sold at tables?
- vi. Around the Town (billboards, transit ads, movie night sponsorships, book clubs, meet & greets).
- vii. Press (TV, Radio, Print)

4. Think about the repercussions of your actions!

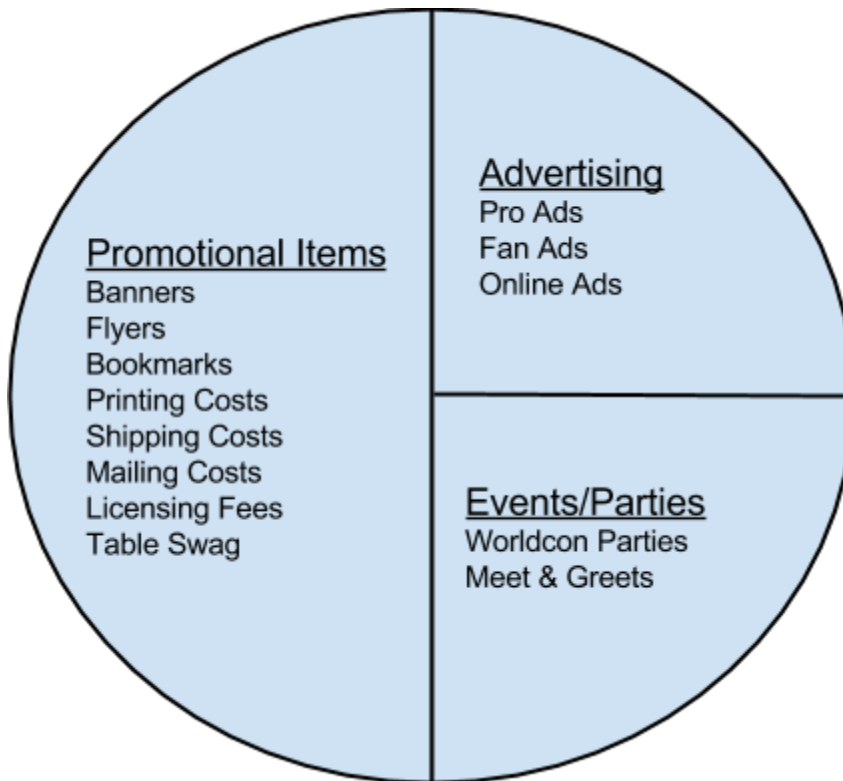
- a. If you are driving people to your website, is it ready for them?
- b. If you create a postcard to distribute to dealers (to help fill up your ranks and get them to sign up), you better be certain your online registration for that is ready.
- c. If you marketing to families based on Childcare availability, you better be certain your convention has capable Childcare in place.
- d. If you plan on using Social Media to promote a sale or warn of a rate increase, your registration and online purchasing had better reflect whatever changes are happening.
- e. Nothing will sink your marketing efforts more than poor customer service!

5. How am I going to get all that done?

- a. No, really, Create your timeline and marketing plan!
- b. Defining areas within Marketing and using them.
 - i. Advertising
 - ii. Website
 - iii. Social Media
 - iv. Press
 - v. Publications
 - vi. Relationships
 - 1. CVB
 - 2. Local clubs and Groups
 - 3. Colleges
 - 4. Publishers?
 - 5. Local press/Bloggers
- c. Budget
 - i. Money is necessary, and easier to get if you identify how to measure your success
 - ii. Fannish inclinations towards frugality can sometimes create efforts that are not as good as doing nothing. Beware doing something cheaply in a way that harms your product.
 - iii. Have contingency plans for increasing local marketing in the final few months, frequently money at the end is difficult to spend and if there's a plan in place and ready to go, you can achieve a lot.
 - iv. Keep a wish list, make sure you know what timeline each needs.

Budget Example

The thing about budgets are that they can vary widely based on how you want to achieve your goals and the convention you are representing. Using a generic Worldcon budget as an example, funds can be loosely broken aggregated as follows:



Every “pie” is going to be different, though. The breakdown is contingent on what you’re trying to accomplish, and the totals are most usually arrived at bottom up rather than top down, i.e. “I want to do these 10 things, it will cost me X” and not “I have decided to spend X, how much can I do”.

The important point about viewing the budget in aggregate is to make sure the balance fits the plan you’ve made. If your plan calls for extensive local marketing but your budget shows only a small fraction going to local efforts, it’s time to either adjust your plan or re-prioritize some of your spending.

Sample Marketing Plan

Marketing Plan Proposal for LoneStarCon 3

1. Focii
 - a. SF/Fantasy Convention Enthusiasts within a 12 hour drive of San Antonio (*Current Fans*)
 - b. SF Literature enthusiasts that are unfamiliar with conventions/WorldCon (*New Lit Fans*)
 - c. SF Media enthusiasts that haven't necessarily attended a convention (*New Media Fans*)
2. Objectives
 - a. Engage and inform *Current Fans* about what WorldCon has to offer and what its specifics are.
 - b. Advertise to *New Lit Fans* and *New Media Fans* through their respective mediums the specifics of the convention and what makes it valuable.
3. Strategy
 - a. *Current Fans*
 - i. Convention Advertising
 1. Divide southwest conventions into primary focus conventions and secondary focus conventions based on approximate attendance, focus, location, and demographic composition.
 - a. Primary Focus Conventions: Arrange for any or all of...
 - i. A fan table
 - ii. Flyers
 - iii. A room party
 - iv. Program book advertisement
 - b. Secondary Focus Conventions: Arrange for any or all of...
 - i. Flyers
 - ii. Program book advertisement
 - ii. Mailing List Access
 1. Generate a series of email blasts for conventions to distribute on their mailing lists/news channels to be broadcast at intervals.
 - iii. Each region should have its own staff member responsible for managing interactions with the conventions in the region.
 - b. *New Lit Fans*
 - i. Sponsorship of regional author signings
 - ii. Soliciting write-ups on author blogs
 - iii. Flyer distribution at book stores
 - iv. Advertising on Amazon, Borders, and Barnes and Noble on searches for Science Fiction authors/books
 - v. This will be executed by a single staffer
 - c. *New Media Fans*
 - i. Sponsor fan movie showing events (Can't Stop the Serenity, Rocky Horror Picture Show, Nerdcore Rising, etc)
 - ii. Placecard ads prior to selected Science Fiction movies in theatres.
 - iii. 15-second stinger ads on SyFy channel and/or G4TV

- iv. This will be executed by a single staffer
- d. General Advertising
 - i. MegaBus
 - 1. Try and obtain a special rate for Worldcon attendees. Advertise on MegaBus. Texas routes.
 - ii. Social Media
 - 1. A social media staffer will be responsible for both a notification and an enthusiasm generating presence on various social media forums
 - a. Facebook
 - b. Twitter
 - c. Vine
 - d. Wikipedia
 - e. Digg
 - f. Fark
 - g. The Node
 - h. YouTube
 - i. Vimeo
 - j. any of the thousands that I'm missing
 - iii. Mailing list
 - 1. A LoneStarCon mailing list will be used to disseminate information of interest to those seeking information about the convention.
 - a. Several contests should be run for those on the list offering prizes, helping drive membership
 - b. Special offers should be provided only to mailing list members
 - iv. Print Media
 - 1. Solicit *newspaper* coverage through a press kit and interview access to staff and involved celebrities in cities within a 8 hour drive of the convention
 - 2. Active advertisement in Science Fiction magazines
 - a. Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction
 - b. Analog
 - c. Asimov's
 - d. Strange Horizons
 - e. Another Realm
 - f. Interzone
 - g. Clarkesworld
 - h. Apex
 - i. Locus
 - j. Others...
 - v. Web Advertising
 - 1. Banner ads on sites targeted through demographics and topics
 - 2. Web magazine articles solicited through press kits
 - vi. Fanzines

Template Timeline

1 year before the Vote:

- Set branding
- make initial marketing timelines
- Recruit staff

6 months before the Vote:

- initial web site set up
- flesh out marketing goals and focuses
- staff/recruit as called for by plans
- Plans for vote site
- Placeholder budget (only need to worry firming up items you plan to do in the first 6-9 months)

3 months before the vote:

- finalize vote site plans
- template initial print/web advertising

1 month before the vote:

- PR#0 staged *
 - initial print web advertising staged *
- * - minus any embargoed information which will be put in last minute

Shortly before to shortly after the vote:

- finalized and produce PR#0
- finalize initial ads and place them
- Review embargoed information and determine how best to “synergize” guests/etc with the plan (augment plan as necessary)

First 6 months after the vote:

- constant contact with new divisions as they come online, adapt and expand the plan/timelines if necessary
- flesh out budget
- carry out plan items as designated, first year marketing is usually low key except for local area
- Plan initial press releases

Remainder of first year:

- finalize plan for “live year”
- staff as necessary
- PR#1 and some social media (especially in relation to the seated convention, connect with current attendees)

Live year to 3 months out:

- Since you’ve staffed up and have a well defined plan, this part is *easy*, right?
- PR#2-4

- advertising blitz, social media with increasing frequency
- Press releases
- Online Ad and campaigns

3 months out to convention:

- marketing focus shifts to local population for convention site, national advertising curtails
- social media, social media, social media
- PR#5

Post convention:

- Plan to monitor/manage public response for at least a month after the convention
- social media work to pass the torch to the now-seated convention.
- Retire having done the best marketing job for worldcon ever