

Exhibits

From Worldcon Runners' Guide

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Exhibits

Film Industry Exhibits

The problem with dealing with the film industry is that deals can pop up and disappear overnight. What is available is whatever is hot at a given time, and what is hot is dependent upon the whims of the Hollywood folk.

It is quite common to beat your head against the wall, several months in advance, and come up dry. Then, a couple of weeks before the con, someone in some studio heard something about this "sci-fi thing" and wants to know if they can send material for display. Flexibility is the key.

Photo Gallery

A photo gallery of SF authors has been a very popular exhibit in recent years.

Hugo Awards

An exhibit of past Hugo awards is popular.

Bid History and Worldcon History

Exhibits relating to Worldcon bids and Worldcons themselves are popular.

Commercial Exhibits

One of the sources that has traditionally not been tapped very well is the idea of commercial exhibits where the exhibitors **pay us for** the privilege of putting up a booth. Unfortunately, much of this is a Catch-22 — many companies are reluctant to exhibit because there is not currently a large number of exhibitors.

In 1993, a solicitation attempt was made, and met with mixed results. Solicitation letters were sent out to a variety of companies (see the Appendices), and got a very low response rate. Many of the responses that did come in were unsuitable; the vendor turned out to have inappropriate material for exhibition.

By far the most common response was that companies consider the Worldcon "too small" for sending an exhibit booth and team. In these days of massive cutbacks, many companies are only going to the huge mega-shows like Comdex (with 50,000++ attendees) where they are assured of gazillions of dollars in sales. The lure of publicity is much more intangible, and may be documented better in the future with the experience gained in 1993.

Another response was that our group is just too weird for mundane companies. Sigh.

The best response was in the area of computer technology, particularly with companies involved in science-fiction oriented computer games. Unfortunately, most of the exhibitors that 1993 did get came in "over the transom" because someone in the company had heard about us (and in some cases, was already an SF fan.) The most frustrating aspect of this was that in many cases those same companies had been contacted by letter several months earlier, and the company had not only never responded, but the people who **did end** up calling the Worldcon about exhibit space had never heard anything about the solicitation letter that had been sent.

As a result of this experience, in future attempts to do things like this, it is strongly recommended that a telephone-based approach be used, in which the department in charge of soliciting exhibits can plan on spending several days on the phone calling companies, finding out who is in charge of making exhibit decisions, and making an initial phone sales pitch. At that point, a solicitation packet is **then sent** out. If possible, the packet should include photos of the 1993 exhibit area and testimonials by 1993 exhibitors.

Thus, the budget for such an area should include several hundred dollars (seriously) for phone bills.

How much to charge? In 1993, \$500 for a 10x10 empty booth was the price finally charged. It may be possible to raise that to \$1000 in the next couple of years (depending on 1993 satisfaction), but probably not much more than that.

The issue of how many and what kind of memberships to provide with such a booth was a matter of controversy that required policy debate. Based on the experience, in the future it is recommended to offer two **non-voting full memberships** (which will allow the vendor to see just what a Worldcon is), and up to four "hall passes" that get booth staff into the exhibit hall but do not allow them into other convention functions. If the vendor wishes to purchase additional memberships or hall passes, the mechanism must be spelled out in the contract (see Appendix).

A sample contract is included in the Appendices. Other than the issue of how many hall passes were to be provided, the 1993 vendors did not request modifications to other clauses. The sample contract, therefore, appears to be a pretty good model for the future.

Again, before solicitation is begun, the concon must be prepared to answer the exhibitor's simple question: "why should I spend a couple of thousand dollars (or more) to bring staff in, put them up in hotels, buy your exhibit space, and put up an exhibit?" Interviews with 1993 (satisfied) vendors could be quite useful here.

Concourse Area

Some Worldcons have taken advantage of large concourse areas to put in things that will entertain fans and encourage them to hang out and socialize, or just have fun.

Miniature golf is one idea that has worked surprisingly well.

Fan Lounge

Also known as the fanzine lounge, this is a gathering area primarily for fanzine fans and older SF fans. It sometimes has part of the fan programming track.

Usually, a large display of fanzines (including fanzines for sale) is here.

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