

Kitchen Sink Departments

From Worldcon Runners' Guide

Contents

- 1 Kitchen Sink Departments
 - 1.1 Handicapped Liaison
 - 1.2 Sales to Members
 - 1.2.1 Pre-con
 - 1.2.2 What to sell?
 - 1.3 Medical Liaison
 - 1.4 Information Desk
 - 1.4.1 Attitude/View Point of Information
 - 1.4.2 Linking Other Departments with Information
 - 1.4.3 Various Types of Information
 - 1.4.4 The "Bible"
 - 1.4.5 Personnel
 - 1.4.6 Designing the Information Desk
 - 1.4.7 Phones (Switchboard) and Radio
 - 1.4.8 Basic Supply List
 - 1.5 Con Suite
 - 1.6 Freebie Tables / Flyer Distribution
 - 1.7 Voodoo Message Boards
 - 1.8 Online Liaison
 - 1.9 Blood Drives

Kitchen Sink Departments

These are departments that end up in various divisions, depending on how a particular Worldcon is organized.

Handicapped Liaison

Handicapped liaison should check out the ability of all convention facilities to handle things like wheelchairs.

Sales to Members

Pre-con

During the years prior to the con, publicity and income can be gained by having limited editions of t-shirts that are sold at regionals. This is more a publicity than an income item.

What to sell?

Recent people who have run Sales to Members areas should be asked what went well and what didn't. If possible, Worldcon members should be surveyed as to what they would like to see in the way of merchandise.

Medical Liaison

For a few years, with the rise of the popularity of Services divisions, it was thought to be a good idea to have a staff of paramedics and fan doctors on call to help handle medical situations.

As a gathering of people gets larger, the chances of various types of medical emergencies arising increases until it reaches virtual certainty. The demographics of fans also tend towards people with various unusual medical conditions. This comes to a head when fans forget about things like sleep and regular meals, and the fact that a Worldcon is not a three-day regional they can just burn through and crash later.

Unfortunately, mundane society, in the meantime, has become more litigious.—I.e., people love to sue. Good Samaritan laws no longer have the strength they once did.

As a result, it is the opinion of both doctors and attorneys we have consulted that a Medical Liaison department is a **bad idea**. The chances of the fan doctor **and** the convention being sued are just too high.

Instead, we recommend that discussions with the facilities in advance of the convention include a full briefing on what medical assistance is available, and this information needs to be made available to both HQ and the Information Desk.

Note that Good Samaritan laws vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, so this may not be true for you. Be sure to speak to both doctors and lawyers when investigating this.

Information Desk

(Contributed by Sandy Rymer)

Below are some basics about how to organize and run an Information Department at a World Science Convention but they can easily be modified for any convention. These basics are peppered with thoughts and suggestions in case they are of help to anyone involved in this process.

Attitude/View Point of Information

Clearly define what "Information" will do, the attitude it will present, and list the basic goals needed to accomplish these wants and needs. Keep in mind during this process that both Information and Registration are the first places where "convention attitude and fun" are established for the fans. If the fans do not receive correct information and reliable help with a friendly and happy attitude, it will reflect in the attitude of the fan towards the convention as a whole. Remember, attitudes are contagious — is yours worth catching?

Linking Other Departments with Information

Make sure you have designated contacts for information before and during the convention.

It is the responsibility of the Information Department to establish an understanding with the committee members and other department heads of the importance of providing the Information Department with information. It is also Information's responsibility to establish the organizational structure for the information to get to the department. Designating one person as the information contact in each department/division is an effective method and it is suggested that these contacts be set up early on and kept in touch with on a regular basis.

Various Types of Information

These will vary according to what each convention is doing, but the basic ideas are:

- a. Con Related (who, when & where)
- b. Newsletter Distribution
- c. Maps (convention center, hotels, surrounding areas)
- d. Emergency
- e. Banks/Restaurants
- f. Site Seeing/Special Tours
- g. Outside Groups (parties, meetings, etc.)
- h. Fan Message Board
- i. Fan Flyers and other related printed information
- j. Lost & Found

For con-related information, a tried and true method has been to create a "bible." An indexed notebook binder is one method to organize the information and have the ease of updating the pages as the convention proceeds. Getting an advanced copy of the pocket program is an excellent way to obtain most of the material to place in your various indexed categories. Anything that can't be obtained from the pocket program can be obtained from your established information sources and put in their index category. Make enough copies of this binder "bible" for each information station at the information booth, one for the information phone station, one for the information department manager, and an extra copy for operations. Information needs to be available before the convention opens its doors to its members. Some have Operations disseminate information at this time in which case make sure they get their copy of the "bible" early. Otherwise prepare to have the information department provide these information services before the convention opens, since information will be required by convention personnel, hucksters, artists/authors, and any others who have to arrive early to set up the convention. There is a more detailed description of this "bible" later in the text.

There is no one who has a better system for fan messages than Erwin Strauss (aka Filthy Pierre) and his wonderful Voodoo Message Board. Erwin is most helpful and the acknowledged expert. It would be advisable to contact him for his input.

For the fan flyers, meet with the hall planner and determine where the most logical space would be to put tables. Determine from the space given how many tables are needed to fill that space and order the tables from the convention decorators. Give the decorators a floor plan for where to place these tables and trash cans. Put up some signs to identify the space and the fans will do the rest. There is another system (also developed by Erwin Strauss) utilizing peg board and string to make pockets for flyer display. Again, Erwin will be happy to provide information and diagrams.

Information will also be expected to know about the City the convention is being held in. Maps, bank & restaurant information can be gathered by Information staff members that live in that City or, if you do not have this luxury, calling local Chambers of Commerce and convention Bureaus is always wise. If possible, visit the City and walk around the hotel or convention center where the convention is to be held and gather bank and restaurant information within a square block of the location. It is sometimes helpful to provide a binder of sample menus so that fans can get a better idea of types of food and their prices. It is suggested the tying this binder down will assure that it stays a source of information throughout the convention.

Some conventions establish a separate department to handle city tours. If so, establish contact. A logical place to have city tours would be a corner of the information booth. Usually city tour people are locals and can help you with any unforeseen problems or questions that pertain to the local area.

Any outside groups/clubs that were to hold meetings and/or parties during the convention can be urged through an article in one of the progress reports to make sure Information gets their schedules. This type of information gathering will depend on how the convention decides to handle meetings and parties. Providing materials (easels), paper, pens bulletin boards) in strategic places so that individuals can post their own party/meeting information can be useful. It also can save the convention committee the stress of handling angry hotel managers complaining about all the flyers being taped up all over his walls.

The "Bible"

People like to see you look things up.

Be prepared to look up information that the fan is already holding in his hands as he asks the question. Be polite and friendly. Look up the information, give them the answer and then kindly show them how to use the pocket program. Save "face" — there are no stupid questions, just stupid answers.

A more detailed discussion of the use of indexed notebook binders as "bibles" was promised earlier. Use a three ring binder thick enough to hold the information you have with room to spare for the information you will gather during the convention. Take three hole punched paper as well as a 3 hole punch to assist in updating the bibles. Suggested indexed categories follow:

```
<tbody>
</tbody>
- Masquerade           - Hugo Awards
- Hall Costumes        - Rock Dance
```

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|
| - Regency Dance | - Workshops |
| - Opening/Closing Ceremonies | - Panels |
| - Children's Programming | - Films |
| - Gaming | - Hucksters |
| - Con Committee | - Art Show |
| - Medical/Handicap Services | - Child Care |
| - Con Suite | - City Tours |
| - Green Room | - Hotels |
| - Parking | - Banks |
| - VIPs | - Miscellaneous |

Of course modification is necessary to fit each convention's unique programming. The section called "VIPs" is a cross reference that is invaluable. If programming has their information on a data base, it is easy to provide a cross reference listing by VIP who would be attending or running a program. This way if a fan only wanted a list of his or her favorite author's panels, all you have to do is look up that author's name and have a list of his or her scheduled activities at your fingertips.

Depending on the size of convention, several copies of the "bible" are made. Usually 1 for con ops, 1 for the information telephone person, and 1 for each station at the information desk. These all need to be updated on a frequent basis during the convention. Warning — this can be very difficult; Information will be constantly coming from all sides and many source (phones, radio, committee, gophers, fans, etc..) A suggestion is to have anyone who receives a bit of information that will require additions and changes to all the bibles take a moment to put it in writing and give it to the manager of Information. The manager should make sure that this information is properly copied and distributed to each bible. It can and will be so hectic at times that most "procedures" can get lost in the scramble to get the information out. Periodic "sweeps" by the information manager to make sure that all the Bibles are current and the staff updated, is advised.

A copy machine within easy reach of the information booth is strongly advised. Make sure that you are provided with the phone number to reach repair services because it will probably bread down. A list of outside copy services could be helpful but usually there will not be the luxury of the time this takes in order to have the copies of updated information. If all fails, a typewriter or pen and a supply of good old fashioned carbon paper can save many stressful moments a day.

Any information that requires more "immediate" attention such as "the masquerade has been moved from 8 pm to 8:30 pm" can be put in large letters on poster board and posted on easels near the information desk.

Personnel

No more than 5 hours per shift.

The basic concept here is to keep hours short enough so that staff remains alert, friendly and helpful while on duty. The number of hours the information booth is open for service will determine the number of personnel needed to run the shifts.

The basic information booth will usually have several staff members giving out information, someone to give out information over the phone or make calls to get needed information, manager and at least two gophers. It is suggested that staff members be cross-trained. Flexibility is the key here. Something that was tried successfully at ConFrancisco was to have one person designated as the care giver per shift. Their job was solely to determine if all staff members were doing well, sending out gophers for needed food/water, or stepping in to give staff members bathroom and rest breaks during their 5 hour shift. This care giver should be given the authority to remind the manager of needed breaks as well.

It is strongly suggested that people take care of themselves with breaks and good eating/sleeping habits. If staff "drop" during the convention they have not done a good job. A suggestion to the Information Department head of manager is to "clone" yourself so that you will not be tempted to work every day, all day.

Depending on the gopher pool or not will have to be an individual decision. Sometimes it is better to recruit your own gophers. This will assure that there are always gophers when needed, since so much depends on Information giving excellent service.

Designing the Information Desk

Some basic ideas are expressed here since each information desk will be unique to its function. Blocking off a section in the back of the information area can be very useful. This space can be your office/rest/storage space area. It is advisable to use a counter with stools for the staff to sit on. Since the staff's attitude is all important, it is much less stressful to put them behind a counter to avoid having fans "looming over" them by sitting staff at a regular table. Eye contact is much easier and it puts the information giver in a position of power and confidence.

The use of easels and large pads of paper to post information is helpful as well as being an easy way to give out information quickly and conveniently.

Some facilities allow for a more decorative approach to your booth — just make very sure well ahead of time that the fire marshal agrees with your decorating tastes. He can shut the entire show down because of one booth. Make him your friend. What he says goes.

Most large facilities can provide (for a price) excellent signage. Most conventions provide their own. Make sure the signage is large and bold enough to be read from several feet away. Hanging these signs from ceilings may be possible. In many cases having signage double-sided is recommended.

If you are going to be in a convention center, be aware that everything is ordered through the convention hall and its decorator. This includes chairs, stools, counters, tables, waste baskets, as well as your phone and electricity. It will depend on how "unionized" the hall is, but usually bringing in your own "stuff" is frowned on and there is the ever present fire marshal to make happy. Check it out well ahead of time so that you can provide the best booth you possibly can without unnecessary hassles from your facility.

Phones (Switchboard) and Radio

This is by far the most important part of the Information booth. A multi-line phone, a single line phone and a radio can enable an information booth to be the kind of quick and accurate service you desire more than anything else you can plan to provide service. Arrange for a list of people and their phone numbers/extensions. If you can't find the answer in the Bible, call someone who knows and ask. Placement of the phone station should be far enough away from the "noise" at the front counter but close enough to be of use to the counter staff.

When counter information staff need to call out to get information, it is suggested that they walk to the phone staff person and request the call. While the phone person is making the call, the counter staff member can return to his station, asks the person waiting to step aside, and be able to help the next person. Providing the phone person with an ear phone jack to make the hearing the callers easier and can be very helpful.

The multi-extension phone allows contact with other departments to get quick information/help as well as answer calls from outside. Outside calls are usually people asking attendance prices, directions to the convention center, or the media calling for program information to determine when it would be best to arrive. Writing a quick paragraph explaining/describing the convention and taping it to the phone is suggested.

Having an extra single line phone is helpful. This phone can be used for any lengthy outside calls or emergency calls leaving the multi-line phone free for other information seekers. The multi-line phone should have the ability to transfer calls. Transferring callers to the source for an answer to their question is fast service and will keep the lines free for more calls. A rule of thumb for giving out information: When it comes time to get information from another source it is often wise to connect the information giver with the information seeker and step out of the role of middle man. Information should be a facilitator not the wise man of the mountain with all the answers. "I don't know, but I will obtain that information for you" is good service.

Information can have jurisdiction over lost and found. It is wise to write a policy concerning lost items and where unclaimed items go after the convention. It is suggested that an lost badges be sent back to registration. Since lost and found can include lost children, a radio allows you to find people who do not have phone extensions to call (such as paging for lost parents, ops in case of emergency, or other department managers that roam the floors.

Basic Supply List

To be modified for individual use:

<tbody>	
</tbody>	
Typewriter	Scotch tape
Computer & printer (paper)	Stapler & Staples
Carbon paper	Paper clips
Pens & Pencils	Yard stick
3 holed xerox paper	Poster board

3 hole punch	Wire (hangers are useful)
Phone message pads	Scissors
Post Its	Masking tape
Broad tipped magic markers	Several paper tablets
Large lockable box for Lost & Found	Duct tape
Straight pins (sometimes you can pin things to your pipe & drape)	

Con Suite

Con suites have become a major area of theological strife within Worldcons. Some schools of thought claim that con suites are unnecessary. Traditionalists maintain that a con suite is important both to help set the ambience of the convention, and to provide a place for neofans to go to find out what late night partying is all about.

Once it has been decided to have a con suite, there are still many decisions to be made.

1. Hours?

Some con suites are open only during evening party hours (say, 6 pm. to 4 am), other cons try to keep it open for, say 20 hours a day (to allow a cleaning time in the morning).

2. Alcohol?

To go dry or serve alcohol? If alcohol is served, it is normally limited to beer due to cost factors.

In favor of serving beer:

- a. Provides more of a traditional ambience

Against serving beer:

- a. Cost
- b. Due to problems with minors, con badges will have to be coded, and bar servers will have to be very careful about not serving minors accidentally.

If you do choose in favor of serving beer, you should try to cut a deal with a local microbrewery, as Chicon V did with Baderbrau. This adds a touch of class, and when negotiating a contract for as much beer as a Worldcon needs, need not cost any more. You also get a better beer than if you go with standard national brands.

Do not under any circumstances serve generic or low-quality brand beer. This is a quick way to get a bad reputation.

3. What form should soft drinks be served in?

- a. Glass bottles. Bad idea due to breakage, cost.
- b. Cans

- c. 2-liter bottles
- d. From bar-type canisters, either premix or postmix.

This is generally the most cost-effective method, and uses up the least storage space and ice. Note that depending on the type of mix, you may need running water in the serving area.

It is **critical** that the hotel contract contain exemptions from corkage regulations for the con suite, so that the con does not have to purchase its soft drinks, beer, and snacks from the hotel! If the hotel forces you into this, your con suite costs could easily triple.

The hotel contract should also include either a waiver of charges for ice or a negotiated, extremely low cost for ice. Con suites use a very large amount of ice. Really.

Con suites are an excellent way to spend unexpected money that comes in at the con with at-the-door memberships. For example, at both Chicon IV and V, several pizza orders of \$500 worth of pizza at a time were made. The pizza never lasted for more than half an hour, and didn't have time to get cold. (Note that in cases like this, you need to contact local pizza vendors in advance and establish credit, so that when you call to order \$500 of pizza they won't laugh and hang up on you!)

If your Worldcon is tax-exempt, you can contact organizations that make or distribute food, and ask for donations. Companies can thus donate snacks to your Worldcon, write it off on their taxes, and you have just stretched your budget.

If you want to buy or accept a donation of material that needs to be refrigerated, do not assume that the hotel will let you use its refrigerators or freezers. The hotel is usually using them for its own food, since fans are busy inundating the restaurants. If you do need refrigeration, the hotel liaison should negotiate for storage space to be provided either free or at a nominal cost; such negotiations will hinge on the facilities liaison being aware of exactly how much space will be needed and for how long.

Cleanliness is extremely important. If you let the con suite get out of control and food and beverages start spilling, not only will the hotel clean-up bill be outrageous, but it will turn people off both to visiting the con suite and in their impression of the con itself. The con suite is the con's living room—if it is messy or uncomfortable to be in, that will be a major factor in peoples' impressions of the con.

Freebie Tables / Flyer Distribution

(Adapted from material written by Erwin S. (Filthy Pierre) Strauss)

The main point that Worldcon committees need to understand is that they must provide sufficient space. The size of a North American Worldcon has (surprise!) little effect on the number of flyers brought. A little under 500 flyers have been brought to 4000-5000 attendee Worldcons, and a little over 550 to large ones (8000-9000 attendees.) At 8 1/2" x 11" of table space per flyer, that means 15 big tables (8' x 30") at a small Worldcon (495 flyers, 33 per table) to 35 small tables (6' x 24") at a large Worldcon (560 flyers, 16 per table).

Most committees seem to start with the idea of a half-dozen tables or so!

At ConFederation, the committee tried to use half a dozen tables in a sunken area of the lower lobby. After the tables filled up (by the end of Thursday), people started putting flyers on chairs, steps, and any other flat surface. The sunken area started filling up with jumbled flyers, like a fishpond. When it was covered and about a half dozen flyers deep all over, the hotel wanted something done before somebody broke their neck or pitched a cigarette butt. Irv Koch then gave Filthy \$150 to buy the makings of string boards and organize the place.

Two approaches can be done:

1. Many, many tables (see above discussion).
2. Constructing flyer holders out of pegboard and string.

The pegboard and string method uses up less floor space and is easier for people to scan. Standard hotel tables don't show off the flyers as well (the vertical boards of colorful flyers draw in passers-by, while flyers on tables are essentially invisible until you're standing over them), they're less convenient for the members (you have to lean over the table to see what's there), and they're harder to keep neat and organized.

Thirteen 4x8' panels provide space for 558 flyers (when cut into three 32" x 48" boards, each with three rows of five pockets each), and take up about half the floor space of tables of similar capacity.

If pegboards and string are used, someone must construct them. They can either be built in the home city or built elsewhere and trucked in. It is NOT practical to build the pegboards on site—experience has shown it takes more than 20 hours of very intensive labor—no problem if spread over a few weeks before the con, but a lot of hassle if done on site.

If tables are used, capacities are as follows:

8' x 30" tables

11 flyers side by side, with 3 rows front to back, for a total of 33 flyers per table, or 18 tables required (with space for 594 8 1/2" x 11" flyers)

6' x 30" tables

8 flyers side by side, with 3 rows front to back, for a total of 24 flyers per table, or 25 tables required (600 spaces).

8' x 24" tables

11 flyers side by side, with 2 rows front to back, for a total of 22 flyers per table, or 27 tables required (594 spaces)

6' x 24" tables

8 flyers side by side, with 2 rows front to back, for a total of 16 flyers per table, or 38 tables required (608 spaces)

Whichever method is used, it is important to group flyers by type. If this is not done, it is impractical to cull out the cases where people put half a dozen stacks of the same flyer along the display. Convention flyers should be grouped by the month of the convention being advertised.

Supplies needed:

Cardboard box

This will hold improperly-placed flyer stacks until their owners come to claim them.

6 trash cans

Pegboard example here

More pegboard samples here

Voodoo Message Boards

(Adapted from material written by Erwin S. (Filthy Pierre) Strauss)

As with flyers, the main issue is providing enough space. No matter how small you make the type on the name list, it needs to be spread over at least three bulletin boards (24 linear feet) to keep the congestion level reasonable—and as long as you're going to use that space, you might as well print the names as large as possible.

The voodoo message board gets its name from the fact that messages are indicated by pushing pins into the space beside attendee names.

In addition to bulletin boards, the main ingredient is an alphabetical list of convention members, including supporting members (who may convert at the door.) For maximum visibility, the names should be printed large (at least 12 point type) in boldface. Ideally, print on a dot-matrix printer, so that names are in sections 6" wide (with 30 characters of text for each name), printed double spaced (to leave space for at-the-door registrants to print their names.) Names should be in alphabetical order, last name first.

Asimov, Isaac

Supplies needed:

- File boxes to hold Voodoo messages
- 3" x 5" pads (for people to write messages on)
- Assortment of color-coded china markers (for tabular party list)
- Push pins (for sticking in people's names to show they've got a message waiting)
- 20 sheets of 28" x 22" posterboard, circa \$10 total
- 2 packs of Blu-tack for mounting signs on cardboard, about \$2
- 6 cards of thumbtacks (for posting stuff on bulletin boards), about \$3
- 12 ballpoint pens, circa \$12 total
- tape
- glue

Also needed:

- 2 trash cans to go under the writing tables to place litter into.
- 2 (preferably small) writing tables, 42" high
- Cardboard box for discards

Online Liaison

With the incredible growth of the Internet and associated services in the past couple of years, this has gone from being a nice frill to a vital necessity. Even as early as the bid, a group of people should be selected to be liaisons to (at a minimum) CompuServe, Genie, and Internet's Usenet.

These people have four functions:

1. Rumor control

If something is going wrong with your con (or some specific individuals are trying to stir up trouble), this is one of the first places things will surface, and if someone is actively monitoring the situation, an official response can be made quickly. This is also a good place to monitor for the mood of fandom re your con.

Selected items from the net should be run through the committee apa to give concom a feel for what the real world thinks about the con.

2. Question answering/Ombudsman

Questions re con policies come up frequently, as to people who are having specific problems with registration and such. A con that responds quickly and politely in situations like this can do wonders for its reputation in terms of perceived competency and friendliness. This cannot be overstated.

On the flip side, this can be one of the concom's tools for tracking down "lost souls" who have moved without notifying the concom, or finding a particular person to ask to be a program participant or con worker.

3. Publicity

Official press releases (hotel rates, Hugo nominations, etc.) can be disseminated quickly and efficiently through the net. This way, the concom can insure that full and accurate information of this type goes out.

4. Liaison with the fan representatives of the commercial online services, to help arrange for them to have exhibit space and online hookups during the con.

The committee should also set up a special private forum on one of the commercial services, or possibly an Internet mailing list, so that concom who are online can brainstorm with each other in (relative) privacy.

Blood Drives

Blood drives are a tradition started by Robert A. Heinlein. The local Red Cross is usually quite willing to set it up. One warning: please caution donors that they will be weaker after donating, and need to take it easy on late night partying, working, and alcohol. Concoms should make it a rule that no concom are to donate blood during the convention.

Some committees offer a special premium or reception for those who either (a) donate blood at-con or (b) donate blood during, say, three months prior to the con and bring a certificate.

Some regions have a strong tradition of having blood drives associated with the convention. In regions without this tradition, but whose convention committee wish to honor Robert Heinlein's request that fandom donate blood, the health safety issues of donating blood during a period when many fans aren't eating correctly or getting enough sleep argue for offering a special premium or reception for those who donate blood during the last six months, **rather than during the Worldcon.**

Copyright © 2002 | Worldcon Runners' Guide

(<http://www.noreascon.org/users/sfrovers/u1/wcrg/index.html>) | Table of Contents

(<http://www.noreascon.org/users/sfrovers/u1/wcrg/toc.html>) | crg@sfrovers.org

(<mailto:crg@sfrovers.org>)

"World Science Fiction Society", "WSFS", "World Science Fiction Convention", "Worldcon", "NASFiC", and "Hugo Award" are service marks of the World Science Fiction Society (<http://www.wsfs.org/>), an unincorporated literary society.

Retrieved from "http://wcrg.conrunner.net/wiki/index.php?title=Kitchen_Sink_Departments"

Category: Eighth Edition

- This page was last modified on 11 July 2009, at 23:50.