

Non-North American Worldcons

From Worldcon Runners' Guide

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When Ross Pavlac asked me to write an article about this subject , he stirred the pot that had been fermenting in my mind for the last six years.

As some of you may know, I was the chairman of the 1990 World Science Fiction Convention in the Hague, the Netherlands, named ConFiction. Over the last couple of years I have offered to share the information I have gathered during ConFiction to various other Worldcons, including ConAdian, Intersection and L.A. Con III. I have also worked on those at various levels. Let me share my vision and thoughts about running a world science fiction convention as a non-North-American organiser with you.

There may be many reasons why one would want to organise such a complex event as a world science fiction convention. If one is convinced of his or her own capabilities to organise such an event, then it is important to first find local support for the event. With local I mean **national**. As an European, I can only speak for what I know about European Fandom. From my observations, only English, Dutch and German Fandom are strong and organised enough to provide a solid foundation for a possible successful convention. The reason for this is that all three fandoms have organised enough pan-European (and even international conventions) that create the breeding ground for fans eager to reach out for the world. Also, in doing so, they have been in touch with the rest of the world and have been able to establish international contacts.

Without local support and international contacts, any attempt to even think to organise a Worldcon are doomed from the start. In my strategy for a successful formula for a convention, one needs to start out with a small group, preferably a mixture of fans and professionals of some kind. The type of professionals who should be members of your group should be people like small businessmen who see

the need for the required (financial) input. A group of ten people in the first year of planning is sufficient; too many people involved creates the danger of over-enthusiasm in an early stage and will burn people—especially fans—out if they do not get recognition for what they have either done or plan to do.

It is also important that this small group of people is willing to take some financial risk. They will have to upfront some of the money to start that convention, as the WSFS still has not set up some sort of initiation-fund for future world-conventions. The members of the group need to be well aware of the financial implications of running a world science fiction convention.

I recommend that the group form a limited company or a foundation. Setting up such a legal form is highly advisable. The existence and nature of WSFS should be somehow included in the corporation's bylaws, so as to later allow the convention to pass on funds, if there is a surplus. If you do not do this, passing on of funds across international boundaries may be more difficult. The members of the core-group need to be aware of this before they start to work on their bid, so they know what lies ahead of them.

Apart from a lot of promotion, getting a good clear plan ready and site-negotiations, as well as contact with possible sponsors. there is not much to do in the early stage of the pre-planning of the convention.

Site negotiations

Site negotiations, as always, are extremely important. In Europe, this almost always boils down to dealing separately with convention centres and hotels in a major city. This required some specific skills, which I will gladly describe in a future edition of this guide.

Sponsors

One effective way to help cover costs is to acquire corporate sponsors. Almost all major airlines offer some sort of barter-agreement, allowing a sponsored group to attend other places in the world for promotion as well as other perks. One needs to come up with a good plan and a convincing story, but apart from membership-discounts (common in the US) most European carriers offer the committee either a form of a barter agreement (never any real money, but tickets for GoHs or others) or other help, such as shipment of program books or art show material at special rates.

Next to barter-agreements with airline carriers, it is quite common to get local, national or even E.E.C.-subsidies, though the last possibility is troublesome and takes quite some effort. However, it can provide a very solid basis for a financially sound convention.

Recruiting

After you have set up the legal form and your little group is functioning smoothly, it is time to spread the wings. You will need to convince local fandom of your goal (which usually means you will encounter a lot of scepticism); then go and spread the gospel around the continent.

At the same time you slowly start to expand your organisation by asking people if they are willing to work for you at a later stage when there is actual work to be done. Nothing is more troublesome than to have a hundred people in an organisation when there is only work for ten. However, you will need to find international support at the same time. Fortunately, that support is widely available on the international fannish scene.

The best place to locate and recruit people will be at the parties you will have to throw at major American, British, German and Dutch conventions, as well as during the business meetings of the WSFS at World Science Fiction Conventions. Choose people you like, and even ones you do not like, if they not only possess great knowledge but are also willing to share that knowledge with you and will work for you. Stay faithful to your own basic plans that you may have cooked up for your version of the World Science Fiction Convention. Whatever you do and whoever you choose, go by your own judgement.

A word of warning: all too often, fannish feuds that you, as a European organiser, have no knowledge of (nor will you ever understand them) may inflict and present problems.

Lines of Communication

As for communication, the telephone is great and e-mail has its advantages, but do not overrate the use of this facility. Keep in mind time differences; a problem discussed in Europe and e-mailed to the States may have been solved here while it is still being discussed in the States. That may cause frustration. But neither the phone nor e-mail are a substitute for personal contact.

Organising pre-convention "mini-cons" with growing attendance numbers is a way to make your organisation work and let people interact.

Also, keep the structure of your organisation in—what I would like to refer to—the KISS-mode, Keep It Simple, Stupid.

Closing remarks

And last, but not least—try to avoid the fatal error many a convention has made—which is re-inventing the wheel. Difficult as it may be to believe, most of the things you need to know or want to do, have already been done and "invented" by a convention before yours ever became a reality.

In closing:

1. Do not be shy to ask for information or help
2. Keep a sound mind
3. Once you have made a decision, stick by it and go for your goal!

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