

WORLDCON RUNNERS GUIDE

EXHIBITS

Exhibit Halls

What goes into an Exhibit Hall? Typically, a Worldcon will have an Art Show, Dealers Room, Fanzine Lounge, Site Selection Tables & Administration, Fan Tables for various groups, and of course exhibits. Traditional exhibits include a Hugo Awards Display, Fan/Pro Photo Area, Costuming Display Area, and Worldcon History Display.

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 film exhibitors, not the Worldcon runners.

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. More recently, with big blockbuster summers, this has eased somewhat.

Photo Gallery

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

Hugo Awards

An exhibit of past Hugo awards is popular. There now exists the Worldcon Heritage Organization that puts this exhibit together. Their website is <http://www.worldconheritage.org/>.

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Bid History and Worldcon History

Two other popular exhibits are the history of Worldcon bids and Worldcons themselves.

Commercial Exhibits

One of the sources that has traditionally not been tapped very well is the idea of commercial exhibits, where the exhibitors pay the Worldcon for the privilege of putting up a booth. This can be 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, 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. These days, many companies are going only to the huge mega-shows, 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.

Another response, perhaps not as applicable anymore, was that our group is just too weird for mundane companies. Sigh.

In the past, the best response was in the area of computer technology, particularly with companies involved in science-fiction oriented computer games. ~~For the 1993 convention,~~ For example, a company came in “over the transom” for the 1993 Worldcon because someone in the company had heard about us (and ~~in some cases,~~ was already an SF fan-).

How much to charge? The 1993 Worldcon charged \$500 for a 10x10 empty booth. Nearly 30 years later, \$1,000 might be more reasonable.

The issue of how many and what kind of memberships to provide with such a booth can be a matter of controversy. One consideration is 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.

Again, before solicitation is begun, the convention committee 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?”

Concourse Area

Some Worldcons have taken advantage of large concourse areas for 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. So have sitting benches. Recently, one convention even built a “river” through the hall.

Fan Lounge

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

Usually, a large display of fanzines (including fanzines for sale) is available in the lounge.