



THE ICG NEWSLETTER

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President's Message

The summer convention season is drawing to a close; ComicCon, NASFic, Worldcon, Dragon*Con are all past. Here in St Louis we'd usually be knee-deep in Archon preparations but this year even that has already passed (it was Archon 31/NASFic 9/Tuckercon this year). There's a few conventions left on the schedule for the rest of the year. They never completely stop, not even for the holidays. And they'll gear up after the New Year; in some areas slowly because of the weather.

So what's next for Costumers? The aforementioned holidays, starting with Halloween. Everyone goes to at least one costumed event at the end of October, even if they throw it themselves. Some people go to dozens. And there's public events; family-friendly street parties, bar contests, community gatherings. Many excuses to dust something off & dress up in public.

Let's not forget those who actually work at Halloween; the people who run the haunts or are busy creating costumes for other people to wear. This is

often their busiest time of year, no parties for them!

And Halloween is quickly followed by Thanksgiving, Holiday parades, seasonal

tableaus & celebrations. Many costumers participate in living history groups who are busy during the holiday providing "color" to historical venues. So is there really a "slow" time for costumers? Doesn't look that way. In the Midwest the weather dictates less conventions during the first few months, but people on the Coasts don't have that issue. Or ignore it; I know there are events in New England in late winter.

My point (I think) is that there's never really a slow period for costumers. Between events you might have a little lag time (quickly consumed by real life), but eventually there's another deadline. So I guess we need to re-think the idea of "I'll get to 'X' after I finish this."



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Upcoming Newsletter

Deadlines:

November 1st
January 1st
March 1st

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Membership Report as of September 11, 2007

Chapter Name	Chapter Members (Primary)	Last Updated
Armed Costumers Guild	27	July 2007
Beyond Reality	39	July 2007
Chicagoland	10	February 2007
CG Western Penn	10	March 2007
Dallas/Fort Worth	6	September 2007
Fiber Fantasy Artists	6	September 2007
Greater Columbia	21	July 2007
Greater Delaware Valley	7	July 2007
Middle Tennessee	11	May 2007
New Jersey/New York	24	September 2007
Northern Lights	35	September 2007
SiliconWeb	46	September 2007
Southeastern	15	September 2007
Southwest	21	September 2007
St. Louis	39	September 2007
Utah	11	July 2007
TOTAL	308	

ICG Membership Benefits

Your ICG membership benefits include voting rights and a subscription to this newsletter. Chapters that fail to report their members and submit their dues run the risk of being deactivated. Members of deactivated Chapters who wish to participate in activities as ICG members must join an active Chapter of the ICG.

ICG Email Mailing Lists

ICG-D@yahoogroups.com (General Discussion)
ICG-BOD@yahoogroups.com (Board & Officers)

ICG-D is open to everyone, including non-members. Instructions for subscribing to any of the ICG email mailing lists can be found at this URL:

help.yahoo.com/help/us/groups/groups-19.html

Publication Specifications/Advertising

Deadline to receive materials or advertising for print: The 1st of the month prior to publication. Further, updated information will be included in the next issue. Please get us your submissions and advertisements for the next issue by no later than September 1, 2007.

Electronic Submissions

Electronic submissions must be at least 300 dpi resolution. Material may be formatted as follows: text, RTF, MS Word or Corel WordPerfect. Sorry, we can't accept .txt format. Graphics at 300 dpi resolution in GIF, JPG or TIF. Email to icg-newsletter@costume.org. Please contact us first before sending attachments in email - we're sensitive to viruses!

Hard Copy Submissions (if absolutely necessary)

Send by snail mail to *The ICG Newsletter* address listed on page three of this issue. We reserve the right to retain all hard copy unless accompanied by a SASE.

Advertising Rates

Ad rates for The ICG Newsletter are per issue. Please make payment to The ICG, Inc. and send with advertising copy to *The ICG Newsletter* (email address above). Ads received without payment will not be published. Advertising revenues are used to defray the cost of mailing the newsletter. Additional proceeds benefit the International Costumers' Guild, Inc.

Ad Size	Member Rates	Non-Member Rates
Full Page	\$60	\$120
Half-Page	\$30	\$60
Quarter Page	\$15	\$30
Eighth Page (Business Card)	\$7.50	\$15
Classified Ads	Free	50 cents/word

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Running a Small Masquerade (Part 2)

by Kevin Roche, Chair, Costume-Con 26

*Fashion is the science of appearances, and it inspires one with the desire to seem rather than to be.
Edwin Hubbell Chapin (frequently misattributed to Michel de Montaigne)*

Organizing a small costume competition comes with a unique set of challenges, not the least of which may be limited resources and space. In part two of this article I'll describe some of the approaches we have found that help to make the event fun for the contestants, enjoyable for the audience and judges, and less stressful for you and your staff.

The approach can be summarized this way:

1. Start with the ICG Fairness Guidelines.
2. Adapt the Guidelines to create rules appropriate to your venue or event.
3. Publish your rules, schedule and forms early.
4. Build a good judging panel.
5. Make yourself accessible in advance to answer questions.
6. Have a mandatory contestant meeting.
7. Plan the entire show.
8. Keep the stage tech simple.
9. Have some extra music available.
10. Take advantage of technology: have a computer and printer on hand and use them!
11. Take good care of the contestants.
12. Start on time, finish on time, have a good time.

Plan the entire show

"Common sense is genius dressed in its working clothes."
Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Dead air" is your enemy when trying to entertain an audience. If you approach your contest and the events leading up to and after it as one collected theatrical presentation, you'll end up with a happier audience, contestants, and management.

After your contestant meeting, you can pick the run order for your contestants. Generally speaking, put the Young Fans first. If you have a large exhibition-only piece, place it last so your judges can begin deliberations before the audience realizes they are gone. The rest of run-order design is question of moving the entries around to balance the show: separate multiple versions of the same costume if you have any, mix up the skill divisions, mix up humorous/serious, etc. The easiest way I've found to do it is print the title, division and number of members onto small pieces of paper and shuffle them around on the floor until I'm satisfied with the arrangement.

It's very important to keep track of your judges, so your show is not delayed by a frantic canvassing of local watering holes in search of an errant panelist. A judges' dinner about 90 minutes before the Green Room opens makes sure that you have them all on hand, lets them meet each other before they have to deliberate together, and lets you discuss your wishes regarding judging and awards in advance of the competition. Your workmanship judges will likely go directly from dinner to the contestants waiting in the Green Room.

Keep the stage tech simple

Never believe them when they tell you your tech crew will magically appear on the day of the event.

Kate Morgenstern, Masquerade Director, LosCon 24

Your facilities may be an item over which you have very little control. You may or may not have stage risers, or you may have to use the dance floor which will be filled with attendees after the masquerade ends. Find out as early as you can what you'll be dealing with, and if you can, plan the audience seating accordingly. If you don't have risers, staggering the seats from row to row will provide a better view. If you must use the dance floor, perhaps you can seat the audience all around it.

Find out who is running the sound and lights – again, this is a place where you may have to use what is provided, or you may be able to choose your own techs. In either case, talk to them in advance about what you expect, and stress the keep-it-simple concept with them, too!

You can make up for these limitations by recruiting some key people of your own to wrangle the resources you are handed. As Kate says, don't expect the crew to magically appear. You might just need to have your people cuing the "official" tech people as the show runs (especially if your venue turns out to be a union-only location).

For a small masquerade, you don't try to get fancy on the tech:

* Go for basic lighting – no follow spots, just enough lighting instruments to fill the stage with good even lighting. If there is a particularly hot spot on the stage, spike it with an easy-to-see marker and make sure your contestants know how to find it.

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* You may or may not be able to achieve a full blackout in your room due to either technical limitations of your venue or safety requirements. Find out in advance how low you can take the lights and how difficult it is to manage. You may need a gofer/stagehand by the room light switches to achieve blackout ... Do you have enough volunteers to do that?

* Plan similarly for music – basic capabilities with decent sound. If your sound guy can rip everything to a laptop, it makes things simpler, but if not, set up for CDs. Make it clear in your documents that basic starting and stopping of music is all is available, with the ability to fade the sound out at the end of an entry. If an entry needs fancier sound cues, the contestants must mix the recording themselves in advance and deliver it complete.

Have some extra music available

"Kudos to Marty Gear, who has done all of us a big service by compiling CDs of suitable music and sharing them with masquerade directors and tech crews!"

Byron Connell, Sick Pups, Philcon 2006 and 2006 Masquerade Director.

It is entirely likely that someone (most often an entry in the Novice division, but not necessarily) will suddenly realize that they have brought no music. If you have a library of tracks available from which they can select, you'll avoid having an audio dead spot in the lineup.

The other use for your extra music is as house music for warmup/filler during the show. If you like, you can actually build in advance a playlist that fits the theme/builds the mood of your event! If you are using a PC/MP3 player to run sound, you can set up those lists in the software. Otherwise, just burn mix tapes or CDs for before/during/after the sections of your show. It doesn't have to be high-tech: mix more music than you need and let it play. If you want to get fancy, have a special set for the final 10 minutes before the show starts to build the mood for the opening and cue your sound person to run it when you give the 10 minute warning.

Take advantage of technology: have a computer and printer on hand and use them!

"No matter how small the contest, it will be more work than you expect."

John O'Halloran

John is absolutely right: certain aspects of running a costume competition do not scale with the size of the contest and require just as much work for a small show as for a large one. It may seem like overkill, but even for a small competitor, having a computer and small inkjet printer on hand will make life much easier if you harness the technology to:

- a. use a database for your entries
- b. print scripts and forms for your MC, crew and judges
- c. print certificates
- d. double-check information.

Using a database for masquerade entries will let you print custom scripts and forms for all your crew and judges; it also means that only one person has to read the contestants' handwriting. I've had the best success by having one or two people at the masquerade registration desk taking forms and entering the information while they wait, rather than having contestants enter it themselves. That way you can confirm spelling, pronunciation, etc. as you go through their original form and then show them the completed data entry screen before letting them go. You can use a full-fledged database program*, or even something as simple as a spreadsheet, and then harness the mail-merge abilities of your favorite word processing software to print your forms and scripts. When it comes time to make award certificates, you can use the same technology to print them on the spot!

A couple more high-tech tricks to speed things up:

- * Design your certificates in advance, and print them in color with a large blank area for the award info.
- * Before the show, have each judge sign a blank white sheet of paper and use a digital camera to capture their signatures. Then do a layout of your certificate and embed the images of the signatures right into that. (Obviously, if you have a scanner, you can do the same thing.)
- * When it is time to print the awards, print the award info and the signatures in black and white on the inkjet – that usually goes much, much faster than color printing and you can have them on hand to deliver to the winners!

As mentioned in the Keep the stage tech simple section, using a laptop/mp3 player and software to organize the music is another way to use technology to make running your show simpler and smoother.

*Note: I have developed a database in MS-Access that we've used for a half-dozen contests now (a web-based version is in development for Costume-Con 26), and will be happy to provide copies of it (as-is) if folks request it from me.

Take Good Care of the Contestants

"Good Den Mothers and a Good Green Room are the key to a happy masquerade"

Arabella Benson, dancing Alien

"Treat you contestants well; if they go away happy (whether they've won or not) you'll have a masquerade next year."

Dana MacDermott

This one probably seems obvious, but it's important – after all, the contestants are the entertainment the audience is waiting to see; without them you have no show!

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Make sure your green room has a good supply of water and bendable straws. Have some light, tidy snacks available for them. I like the little goldfish crackers and small pretzels because they are baked, not fried, and thus are less likely to leave greasy smudges.

Make sure there are chairs for the contestants to sit on, and be prepared to move them around for folks who need to perch rather than sit on a chair that's part of a fixed bank of chairs.

Make sure it's ventilated, as well! Bring in a box or standing oscillating fan if necessary.

If you can provide a mirror and some basic repair supplies, it will do much to help your contestants feel ready to go on stage.

The Green Room staff is as important as the supplies. You may not need multiple "dens" in a small masquerade, but you still need people who can stay pleasant and supportive while keeping the chaos somewhat under control. Your Green Room head should set the tone. If it's a hike to the nearest restroom, have someone assigned to act as usher for contestants answering the call of nature.

Have one person at the door with a copy of the contestant list to check people in as they arrive. If someone has to step out to utilize the euphemism, make sure they check out and back in so the Green Room staff knows where they are.

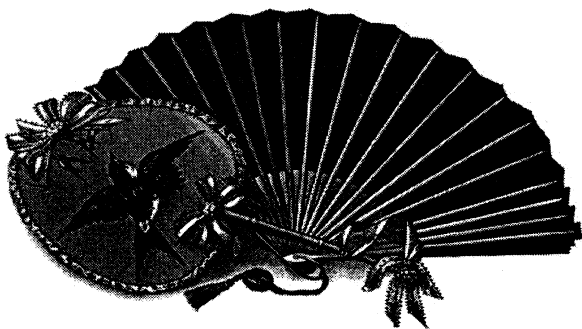
Post at least one copy of the run order in LARGE TYPE where everyone can see it, and when the show begins, your staff can mark off entries as they go.

Have several ushers (each with a copy of the run order) to make sure your entries get to the stage door on time. If it's a long hike, this is one place FRS radios can come in handy. Have another set of ushers to get them through any photo lines and back to the green room if that's where they are going.

If you can't get a video feed of the show into the green room, try to reserve a chunk of the seating for contestants to sit after their stage appearance if they wish to do so.

A note about workflow and traffic: If you are short space or budget, and it's possible to shoot your official photos before the show starts, you can convert that photo pit to the fan photo area during the show.

REMEMBER to thank your contestants before and after the show.



Start on time, finish on time, have a good time

"Actually, this isn't the time for the masquerade director to have a good time. The MD is there to work to assure that the audience and the entrants have a good time!

Have a good time later -- after the show, and your job, is over."

Byron Connell, Sick Pups, MD Philcon 2006 and 2007

"Be flexible."

Bruce MacDermott

I will disagree slightly with Byron on this point. If I've taken the time to set up the show to the best of my abilities, and have a good crew helping me out, I find running the show itself to be quite enjoyable. However, it can also be very stressful. If you've laid your groundwork properly, any crises that come up can be dealt with as necessary and a minimum of drama.

Starting on time is HUGE. Your contestants won't have to wait in the green room as long, the audience won't be twitchy and bored, and it sets a good tone for the entire show. One legitimate reason to hold the curtain is if something (another event) has delayed the audience's main arrival; if you know they are coming, hold the show a few minutes for them. Make sure the contestants and crew, and those already seated know why you've held the curtain.

After the judging, don't hold things up more than 5 minutes or so to finish certificates. Have ribbons or something to hand out on the spot, and deliver the certificates the next day or by mail later. As long as the list of awards is complete and clear (and can be delivered to the convention newsletter/website), present the awards, make your thanks, and let everyone go on with the rest of their evening!

Do remember to thank your judges, your crew, your tech people, the convention for having the good sense to "hire" you, the contestants and the audience. Don't be long-winded, and remember to apologize in advance for anyone you forget to mention by name.

Then get the heck outta Dodge. Check on your green room staff to make sure they've been able to get free, and make sure any cleanup you're responsible for is taking place. Deliver the running order and awards lists to the convention communications staff (if any) and then go enjoy the rest of the evening. If you've been successful, you'll probably find a bunch of your contestants out there abuzz with all the things they liked. You'll probably also get an earful or two about what they didn't like. Urge them to come to the masquerade postmortem/followup if there is one and share their comments for the benefit of future events, otherwise take note and pass it on.

Congratulations! You've run a small masquerade and nobody died (including yourself)! Are you ready to run another one?

