

reprinted from CON GAMES #4  
part of Article on Starting a Media Con  
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Step 17. Start advertising. This is the most important thing for a convention. If people don't know you exist, they won't buy memberships. This is obvious until you have to start laying out the bucks for the fliers, ads, etc. But remember, if you don't spend it, you won't make it.

You don't have to wait until all the details are finalized to start advertising. Essentials (without getting down to too many niggling details) are: location (hotel or whatever's name and city/state), hotel room rates, address/phone to contact hotel for rooms, membership rates, table rates, dates, guests, and where to buy the memberships. You might consider a checkoff for costume contest entrants and art show entrants. Fliers should have a membership/dealers' table blank (unless tables are by invitation only). As more guests are confirmed, add them to the flier. If you're at an early stage of advertising with many guests invited and few confirmed, you might note guests you're still negotiating with (i.e., have been contacted and haven't rejected appearing) and note on the flier that they are not yet confirmed. However, don't dare do this without pulling old fliers and updating them as facts change. Never list someone who hasn't been contacted or has rejected appearing.

--Arrange with local bookstores or other locations frequented by your target audience to at least set out fliers. Some may even be willing to sell memberships for you (at no fee), especially if they're buying a dealer's table at the con. Check with the stores periodically and supply them with updated fliers.

--Closer to con dates, try to arrange a trade with whatever TV station(s) are showing con-related programs. They might be willing to trade the back cover or other part of the program book for some 30-second ad spots. The last 2 weeks, and especially the final week, are most critical for ads.

--Send con listings to magazines that list conventions. These include STARLOG, SF CHRONICLE, LOCUS, ISAAC ASIMOV'S, and SF Convention Register. Tell them the con name, address to contact, name of the con facility, hotel room rates & address/ phone to contact, table & art show & membership rates, guests who are confirmed, and type of convention (e.g., Star Trek & Dr. Who, Dark Shadows, etc.). Update these listings as information changes. Allow at least 3 months lead time for listings to appear and for changes to be made. Magazine listings are free.

--Put up fliers on message boards in busy locations, especially in areas frequented by target audience. Be sure that you get permission wherever possible...otherwise you may have wasted your time and flier. A poster would be best to put up. Best of all is a poster with tear-off membership blanks (including the address to send the blank in to).

--See if you can borrow another area con's mailing list. Consider doing a bulk mailing to people who attend that con. Most cons won't release the list, though, in which case...

--Get in on a bulk mailing by other organizations to con attendees. For a lot lower a cost than doing it yourself you can send your fliers out with their mailings.

--Close to the convention (starting about 3 months out) you'd begin to send out Press Releases to local area magazines. Closer to the con dates you'd send PR's to weekly newspapers or supplements. Then, three weeks or two weeks out you'd send them out to TV, radio, and daily newspapers.