

Randy Smith has been involved in fandom & conventions for years. Just finished running open & closing ceremonies for WorldCon 76. North American agent for New Zealand. Used to be the exhibits head for Sasquan.

Example: Randy modeled steampunk goggles he bought at a street fair, not a convention.

Introductions

- Megan Kent – Convention Chair of Escapade. Quick review of how the art show ha
- Carol – Participant in conventions (programming staff, mostly costuming at WorldCon). Looking at starting a new non-SF event. Will involve gathering artists, making them known to public.
- Amy – North American DiscWorld convention (moves around the country).
- Jan – first SMOFcon. Came to learn, to be more useful at conventions. Niece is an artist. Want to give her ideas.
- Maureen – 2012 Hugo winner for best fan artist. Professional artist since 1972. 30+ years in computer game industry. Started as studio painter. Ran the art show for SiliCon and Fanime. Elaine Pells (sp?) knows everything. I want to learn from her. Willing to talk about how to sell art for artists.
- Mary – vice chair for Con Zealand. Looking for how to approach people outside the box. We have people who come to our equivalent of comic con. How to approach people who don't normally go to shows. “
C: one thing I'll be looking for at Con Zealand is artwork I can't find in the state. May be commonplace to locals, but new to me.
- Angela – runs dealers room (world's best, says Randy)

Stories

Randy: I was at a street fair of lots of people selling a lot of neat stuff. I was wearing the steampunk goggles, and he pointed out the hat he was selling, plus artwork with gears, clockworks, etc. I tried to introduce him to WorldCon, but it wouldn't have mattered. They book a year out for their fairs. I picked up the card. Eventually WorldCon emailed, but they were already booked. Next year, they were at the same fair. I approached them. The guy said “we've been to con, but we were disappointed in the sales.” He mentioned a steampunk convention and a comics convention. “Why would we have better sales at a WorldCon? Oh, it's adults spending money.” Older, international, more well to do. Invited him to come to the convention, and he did. He loved it, but it won't be back in SJ for years. ☺ We have to do a better job of telling our story, and earlier. Go to street fairs, art shows, build relationship. We need to be talking to them a year or more head. They also had an ongoing event, and we were a 1-off. The people who do street parties & art shows. They know there might be 100K people coming by, but the percentage interested in their stuff is small. They come to a convention, it's a smaller group. But the percentage of people interested, willing to spend \$\$ is much higher. Note: the people who do the masks don't do mail order

Angela: in my FAQ for the dealers room, I had “why should I want to sell my stuff at your convention” Our community is older, wealthy, looking for new experiences. This is their big vacation. Part of the fun is going to a new place and have new experiences. Often, that means buying stuff. We have an older, educated market of people who want to buy things. To tell my

story, I had to demonstrate why they should care about our convention: because \$\$ is here. One of the reason we have a broad & robust dealer culture in US is because there are a lot of people, and they can drive places. In the days of ebay & etsy, there are more venues to get stuff known. The markets for crafts & art is new compared to what it was 20 years ago.

Randy: we had a fellow at Sasquan who sold steampunk clocks. At the end of the convention, I was talking with him. He was surprised at the business he'd done. Most of the business was special orders. People came in, saw what we had, and they thought about their house, and asked for exactly what they wanted, to be built & shipped later. He did a lot of business. He thought about (but did not) attend KC a year later. It is a different clientele, and they bought differently. Special orders are more common at conventions.

In a normal retail situation, a lot of people think they have to buy what is there, or not. They don't think to ask for something special.

Randy: way back in 2002, run up to Con Jose. I had a friend whose art would be appropriate for the art show. I asked him to send it. He went to the website, and I didn't hear anything. I didn't hear back. I heard through back channel: that plan didn't work for him. He is used to doing outdoor art in the park, where he is with his artwork the whole time, talking to people the whole time. Not the way most convention art shows go. Probably I should have invited him to the dealer room. Then we would have run into the need to buy a membership.

Angela: prior to me being a member at WorldCon, they worked on a philosophy that everyone pays. Dealers may not want to be part of the community, and pay the registration. Instead: vendor packages: bundling. X amount of space and Y way to get into the space. E.g. 1 table & membership, or 1 booth & 2 memberships. Don't present any idea that things are optional. Opened up an opportunity for new vendors. We don't do a good job of selling ourselves to outsiders. We don't listen to them well. They use the same words, but mean something different. Invite people, listen to them, remove obstacles where possible. Another example: I had trouble attracting people to the convention center, because they couldn't afford union help. WorldCon pays that help, and doesn't pass that along to vendors (because it's in their best interest for things to run smoothly). Listen for what is stopping people, and remove the barriers.

Randy: the perception re: conventions is that they are smaller than other venues. Convincing them that smaller people but more sales.

Randy: we need to start taking statistics from our dealers

Angela: I did that. We can talk about metrics that lead us to believe you would be a great fit. e.g, I already own a bunch of your stuff. Also, your work is amazing (so buy some). They are more likely to be polite when you talk about their convention. Don't blow smoke up their ass. If you want to sell your convention, invite them, but don't start with metrics Every dealer judges their metrics differently. We can't know their motivations for doing it, all we can do is talk about why we'd like to see them at our event.

Randy: if we had several years of statistics: what kinds of things are selling, and what sort of gross people are making. There are things we have no control over, e.g. what's hot this year.

Open Conversation

- At Escapade we don't charge artists up front, just a commission as a sale. Saw a barrier, and removed it.
- Some artists don't want to buy a non-attending membership.
- Randy: some years ago, I was running an art show. A guy had made tiny dragons eating Magic cards. Totally cute. He shipped them to the art show in boxes, but a bunch had broken in the shipping.
- Angela: We have the power of the internet. If I have rule, I put it online. Put the rules up clearly. Application, rules, deadline, address, dates. We send a message to outsiders when we are that careless, that we only care about the people who are already here. Help people participate by removing barrier of lack of information.
- Mary: the barrier people are encountering in New Zealand is they can't afford it. They don't think they will sell enough to cover that.
Angela: one of the things we do at WorldCon is set up payment plans for dealers. Hanging fees vary depending on the goals of the convention. If you have plenty of volunteers, you can charge less.
- Mary: what is the difference between selling art in the art show vs dealer room?
C: I can enjoy the convention. The art show has people securing it. They take care of the \$\$\$. I pay a commission so I don't have to worry about everything. As a dealer, I have to have a resale license, I have to sit my table or have someone else work my table.
Maureen: the art show acts the artist's representative.
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