

How to run a con like a pro

Contents

How to run a con like a pro.....	1
Contents.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Overview.....	5
Red Book.....	5
Why run a con?.....	5
SFFANZ.....	5
Preparing your bid.....	6
Choosing a date.....	6
Choosing a Guest of Honour.....	6
Putting together your committee.....	6
Choosing members.....	7
Allocating jobs.....	7
The chair's tasks.....	8
Running meetings.....	8
Delegating.....	8
Timeline.....	9
Before the bid.....	9
By 12 months before the con.....	9
By 1 month before the con.....	9
By the beginning of the con.....	9
During the con.....	9
Tips for the chair.....	9
The secretary's tasks.....	10
Tips.....	10
The treasurer's tasks.....	10
Preparing a budget.....	10
Costs.....	10
Keeping track of income and expenses.....	11
Tax.....	11
Timeline.....	11
Before the bid.....	11
Immediately after the bid.....	11
By 12 months before the con.....	12
By the beginning of the con.....	12
During the con.....	12
After the con.....	12
Tips.....	12
The programmer's tasks.....	12
Contests.....	13
Masquerade.....	13
Six months before the con.....	13
Three months before the con.....	13
Two months before the con.....	13
One month before the con.....	13
One week before the con.....	13
By the beginning of the con.....	14
During the con.....	14
Video track.....	14
Opening ceremony.....	14
Auction.....	14
Floating market.....	15
Banquet.....	15
Dealers' room.....	15
Equipment.....	15
Making up the programme.....	15
Getting participants.....	16
Programme Participant Questionnaire.....	16
Making up the schedule.....	16
Allocating space.....	17
Deciding on times.....	17
Clustering.....	17
Other logistical things to consider.....	17

Checking a draft schedule.....	17
Timeline.....	18
By 12 months before the con.....	18
By 6 months before the con.....	18
By 3 months before the con.....	18
By 1 month before the con.....	18
By 2 weeks before the con.....	18
By 1 week before the con.....	18
By the beginning of the con.....	18
During the con.....	18
The hotel liaison's tasks.....	19
The venue.....	19
The contract.....	19
Consorting with the enemy.....	20
Timeline.....	21
By 12 months before the con.....	21
By 6 months before the con.....	21
By 3 months before the con.....	21
By 1 week before the con.....	21
By the beginning of the con.....	21
During the con.....	21
Tips.....	21
The guest liaison's tasks.....	21
Timeline.....	22
By 12 months before the con.....	22
By 6 months before the con.....	22
By 2 months before the con.....	22
By 1 week before the con.....	22
By the beginning of the con.....	22
During the con.....	22
Tips.....	22
The membership co-ordinator's tasks.....	23
Badges.....	23
Timeline.....	23
Immediately after the bid.....	23
By 12 months before the con.....	23
By the beginning of the con.....	23
During the con.....	23
Tips.....	23
Publicity manager.....	23
Advertising.....	24
Flyers.....	24
Timeline.....	25
By 12 months before the con.....	25
By 3 months before the con.....	25
By 6 weeks before the con.....	25
During the con.....	25
Tips.....	25
Publications.....	25
Progress reports.....	25
Con book/programme book.....	26
Pocket programme.....	27
Timeline.....	27
Before the bid.....	27
By 12 months before the con.....	27
By 6 months before the con.....	27
By 3 months before the con.....	27
By 2 months before the con.....	27
By 1 month before the con.....	27
By 2 weeks before the con.....	27
By 1 week before the con.....	27
During the con.....	27
Tips.....	27
Website.....	28
The site.....	28

Timeline.....	28
Immediately after the bid.....	28
By 12 months before the con.....	28
By 2 weeks before the con.....	28
By the beginning of the con.....	29
Tips.....	29
Fundraising.....	29
Timeline.....	29
By 12 months before the con.....	29
Things SOMEONE will have to deal with for the con.....	29
Signs.....	29
Con pack.....	29
Jobs at the con.....	30
Video manager.....	30
Emcee.....	30
Registration desk.....	30
Front desk.....	30
Member liaison.....	30
Technical manager.....	30
Room manager.....	31
Floor manager.....	31
Guest minder.....	31
Prize administration.....	31

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Written sources for the guide were:

- Garth Spencer's Convention-running resources, <http://www.fanac.org/Conventions/Running/index.html>
- The Worldcon Runners' Guide, <http://www.sflow.org/wcrg/index.html>
- Michael Citrak's Chairman 101 notes, <http://www.sfnorthwest.org/CHAIRMAN101.pdf>
- SMOF-files, <http://www.snof.com/snofiles.htm>
- Conrunner (online), <http://www.snof.com/conrunner/index2.htm>
- Running the Eastercon, <http://www.vraindex.com/guide/>
- WASFF Red Book, <http://members.iinet.net.au/~robin/redbook/index.html>

Introduction

This guide is intended to help people run cons in New Zealand. Although a lot of it is based on advice given for larger cons, such as Worldcons, I have tried to scale it back so the advice isn't too over the top.

Note that this is a piece of collected wisdom, rather than the personally thought-out advice of either the editor or the powers that be in SFFANZ.

Overview

This guide attempts to give advice on every stage of running a con. Accordingly it begins at the beginning—with ideas about putting your bid and committee together. The bulk of the guide is organised by positions—for example all jobs to do with the programming are discussed together. Most positions include a timeline for when various tasks should be finished. At the end of the guide are all the myriad jobs that didn't fit quite so neatly into pigeonholes, including jobs to be done at the con itself (like video manager).

This guide is not yet finished perhaps it will always be under construction). Feedback and suggestions are most welcome. Please send comments to board@sffanz.sf.org.nz.

Red Book

Red Book, the online guide to running a SwanCon, was by far the most significant source of information for this guide. I refer to it directly in the text, and have taken a great deal of information from it.

Why run a con?

Running a con is an incredibly stressful experience—any organiser who says it's fun to organise a con needs their medication checked. But you run a con to create fun for others, not profit for yourself. Any profit you make will either go to a charity of your choice or be split between SFFANZ and your charity.

Your first responsibility is to make the con successful for the people who attend. To this end, you might consider preparing a charter or set of goals as part of your con bid; this could include a set of statements of intent and success criteria.

SFFANZ

One of the purposes of SFFANZ is to provide support for events that transcend normal club structures, such as cons. It has tax-free status, which cons can utilize if they wish. Its national fan database can be very useful to con organizers. You might also be able to get a loan or grant from SFFANZ.

SFFANZ organizes and conducts the Sir Julius Vogel awards, and is responsible for voting on bids to host future cons. These will both be necessary parts of your programming.

Preparing your bid

What you need to do for your bid will depend on your track record—if fans know who you are and what you know about organising a con, you won't need to do much; if you've never done anything like this before, you might need to do more.

You will put in a bid at the con two years before you want to run yours. Your bid must include the date of your con, the place (at least the city), and any detail you care to include. Think of the bid as your chance to demonstrate your commitment and competence.

Choosing a date

You'll need to decide when you're going to hold your con. Traditionally, New Zealand natcons have been held at Easter, because it's such a long holiday, or at Queen's Birthday Weekend, which fits in well with the usual date for Australian natcons and lets us share guests with them. Each date also has disadvantages. At Queen's Birthday, the weather is worse, and you have less time for the con. At Easter, there are more competing events, which might make it harder to find a venue; SwanCon, in Perth, is traditionally held at Easter, and some fans might choose to go to SwanCon instead of a New Zealand con. Easter also tends to coincide with Passover, which might prove a problem for Jewish guests.

Choosing a Guest of Honour

Being able to name a Guest of Honour (GoH) as part of your bid will make it more attractive. However, before you choose a GoH, there are a number of things you should consider.

How much is the guest going to cost? Australians or New Zealanders are the cheapest in terms of transport, but they are less well-known than many American or British authors. You might be able to get an author's New Zealand publisher to supply extra funding or publicity if the author has books in print in New Zealand.

How good will a person be as a guest? Check their track record at other cons. Get references from other cons or from fans who have seen them at other cons. Find out how easy they are to work with, whether they have any restrictions that inhibit their ability to perform, and whether they have any strikes against them (such as moral, religious or political convictions they push in public forums). Also check whether they're reliable—media guests in particular are known for being unreliable and expensive.

Other considerations are the mix of guests you invite, any theme you have for the con or programming, and the health of people you're considering inviting.

Be aware that media guests commit to conventions on the basis of "if not otherwise working."

Putting together your committee

Since you don't want to be putting a whole con together by yourself, you'll need to choose a group of people to help you—your committee. The committee's purpose is to put on an event at a specified time and place, made up of a programme of events that will be interesting to the people who come, and to attract people to come by publicising the event. This breaks down into four main tasks: organising the venue, publicising the con to get memberships, organising the programme, and running the con.

Although this sounds straightforward, in fact the number of separate things your committee will have to do is staggering. Con with the Wind, working on a two-year timetable, had to do the following specific things to complete those four basic tasks.

- Year One
 - Chose and invited guests
 - Chose and booked venue
 - Set a provisional budget and determined the pricing
 - Scoped the con—what were the main events? Was there a concept? What did they want to achieve?
 - Got a logo/design
 - Designed and launched the website
 - Set up a straw man programme

- Leveraged off the Melbourne con (a week after Con with the Wind) by agreeing to share US and Aussie guests
- Promoted the con at a relevant event (posters, leaflets)
- Discussed sponsors, advertising
- Got buy-in from key helpers, and agreed what their commitment would be
- Looked for media contacts such as Cloud 9
- Chose a charity
- Year Two
 - Started looking for sponsors, freebies, interested third parties
 - Put out progress reports
 - Kept the website up to date with news and programme
 - Chose guest liaison
 - Chose hotel liaison
 - Contacted groups for panels
 - Finalised the programme
 - Created layouts for each event on the programme
 - Designed T-shirts, etched glasses
 - Decided on competitions and looked for prizes
 - Chose competition judges
 - Designed prize certificates
 - Reviewed the budget and determined discretionary spending
 - Pinned down details such as how much pocket money to give the guests
 - Assigned guest minders
 - Checked guests' schedules and arranged details about their delivery and departure from the con
 - Handled media liaison and publicity (local papers like Contact, TV, radio)
 - Finalised the programme and determined equipment requirements
 - Got quotes for equipment hire
 - Kept on top of hotel contract, paid deposits as agreed, checked reservations, reviewed agreement at intervals with the hotel, refined detail
 - Wrote the opening ceremony
 - Checked all rooms to consider best use
 - Chased up helpers and reviewed commitments.

Remember that all this is being done in committee members' spare time!

Choosing members

Various sources say that the number on the committee should be eight or (in line with studies in business and the military) 7 ± 2 . An ideal committee member thinks on their feet, is responsible, is reliable, is reasonably competent, has experience in areas you're lacking in, and is easy to get along with. The single most important thing to look for is flexibility, and all members should be "doers" rather than "thinkers". You must be able to trust them to do whatever tasks they're allocated. *Don't* let people squeeze their way onto the committee.

Allocating jobs

As a group, make it clear at the beginning how decision will be made, then stick to this method.

In general, it's good to have people do jobs that fit with their own areas of interest. It's important to match jobs to people's strengths. If you don't want to assign jobs, you can have committee members volunteer for various jobs, or have the committee vote on who does them.

At least one person should be in charge of each essential job, with one person identified as back-up.

Some jobs must be done by committee members—treasurer, membership coordinator, programmer, and hotel liaison. Other jobs might be successfully delegated off the committee if you choose the person for the job carefully—registration, tech, member liaison, and guest liaison. It's very easy to delegate off the committee the dealers' room, the games room, video programming, the masquerade, and signs.

The chair's tasks

The chair oversees the vision of the con as a whole, keeping a general overview of everything and holding the con together. Tasks include

- keeping order and directing the group at committee meetings
- arbitrating between individuals and groups where necessary
- supervising the various divisions
- acting as the primary voice for the con
- checking all committee publications before they go out
- approving or vetoing all committee appointments
- keeping track of what people have been asked to do and when they've been asked to do it.

Another job, one that's harder to pin down, is to try to avoid a copycat sameness with other cons. The best way to prevent that is to make active decisions about everything rather than passively assuming things will go a certain way.

These are all pre-con jobs. Once the con starts, the chair can be responsible for a range of jobs—but the tasks of the chair per se are largely finished.

Although it doesn't often happen, if the rest of the concom is dissatisfied with your performance they can replace you.

Running meetings

An important part of the chair's job is running meetings. If you don't know how to run a meeting efficiently and well, you should learn how (you might be able to take a class or find a good book on running meetings). Here are a number of things you can do to make meetings more pleasant for everyone. If you know little or nothing about running meetings, this list will not be enough!

- If possible, go to meetings of other concons to see how they are run.
- Be clear about the purpose of a particular meeting:
 - making decisions about running the con and reviewing what's gone on so far
 - having long-term strategy discussions
 - brainstorming
 - communication
 - team-building and fun
 - completing a particular task, such as stuffing envelopes.
- Always have an agenda. (The secretary might be responsible for this, but you will put in most of the work on it.) Give it to everyone ahead of time. Make copies. Know what you're going to say about each topic.
- Be on time for meetings.
- Keep socialising confined to before the meeting and during breaks.
- Be prepared to prevent digressions, and stay on topic yourself.
- Set a time limit on the meeting, and make sure the rest of the concom knows what it is.
- Keep the meeting moving without forcing your opinion onto it.
- Make sure the committee doesn't do jobs that have been delegated to subcommittees.
- Stick to the rules you've set up about meetings.

Delegating

Delegating is an important part of the con chair's job. There are a few things to remember if you want the people you delegate to to feel you trust them.

- Once someone has agreed to do something for you, leave them alone. If you're delegating responsibility you have to give up control. Live with it.
- Keep the person informed about decisions that affect what they're doing.
- When you've delegated a job and the person you've delegated it to wants to do something that conflicts with something you've already decided, don't overrule them—let them know why their choice isn't suitable and get them to rework their ideas.
- Give a completion deadline—if you don't, it's guaranteed to be late.

Timeline

Before the bid

- Put together a committee, at least a partial one.
- Choose a charity.
- Prepare the bid.

By 12 months before the con

Ideally, many of these things should be done even before the bid, but you can tie up any loose ends afterwards. A year before the con is the absolute final deadline for getting them done.

- Get yourself a book about management. Read it. Highlight important points. Read it again. Memorise it.
- As soon as possible after you win the bid, set up a stable postal address for the con, preferably a post office box, and make sure there are a number of people with keys.
- Set up a mail system. You will have to distribute and route mail received for the con to the people responsible for dealing with it.
- Set up a system to protect yourself from loss of critical documents such as membership lists and registration forms. Be paranoid! Assume at least one committee member's computer will blow up and all data stored there will be irretrievable.
- Incorporate!!! The constitution from Con with the Wind is available on this site for you to look at.
- Get other people to take responsibility for running particular areas of the convention.
- Know details about what's OK when you call each of your committee members (like leaving long messages or sending faxes to work numbers).
- If you don't have email and voicemail or an answerphone, get them.
- Get a logo/design. You'll need it for progress reports, letters to guests, flyers—any number of things.

By 1 month before the con

Draw up a timetable for everything that needs to be done before the con. Get as specific as you can, and make sure you know who's going to do each task. This timetable will show you what needs to be done first, what can't happen until something else does, and where you're likely to have clashes.

By the beginning of the con

- Find ways of getting information about what's going on during the con. People won't always tell you when they're angry about something, and you should know anyway.
- Post guidelines on: party areas (where they are, what's OK for congoers to do at them), weapons policies, smoking.
- Stuff con packs at a con pack stuffing party, held in the week before the con starts.

During the con

- Things will always go wrong! Don't try to ignore them. When solving these problems:
 - be ready to apologise (whether it's your fault or not, it's your responsibility)
 - keep calm
 - look for a solution to the problem where both parties win
 - remember it's not the end of the world
 - be willing to spend money to help solve the problem or ease feelings (for instance, buy a box of chocolates for a non-fannish guest who's had a bad encounter with a drunk fan)
 - admit it when something's gone wrong, rather than trying to conceal it.
- Let people moan at you.
- Try to find people to fix problems.
- Make critical decisions that come up.
- Visit the various parts of the con a couple of times.

Tips for the chair

- Be prepared for trouble.
 - You will need to log details of some conversations regarding the con. Do it quickly and privately, as soon after the conversation as possible.

- Be prepared to say no when necessary.
- Be sure there's someone whose shoulder everyone can cry on.
- Know how to take criticism.
- Have someone proofread everything you produce.
- Sometimes you'll need to tell someone off.
- Realise that different people think differently.
- Get organised.
- Know and stay focused on the by-laws, goals and objectives of your convention.
- Always have extra duct tape, a couple of plastic forks and some baby wipes.
- Be prepared to do lots of writing.
- Publicising decisions is good. People can help you better if they know what you need, and you're more likely to think things through carefully if you know other people will be seeing them.
- Have your meetings as open as possible. Invite experienced people to come to particular meetings and advise you on specific topics.
- Do things early, and do everything possible more than one month before the con.
- Know how to mediate/resolve disputes.
- There will be a diversity of people planning and attending the con. Always plan for a variety of behaviours.
- Running a con is an emotional thing. People will be up and down. Be prepared for this.

The secretary's tasks

This is purely a committee role, and an ongoing one, with no changes over time (unlike other jobs). The secretary keeps minutes, follows up with committee members to make sure they do what they agreed to do, and keeps up with correspondence (keeps in contact with outside individuals or groups). The secretary's involvement with the con per se comes through other jobs they take on.

Tips

- You or the chair will circulate a clear agenda before all meetings. Keep it as short and well-focussed as possible. Highlight decisions and actions you need from others on the committee.
- Make sure someone is keeping accurate, concise minutes. Record decisions only, not who said what.
- Distribute information to whoever needs to know it. (Eliminate any confidential information first.)

The treasurer's tasks

The treasurer has three primary tasks: budgeting, keeping track of income and expenses, and dealing with taxes. After the con the secretary is responsible for distributing any profits to the charity and SFFANZ.

Preparing a budget

You can forecast your budget by getting a record of what costs a similar con had to deal with and revising the numbers to fit with what you expect to take in and spend at your con. Err on the side of caution for income, and rashness for expenditure.

You can get some information about your own costs from details of payment specified in contracts. You'll also have to know where you're getting money from.

Initially you'll have to guess or estimate many of your numbers. It's a good idea to hold back a certain amount of your predicted income (leave it unallocated), so that you can add it to budgeted items as it is needed.

You should update your budget as you get more information about income and expenditure.

Calculate how many registrations you'll need to break even. Make sure the committee knows this figure.

Below are estimates of some costs you will encounter. The list is taken from the Red Book, with amounts adjusted for New Zealand.

Costs

Budget item	Description of Budget item	How to work out the cost
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Function rooms	About \$300 for each function room for each full day of the con—generally about \$3500 for a four-day con	$\$300 \times \text{number of rooms} \times \text{Number of days}$
Guest rooms	Sleeping accommodation for the guests you are going to pay for	$\text{Nightly cost of hotel rooms} \times \text{number of nights} \times \text{number of guests}$
Getting guests	The cost of getting the guests to New Zealand	$\$3000 \times \text{number of overseas guests}$
Guests' con costs	Food and reasonable expenses	$\$80 \times \text{number of whole days} \times \text{number of guests}$
Other hotel costs	Coffee, the banquet, cost of using the phones, keeping the bar open	
Progress reports	Cost of producing the progress reports and cost of posting. Depends on the number produced and how often they are going to be produced. This includes cost of photocopying.	$\$1 \times \text{number of copies} \times \text{number of progress reports produced}$
Con book	The cost of producing the book you give the con attendees. Can vary a lot in cost depending on the quality and size. One for each expected attendee.	$\$2 \text{ to } \$5 \text{ a copy} \times \text{number of possible attendees at the con}$
Competitions	Costs of prizes for short story competition, art competition, etc.	
Entertainment	Room parties, balloons, decorations	
Equipment	Hiring computer, video player, laser equipment, videos	
Marketing	T shirts, coffee mugs, whatever, should have an item nearly as big in the budgeted income	$\$11 \times \text{number of t-shirts}$
Incidentals	Who knows, assume the worst	

Keeping track of income and expenses

You'll have to bank the money that comes in. This means setting up a way of tracking what cheques have been deposited each time you make a deposit. (For instance, you should be able to check whether you have received and deposited a particular person's registration fee when they claim they've registered and the membership coordinator can't find their registration form or a record of their registration.)

You'll also have to pay for anything that needs to be paid for, keep careful records of what each payment has been for, and file and keep receipts.

You are responsible for providing progress accounts to the committee and the IRD, and doing the final accounts after the con.

Tax

Find out what you need to do about taxes. The IRD voicemail system is modeled on medieval systems of torture, but hang in there until you know what you have to do! A good head start is to ask the treasurer from a recent con what you'll have to do.

Timeline

Before the bid

Get a receipt book. You must keep track of every payment you receive!

Immediately after the bid

Be ready to take money as soon as the SFFANZ meeting that accepts your bid empties out. You'll need a flyer, a cashbox, a float, and receipts.

As soon as you can, set up a cheque account specifically for the con. This is the account you will make all deposits to and payments and reimbursements from. Consider how many people you want as signatories.

Get copies of tax forms/information from previous cons to use as a guide.

By 12 months before the con

- Get seed money.
- Prepare a budget.
- Determine the pricing.

By the beginning of the con

- Make sure that all areas of the con that will be handling money are supplied with receipt books.
- Make sure the front desk has an adequate float.
- Do a registration sweep.

During the con

- Control any money being spent during the con.
- Count the money that has been taken in *every night*. Take the receipts, add them up, take that amount of money from the cash box, and the amount left should equal the float.
- Try to balance the cash box every night, unless you are sleep deprived or intoxicated.
- It's best to have two people to do the accounts each night. Irregularities are very unlikely, but this will provide you with protection just in case.

After the con

After the con, you might need to pay:

- hire of convention facilities
- meals and accommodation for guests
- printing
- t-shirt printing
- bills with the hotel.

Tips

- You won't get much money until memberships start coming in, so keep careful control of expenditures.
- Always keep good and proper financial records.
- Be prudent. Don't do things like making loans to committee members.
- Pay for as much as possible up front.
- If you'll have a large cash balance for more than a couple of months, look into making it earn interest for you.
- Don't expect to make a profit on the banquet.

The programmer's tasks

The programmer's tasks are legion—in fact, it's a job for two or more people. The person who has the overview and sets the schedule should not be the one who organizes individual items and focuses on the detail. The programmers will

- coordinate and have an overview of programming
- think up programme items
- choose people to participate in the programme
- put together the timetable
- work at the con to handle last-minute programme changes, make sure rooms are set up properly, and keep items running to time.

One decision you'll have to make is whether it's more important for things to run to time than it is for them to go on as long as people are enjoying them. If you decide to be strict about time, tell people so clearly in advance—this saves a lot of resentment.

Contests

Once you've decided what contests to have (and this will depend on the focus of your con and your guests), you should delegate the jobs of organising and running the contests, then only deal with any necessary scheduling. In the past it's been common to have:

- a writing contest (judged by GoH if appropriate, or another author who attends)
- an art contest if there's someone appropriate to judge it
- an in-con modelling contest of some sort, like the Barbie Wearable Art Awards
- KAOS-type games.

Masquerade

The masquerade is traditionally the biggest event (or one of the biggest events) of the con. A great deal of detail goes into making it run smoothly. If you don't plan that detail carefully, you might make it through okay—but at best it will be an extremely tense time, and at worst there could be any number of disasters.

No matter what you do, something will go wrong with the masquerade. Your best chance of making it something minor is to delegate this job to someone who is good with detail. The following timeline is taken from a website about putting together a Worldcon, so the level of detail might be excessive for a smaller con. Choose the details that fit your con.

Six months before the con

- Map the room for the masquerade, including door and ceiling heights, electrical outlets, type of power supply, riser availability, main service corridors, service halls, bathrooms, and video hook-ups.
- Do the hall and stage layout.
- Write the rules.
- Write tech info up for the contestants.
- Publish the rules, layout and tech info in Progress Report 1 (this may be necessary earlier, depending on when your con's progress reports come out).
- Send layouts to the hotel liaison and the con chair.
- Send a preliminary budget to the con treasurer, if necessary.
- Start encouraging costumers to compete.

Three months before the con

- Recruit staff and emcee.
- Decide on entertainment for the judging intermission.
- Have award certificates designed.
- Order ribbons.
- Get entry forms made up.
- Keep recruiting entries.
- Have the draft schedule finished. Begin checking it with participants.

Two months before the con

- Make a masquerade equipment list for everyone who needs one.
- Send key crew members job descriptions, timetable, layouts, tech info, and call times.
- Make a supplies list.
- Continue recruiting crew and contestants.

One month before the con

- Reconfirm room arrangements with the hotel and the hotel liaison.
- Find out where you can rent tech and pipe and drape and how much they'll cost.
- Recruit judges and send them copies of rules, judges' guidelines, and call times.
- Give the concom your final budget.

One week before the con

- Assemble a repair kit.

- Buy all supplies.
- Start packing supplies by area.
- Confirm equipment rental arrangements.
- Pick up ribbons.
- Get award certificates copied.
- Get all forms assembled.
- Make backstage signs.
- Put together registration signs and forms, including photo sign-up and supply kit.
- Reconfirm judges.

By the beginning of the con

- Pick up all rental equipment.
- Make a preliminary work schedule.
- Open registration for masquerade and photo sign-up.
- Get a list from the concom of special seating for VIPs.

During the con

When you close masquerade registration:

- Put together a running order.
- Make sure you have all necessary information from participants before the start.
- Set up the rooms with everything you'll need.

Video track

Recently, New Zealand cons have been piping the video stream into the accommodation rooms at the hotel. This dodges the bullet on issues of how to run a video room. However, it does mean that anyone not staying at the hotel can't watch the videos. You might consider screening special video events (like a late-night showing of Rocky Horror) in one of the conference rooms as part of the main programme so that everyone can see them.

- The main track of films should combine old favourites and obscure, little-known films.
- Use lots of short subjects, sandwiched between features. (Cartoon are popular, especially Warner Brothers ones.)
- Try showing a really bad film late at night.
- Try showing one or more serials, with an episode of each serial shown each morning of the con.
- If you prepare eight-hour tapes, you only need to change them three times a day.
- Decide whether you want the video programming to offer alternatives to people not interested in major events, or whether it should not conflict with major events. Schedule accordingly.

Opening ceremony

People generally expect some sort of presentation, even if it's short. What you do at the opening ceremony sets or reinforces your theme. It's a good chance for you to do something creative. Remember that it's for the audience, not for the concom—so no showing off or making in-jokes! You might even have a person or people not on the committee do something.

Auction

The auction is a fundraiser as well as a programme event. There should be a specific person assigned to organize it, rather than the programmer trying to handle all the details. It is usually scheduled after the floating market in a morning time slot, followed by a lunch slot so it doesn't interfere with anything when it runs over time.

FFANZ will want to have an auction. Give them a room and a time slot, and let them organize everything themselves—having their stuff in with the main auction will make it longer, possibly too long, and increase the auction organiser's headaches.

Consider restricting the auction to items of higher value, and having things of lower value only at the floating market.

The auction organizer needs to

- Arrange an auctioneer

- Decide whether to accept credit card payment and make all arrangements necessary for it
- Write up and circulate all rules about the auction, including
 - Times
 - Items being auctioned
 - Any preregistration requirements
 - Payment terms.

Floating market

The floating market is good, easy programming, so consider letting people sell things for no charge. Schedule it in a large room in the morning, just before the auction.

Banquet

You are likely to run into some of the following issues with banquets.

- You need some form of ID to know who to let in.
- Have a list of people who paid handy for the people who've lost receipts or their ID.
- If you include items of interest to everyone, are you going to open those items to people not at the banquet?
- Make sure you account for displays, head tables, etc. in your space requirements and when you calculate seating numbers.
- Will you have special décor?
- Plan space for special guests or award winners, and include free banquet attendance for them when you calculate how much to charge for the banquet.
- Establish a number of tickets you'll sell at the beginning and stick to it. Decide how many tickets will be given out to people without paying, then stick to that decision.

Dealers' room

You will probably schedule a room exclusively for dealers' use. The hotel liaison will need to be involved in planning the dealers' room, particularly in terms of what the hotel will supply and what's OK to have in the room. The publicity manager will need to help find people to go in the room.

Plan the layout, even if there are only 3–4 dealers.

Have someone at the con who's responsible for dealing with the dealers—the most likely candidate is the floor manager.

Equipment

You will inevitably be working with the person in charge of getting equipment. You might do the work yourself, or simply have to pass information on to the person who gets everything. The hotel liaison might be able to get most or all of the equipment through the hotel, or there might be restrictions on what equipment can be brought in to the hotel from the outside, so it is very important that the hotel liaison be part of the process as well. It is best to check equipment prices from other sources as well, as the hotel is likely to be charging more than other places might.

Making up the programme

Although some fans come to cons for reasons other than the programme, there are always fans who want to go to programme items. It is very important for anyone running a con to plan a programme that provides interest and variety for these fans.

There are some events that people will want to see very much, and you leave them out at your peril. These are an opening ceremony of some sort, Guest of Honour speeches, a prize-giving (for the Sir Julius Vogel awards), a masquerade, the SFFANZ business meeting and bidding for the con two years after yours. It's very hard to leave out a banquet, a closing ceremony, a quiz, an auction and/or a floating market, a FFANZ auction, and a dealers' room. It's common to have an introduction to cons for newbies, writers' workshop events, a dance, an opening night mixer, some events for furry fandom, and a 'dead dog' or some other form of wrap-up.

Beyond these standard events, you need to generate ideas. Develop a habit of thinking about programming in spare moments. Get a group of people together to brainstorm ideas.

- Look back at what other cons have done. Repeat some items directly and use others as inspiration.

- Talk to people you know are entertaining. Ask them if they're willing to do programme items, and let them suggest what they'd like to do.
- Think about your theme and things that might fit in with it.
- Think about your guests' strengths.
- Include some science items, whatever is available locally. Remember to fit them in with the focus of the con.

Once you have programme events, discuss them with other people, especially your guests—they'll be a valuable source of feedback. For panel and discussion ideas, get a group of people together and start to discuss the topic. If the discussion dies out quickly, you can probably discard the idea; if the discussion goes well, the topic is probably a good one. This works really well, but it takes a lot of time to do properly.

Getting participants

It's a good idea to have a large pool of programme participants to draw from for your programme. Talk or write to people early on. Get a commitment from them to help—and put it in writing.

When writing letters to individuals you haven't talked to first, include (but do not limit yourself to)

- Any details about the programme item you're asking them to participate in
- An explanation of why they're being asked
- An invitation for them to comment on the item to you (whether they agree to participate or not)
- Names of other people who are likely to be taking part in this item
- A return address
- Thanks for their time.

If you're writing to someone who hasn't registered for the con, apologise for writing and ask what times they'll be available for programme items.

Another way to find programme participants is to appeal to the SF community. You could

- Send out a participant request form to people who have registered who you think would make good participants
- Send out a participant request form to all Phoenix and Stella Nova members
- Place notices asking for participants in progress reports
- Place notices in the Barbara's Books catalogue, club zines, and other New Zealand SF media
- Place notices on your website.

No matter how willing committee members are to be on a large number of panels, DO NOT give in to the temptation. Committee members should be on no more than one panel. If you need a warm body for a panel, pick anyone except a committee member.

Programme Participant Questionnaire

Once someone has agreed to participate in a programme item, you should send them a questionnaire that helps you make scheduling decisions. Specifically ask the participant how many items per day they're willing to be involved with, and how many in total. If you need to go over their maximum, get their permission!

Making up the schedule

This is one of the hardest things you'll do. Fortify yourself before you begin.

If you have enough rooms, try to programme three streams.

Try to put as much as possible into the programme. It's easier to take ideas out than put new ones in.

Things to include in your programme (if you plan to schedule them) are

- All sessions from all streams
- Filking
- Gaming
- Autograph sessions
- Films/videos
- Guests and VIPs

- Writer's workshop
- SFFANZ business meeting, including voting for the con two years after yours
- Any childcare or special events for children.

Allocating space

Begin by deciding what needs to go where. List each location, then list everything the con needs to do, from set-up to teardown. Look at each room—if possible, by going through it with paper, pencil and measuring tape. Make a diagram of each space, including anything that might make a difference to the usefulness of the room. Don't rely on the hotel's diagrams or blueprints—if there are mistakes on them that cause problems for the con, you're the one who looks bad, not the hotel.

Once you know what the available space is like, go through and decide where each event could go. To do this, you need an idea of how popular you expect each item to be. Have other people look at your list and point out any problems they can spot. Incorporate their feedback into your list.

Deciding on times

Before you plan your programme, you should have a good number of items and know who's going to participate in them. Begin by scheduling items that can't be moved easily or that you want to give prime positions to (such as the Guest of Honour speeches), then move on to other items. Consider scheduling against major programme items, but be sure you schedule something that appeals to a different group of people—schedule something about a fantasy TV program against your hard SF writer Guest of Honour speech, for instance. In general, think of the audience you expect a particular item to appeal to, and don't schedule two items that appeal to the same audience against each other. You can ask people to do two items in a row, but it's an imposition—and NEVER ask anyone to do more than two in a row! Spread similar events out over the duration of the con (eg if you have three quizzes put them on three different days), and put things at suitable times of day. Programme from fairly early in the morning to late in the evening—even if it doesn't appeal to you, it will appeal to someone.

Clustering

You can make things easier on yourself by clustering certain programme items together. Do this when you have a set of items

- Of common interest (say three comics events)—this also increases audience size
- That use the same room configuration
- That use the same resource, such as a video projector.

Other logistical things to consider

Consider how people will get from one item to another (what route they will follow) and how crowded the corridors will become. Be sure there's enough time between items for everyone to move. Plan some fudge time, especially after items you know will go over time (like the Guest of Honour speeches, which run over time no matter how much time you give them). Finally, don't try to fit every event into a one-hour time slot—some events will take 90 minutes or 2 hours, and it's better to allow enough time.

Checking a draft schedule

Once you've drafted your programme, check that

- Nobody is scheduled for more than one event at a time (this includes programme sessions, autograph sessions, readings, workshops, etc.)
- Nobody is asked to do too much in a single day
- Guests of Honour have things scheduled throughout the con
- You've taken account of all participant preferences.

Have as many people as possible check the programme, then send a draft to all participants, with their items marked, asking for feedback. Once you've made any changes they request, get them to check it again.

Timeline

By 12 months before the con

- Decide on at least some of the programme. If possible, set up a straw man programme.
- Scope the con—are there main events? Is there a concept?
- Identify items that will require convention attendees to make a big effort (eg masquerade). Publicise them early and often.

By 6 months before the con

- Begin prep for the masquerade.
- Put basic information about dealers (table fees, whether memberships are included, etc.) into a progress report.
- Put out a Programme Participant Questionnaire.
- Start fingering people for individual programme items, if you haven't done that already.

By 3 months before the con

- Map the dealers' room carefully and figure out the number and size of tables that can fit in there. The hotel might be able to provide tables, so check on what they have (through the hotel liaison) before planning the layout. You must know how many dealers of what size you can fit in before you sell the room out.
- Draft the programme schedule.
- Send the draft programme to all programme participants, with their items marked, and ask for feedback. Follow up as much as necessary until you know everyone is OK with the times and places they're supposed to be at.

By 1 month before the con

- Arrange for the video tapes early enough that you are sure you can get them.
- Provide each guest with a schedule of all the things you have planned for them to do (times, locations, topics). Do this BEFORE the overall schedule is printed up, because it's likely someone won't be able to do something you've scheduled for them. Ask them to tell you about any conflicts IMMEDIATELY.
- Finalise the programme for inclusion in programme book.

By 2 weeks before the con

- Prepare slips for people who are participating in items to go in their membership packs. Include the item name, room, time, and the person's role if it's applicable. For people chairing items, also tell them the names of everyone on the panel and the required end time.
- Send out reminder letters about the items to everyone in each item, including confirmation that they're in the item, the "teaser" from the item, and the exact time and place the item will be.

By 1 week before the con

- Have the final programme for the pocket programme.

By the beginning of the con

- Check the lighting in every location, especially for the masquerade and any awards ceremonies. Will the hotel provide the lighting? Do you have to pay operators from the hotel? Do you have to pay for the lighting?
- Give each guest a schedule with their events marked on it, or a special schedule with just their events.

During the con

- Try to keep the programme running smoothly. Change things around IF NECESSARY, but avoid moving items if possible. It's usually easier to find a replacement panellist than to move an entire item.
- If you absolutely have to reschedule something, only do so once. If it can't run in the second time slot, cancel it.
- When you reschedule an item, make sure you
 - notify all the members of all affected items, and not just by a note

- post a notice about the change on the notice board
- put a notice about the change on the door of the room that the item was scheduled to be in
- announce the change in the room at the time the item was scheduled to happen.
- Have a location where you post programme changes. Publicise it.
- Put signs up outside each function room showing what will be happening in the room during the entire day, and another sign showing what's currently going on, including the topic and the people involved.

The hotel liaison's tasks

The hotel liaison

- Chooses the venue
- Negotiates the contract
- Keeps in touch with the hotel during preparation for the con, making sure the hotel knows what the con needs
- Allocates hotel rooms if the committee takes responsibility for doing that.

The venue

When you choose your venue (assuming there's more than one that's suitable), you must look at

- The facilities (rooms, equipment, security)
- Times of access to the function rooms
- The cost of the facilities, including the downpayment times and conditions
- The provision and cost of furniture, sound equipment, and AV aids
- The sleeping rooms
- The dance floor and stage, dais, and any setup costs involved
- Catering (coffee, bars, Coke machines, snack machines)
- Sale of material on-site by the con
- Set-up access and time
- Close-down access and time
- Conditions of use of outside services
- Privacy of con facilities from other hotel guests and the general public
- Whether other groups will be at this facility at the same time
- Availability of in-house TV
- Deposit conditions for members' rooms
- The match between the conditions of use and what's expected at a con.

Some other things to look for are

- How high is the quality of the facilities?
- How expensive are the sleeping rooms?
- How good is the restaurant?
- How close is the venue to shops and restaurants?
- Is alternative accommodation available nearby?
- How hard is it to reach the venue?
- Does the staff have a good attitude?
- Is the person you'll be working with onto it?

The public space should include enough room for everyone you expect to be at the con to be there at the same time.

Don't forget to check disabled access, even if you don't know of any disabled attendees. It's always possible that someone will break a leg and have to come in a wheelchair. Asking hotel staff isn't enough—if you can, take a wheelchair or a person in a wheelchair for a site visit. Also plan how to make things easier for people with other handicaps, such as deafness or blindness.

The contract

It's important to get the contract signed as early as possible. If you leave it too late, you might find yourself unable to get a venue at rates your con can pay. The hotel will have a standard contract. If there's anything in it you don't like or are unsure about, ask them about it. They might be able to waive or change it. Run both the draft contract and the final contract past the committee before signing—there are sure to be things you miss.

Things to consider when you negotiate the contract include

- How long will convention room rates apply? Some travellers might like to come early or stay on after the con finishes.
- Will convention room rates apply for walk-ins?
- How much will parking cost? This applies both during the con and for pre- and post-con meetings.
- Can you get time in the hotel before the con?
- How is the billing arranged? The hotel should give you a master account, payable 30 days after billing. You'll have to pay a deposit, but be sure it's clear what the deposit is for and when it is due. Try to avoid paying a deposit against the master account or damage.
- Will the hotel fix escalators or elevators that break down during the con?
- Are the room rates based on total room nights, or just peak night? Total room nights is better.
- Will the hotel restaurant serve attendees in costume? You can specify that they have to in the contract.
- What will you be charged for? Ask specifically about
 - Microphones
 - Tables
 - Chairs
 - Staging
 - Podiums
 - Easels stanchions
 - Power hookups
 - Working house phones in meeting rooms.
- Does the hotel provide drinking water?
- What is the hotel policy about guide dogs and other support animals?
- If there is a disagreement between the con and the hotel, will it be settled by arbitration or in the courts? Arbitration is much better.

Consorting with the enemy

No matter how nice the hotel people are, no matter how good the facilities, remember: they DON'T understand what happens at a con, and they have to be treated carefully.

- It's a good idea to have at least two people at the first meeting with the hotel.
- Look professional for your meetings with the hotel.
- Always get things in writing. This begins with the quote, and continues with putting all agreements in writing. Every time you make a decision of substance verbally, follow it up with a note to the person you deal with at the hotel (and to the person you made the decision with, if they're not the same person).
- Never, ever trust the hotel.

Hotels also find it every hard to understand some things about fans, even though they appreciate our money. You'll have to work very hard to get the hotel to believe the following things.

- Fans really DO eat that much food.
- Fans' parties are noisy, but not wild.
- Fans sleep late. Maids will have lots of cleaning to do later in the day, and not very much to do earlier.
- Fans will expect breakfast at lunchtime, and possibly at dinnertime.
- The hotel should be staffed as heavily as it would be for a mid-week convention.
- Concoms often like to make a block booking and assign individual rooms, then give the list of room assignments to the hotel. **NO MATTER HOW CAREFULLY YOU DO THIS, THE HOTEL WILL SCREW IT UP.**
- The concom will need a room to meet in and to store stuff in. Ideally you should use a suite, where some of the concom can sleep. You should use one of the complimentary rooms/suites you get from the hotel for this purpose.
- A suite also makes a good overflow room for programming (eg for writer's workshop).
- You'll need rooms paid for by the con for all GoHs.
- The FFANZ delegate needs a room. FFANZ will pay for it.
- Some events will be messy. The hotel may have plastic sheeting they can give you to put down on the floor during such events.

Timeline

By 12 months before the con

- You must have the site for your con picked out, and if possible have it booked and the contract signed.
- Know what the sleeping rooms cost for one occupant, for multiple occupants, and for children staying with parents.
- When the registration form is created, make sure it has a space where people can indicate whether they want quiet or noisy rooms. Make sure that the responses to this section go through to whoever is making the bookings.

By 6 months before the con

- Make decisions about where you want people to be able to have parties. Consult the hotel and make sure they understand what's likely to happen.

By 3 months before the con

Work with the programmer to plan the dealers' room. This could include such details as the layout, the size of the tables, and knowing what furnishings you can get from the hotel, what you have to bring in from outside, and what you're allowed to bring in.

By 1 week before the con

- Hold a meeting with Hotel Security to explain cons to them.

By the beginning of the con

- Talk to the hotel about what jobs the hotel will do and what jobs the con will do.
- Check out the hotel's sound systems. (You might be working with the programmer or masquerade coordinator on this.) If the facility is one large room that breaks down into smaller ones, check the sound system in all the variations.
- It's useful to work with the programmer and hotel to put together a room plan—what arrangement of the rooms and what equipment are required for what times.
- Make sure you have enough suites for your guests.
- Arrange an at-con phone number for the con, and give it to anyone who might need to contact the con.

During the con

The hotel liaison spends the con acting as a buffer between people attending the con and the hotel. That means sorting out whatever problems come up in the most efficient way possible while still keeping everyone on-side. Since problems can flare up at any time of the day or night, you should have a night-shift liaison or some form of assistant liaison to allow you to take a break. You or the assistant must ALWAYS be available by beeper during the con.

You're going to have to deal with problems with loud parties. When you do, weigh your relationship with the hotel against the grief the people at the party will give you for shutting the party down. Try to negotiate something that's agreeable—or at least not too disagreeable—to everyone.

Tips

We're a well-behaved convention, and most hotels would have us back because of our good behaviour.

The guest liaison's tasks

The guest liaison (GL) organises the guests and makes the guests' travel arrangements. Once the guests arrive at the con, the GL is responsible, either personally or through guest minders, for making sure their experience is as positive as possible.

Make sure the details of arrival, being met, etc. are clear to the guests.

You will want to book some non-convention activities for your guests—things like media interviews and book signings. Make sure these are OK with your guest, and make arrangements for the guest and a minder to get to and from them.

Timeline

By 12 months before the con

- The guests should have been chosen and invited by this point. Note that this might be early for a media guest to make a commitment.
- Have an idea who you want to act as guest minders, and if possible discuss the job with them.
- Check out transportation to and from the con for your guests. If possible, have air transport booked and paid for. This might be too early for you to be able to pay—if so, pay as soon as the airline lets you.
- Make sure all progress reports are going to the guests, so they know as much as possible about the venue, the numbers expected, and the theme, if any.

By 6 months before the con

- Consult with the guests about what kind of programme items they prefer to do and how much they'll be doing during the con. You should liaise with the programmer on this *before* either of you contacts the guest.

By 2 months before the con

- Make sure the publications person has all the information they need about all the guests. If they need more, communicate with the guest to get the information.
- Check whether the guests have any special needs, eg dietary.

By 1 week before the con

- Make arrangements for guests to be picked up at the airport or wherever they're arriving for the con.
- Finalise arrangements with a person to be guest minder for each guest.

By the beginning of the con

- Make sure that there are name tags and con packs for all the guests.

During the con

- Make sure guests know everything they're involved in. Give the guest and minder each a copy of the guest's individual schedule.
- Make sure guests get to their items on time.
- Make sure guests aren't hassled by people.
- Make sure guests get fed and rested.
- Make sure guests know who the responsible people are at the con.
- Make sure members know who you are, and that they can talk to you about making arrangements with the guests.
- Make sure there's someone to accompany the guests to everything they want to go to. This means that if the regular guest minder can't cover the whole time, you need to find someone to come in during the times they can't be there.
- Give the guest a chance to rest before you ask them to do anything at the con.
- Make sure the guest has a chance to see the area if they don't live there, and offer a couple of sightseeing things to them if possible.
- Meet the guests yourself, and introduce them to their individual minders.
- If you're giving the guests a per diem in advance, give it to them at the beginning.
- When or if it's appropriate, the guest liaison and minder can offer "cultural" advice to a guest.

Tips

- Discuss as specifically as possible what you expect of a guest with the guest. Do this before they arrive.
- If your guest is travelling on their own and doesn't want to be met at the airport or whatever, send them a map.

- Make sure all guests know whether they're receiving
 - Travel costs (including details about what you're paying for)
 - Speaker's fee
 - Per diem
 - Hotel room
 - Con membership(s)
 - Entry to banquet and other special events.

The membership co-ordinator's tasks

Whoever handles membership should be on the committee. The same person who does the treasurer's tasks usually handles the membership details as well—this cuts down on double handling of paperwork.

The membership coordinator, in a nutshell, deals with memberships. All registration forms go first to them. Their job is then to keep track of memberships by

- keeping the membership database up-to-date
- keeping mailing lists up-to-date and supplying the current one to any committee member who needs it
- routing information from registrations to the appropriate people at the hotel or on the committee
- training the people who will work on the registration desk
- setting things up so the people at the registration desk have access to all the pre-con registration information so they can clear up any problems that crop up.

Badges

The committee will decide what should go on the badges, including whether fan names are OK. You will print them.

Timeline

Immediately after the bid

- Open membership books.

By 12 months before the con

Have a registration form to give out at the con before yours.

By the beginning of the con

- Train the people working on the registration desk.
- Work with the guest liaison to make sure all the guests who didn't have to pay for their own registration have nametags and con packs.
- Have people lined up to work on the registration desk.
- Have registration desk procedures mapped out.

During the con

- Make sure the hours the registration desk is open are clear to everyone. They *must* be published.
- If you can, open the desk before the published opening time to reduce the crowd.

Tips

- Make sure your membership database can generate mailing labels directly from the database.
- Acknowledge each registration by letter, postcard or email. You can assign a membership number at this point if you wish.
- Remind members over and over again that they need to let you know of name changes or membership transfers immediately.

Publicity manager

This job is sometimes handled by the same person who does publications.

The publicity manager acts as the interface between the con and the public. They remind people of the con's existence through advertising—and the job might include finding sponsors. They also make sure the con has a recognizable image.

The job specifically involves:

- Preparing and sending out posters and flyers to a mailing list of useful places at regular intervals, perhaps every two months or so
- Preparing and distributing press releases
- Preparing and placing ads
- Assessing response to ads.

All of this work should be planned and scheduled carefully so no one is overloaded with publicity work at any time.

Progress reports and the website are extremely important in reminding people of your existence, so the publicity person will work closely with the publications person and the webmaster.

Advertising

The general principle of good advertising is to put your ads where people who might respond to them will see them. Specifically, you should advertise your con in places where fans are likely to be.

Your advertising could take the form of:

- Traditional ads in, for instance, fan publications
- Flyers
- Posters
- Bookmarks with basic con information on them.

Places you could advertise include

- Libraries (flyers, posters, bookmarks)
- Bookstores, including university bookstores (flyers, posters, bookmarks)
- Video stores (flyers, posters, bookmarks)
- Publications of cons similar to yours
- Publications of clubs or organisations whose members are likely to be interested in your con (Phoenix, Stella Nova) (ads or flyers in their mailings)
- Other fan publications (and don't overlook the possibility of trading ad space: you put an ad in their publication, they put an ad in your con book)
- Student newspapers.

Ads in newspapers or on TV or radio usually aren't effective enough to justify paying for them.

However, if you provide an article to a community newspaper, they will often print it, and TV and radio stations (and websites) often provide a free "what's on" list.

Flyers

Good places to put flyers include the con before yours, gaming shops, computer stores, CABs, university bookstores, SF bookshops, and the library. The SF section of larger bookstores can also be a good place, and you might have some luck putting flyers in the SF sections of video stores.

Some things to consider when you plan your flyer:

- Don't fold or print in colour—in fact, don't do anything that requires special printing facilities because it adds to expense. Save the fancy stuff for something that's not going to be thrown out by most people who take it.
- Use both sides of the paper.
- Put a logo and the con name in BIG letters on the back of the flyer.
- Put a registration form on the flyer.
- Put your address on the bit of the flyer they'll keep, not the bit they post in.
- Have separate flyers for experienced congoers (at the con before yours) and newbies (just about everywhere else).
- Include all essential con details.

Timeline

By 12 months before the con

The con before yours is a very important event. You should begin promoting your con there. At the end of that con, you and the publicity manager from it might issue a joint press release telling about the con that's just finished and referring to yours.

This is a good time to begin your advertising campaign. Discuss your sponsors and advertising with your concon, and pick their brains for ideas.

Communicate with other cons. Try to get them to link to your site from theirs.

By 3 months before the con

You should be working on getting dealers for the dealers' room.

By 6 weeks before the con

Send out a press kit to get the press interested in the con.

During the con

- If you've raised enough interest about your con with the press, you might have to deal with them during your con.
- Be prepared to issue a joint press release with the publicity manager of the con following yours. It should describe your con and refer to the next con.

Tips

Guests might agree to publicise your con by doing book signings—but check with them, as some authors get paid for doing signings.

Publications

The publications person produces progress reports, the con book (including the programme), and the pocket programme if there is one. You might share responsibility for flyers with the publicity person. You will have to work closely with the publicity person, the webmaster, and the programmer.

Progress reports

At least one source says the most important thing about the progress reports is the content: poor quality will be less of a problem than poor content.

There should be at least three progress reports. One should be timed to give out at the con before yours, and should go, in addition, to everyone you know of who might be interested in the con. This includes people already registered for your con, people registered at the con before yours, and everyone on the SFFANZ database. Also target any fan publications that might publicise your con. Work with the guest liaison to make sure all the guests receive all the progress reports as well.

Include in every progress report:

- The name of your con
- The date of your con
- The current membership rates, including when the rates will change and if possible what they will change to
- Ways to contact the con: correspondence address, email and if possible phone
- The location of the con (town and hotel)
- The names of the guests
- A registration form.
- A form for people to fill out if they're willing to volunteer some time to help out during the con.

Include in at least one progress report:

- A list of members with their membership numbers and current status
- Weapons policies and other restrictions

- Reminders about contests etc., especially ones where people have to prepare something in advance or bring something to the con
- Any unusual hotel restrictions, such as a hotel that doesn't provide jugs and stuff for making coffee and tea in the rooms
- Sign-up form and information about the banquet, the writers' workshop, the masquerade, and similar events.

The first progress report should include:

- At least 100 words on the Guest of Honour
- Any 'special guests' already registered (generally other writers)
- All information on dealers' table rates
- All information on any art show
- All information on the writers' workshop
- The programme that's organised so far
- Any policies members need to be aware of
- A short feature on the hotel
- A list of pre-registered members
- A hotel reservation form, with the hotel's address and rates, if you're organising that separately.

A progress report that's put out about three months before the con should include

- Information on special guests
- The programme
- Map and directions to the consite
- The hotel site and house rules/courtesies
- A list of pre-registered members
- A hotel reservation form.

The final progress report, which should come out two weeks or more before the con, should include:

- clear directions for finding the hotel
- clear information about the parking situation
- directions about how to find the registration area and times it's open
- information about shuttles, and how to get to the venue from the motorway, the train station, and the bus station.

Con book/programme book

This is the single biggest publication. It should include:

- the title of the con
- the date of the con
- the site
- names and biographies of the Guests of Honour, including photos and publishing credits
- welcome from the chair (about one page long)
- a committee list and possibly photos
- table of contents
- the programme as it is at the book deadline, in point-paragraph form
- directions to and maps of the hotel, site and environs (with function rooms labelled)
- house rules
- a list of nearby restaurants, convenience stores, liquor stores and supermarkets, with their hours
- paid advertising from local businesses, the next con(s), and dealers
- a cover illustration which includes the logo
- publications page
- information about whichever of the following apply:
 - dealers room
 - gaming room
 - writers' workshop
 - programming rooms
 - costuming room
 - media room
- visitor information
- membership list.

Pocket programme

This is a small programme that lists all programme items in a table showing time and location. It's intended to be the one thing people will carry with them everywhere, so it should literally fit into a pocket. Liaise with the Programmer about it—it's important to be as accurate as possible, so you need to have the most up-to-date information at the time of finalising it.

Timeline

Before the bid

Have a flyer ready to go with bare details about your con (dates, rates, guests' names).

By 12 months before the con

- Have a registration form ready.
- Have a publicity flyer ready.
- A Committee Newsletter can be a good way to keep everyone informed of what's going on. It can be distributed to committee members and volunteers. It can list meeting times and locations and have information about what happened at the last meeting.
- Include a bit on the registration form for people to tick if they're willing to volunteer time. Also include a sign-up sheet in each Progress Report.
- You might be able to exchange ads with fan publications: they run your ad, you include one of theirs in the con book.
- Look for media contacts eg Cloud 9.

By 6 months before the con

- Put out a Progress Report that includes hotel booking forms. You can do it earlier than this, as long as you plan for other people's plans to change, and you're prepared to deal with lots of changes.

By 3 months before the con

- Put out a progress report to preregistered members that includes maps, hotel details and instructions on how to get there, the hotel phone number, convention phone number, etc. Have information about the masquerade, especially if volunteers are needed.
- Work with the masquerade coordinator to get masquerade entry forms made.

By 2 months before the con

- Tell the guest liaison if you need more biographical information about any of the guests for the Programme Book.

By 1 month before the con

- The Programme Book should be ready.

By 2 weeks before the con

- The Programme Book should be copied and delivered.
- Send out the final Progress Report.
- Get "teasers" for programme items from the programmer.

By 1 week before the con

- Produce the Pocket Programme.

During the con

- Are you going to have any publications during the con? If so, how are you going to make multiple copies?

Tips

- Be sure there are enough Programme Books for everyone who might sign up at the con.

- If you're selling ads in your Programme Book, start selling space well in advance. Include ad rates for different sizes in each pre-convention publication, including rates for the Programme Book. Include any technical requirements (eg camera-ready, colour ads).
- The content of the programme books is especially important, because people keep it as a souvenir of the event.

Website

The webmistress' or webmaster's job is to make all important information about the con available online. Begin by having a specific goal for your website: for instance, you might decide that anything and everything the con announces or wants to announce will be available online, by email and/or Internet. To reach this goal, you would have to get files of every article that goes into a Progress Report and put them on the website.

The pattern of use of the website will be a slow start, with traffic building gradually and reaching a peak within a month or two of the con, then crashing to almost zero after the con.

Decide whether it's more important to you to control everything that goes up on the website, or to minimise your own workload. If you want to control everything, create a website that you and you alone can modify. If you want to minimise your own workload and encourage everyone to have some stake in what goes up on the website, create pages for everything that you might want to have on the site, then give someone involved with the subject of that page access to the page to make the changes directly.

The site

Keep your website simple. It should include:

- Basic information about when and where your con is
- Some basic information about what a con is
- The guest and who they are (this can be done with links to the guest's website)
- Pricing
- Hotel information, including possible low-cost alternatives
- Links to websites for the conference hotel, at least one low-cost alternative hotel, and the city
- A registration form
- Transport tips (where the venue is, how to get there, how much it might cost)
- Some programming information
- Anything else you want.

Arrange the site so users can find what they want by topic. That means taking articles from the progress reports, making them individual files, and putting each individual file up.

It's also a good idea to put up a list of who will be at the con—people searching for particular names on the Internet will then get hits on your website.

Timeline

Immediately after the bid

- Set up an email address for enquiries.

By 12 months before the con

- Design and launch the website.
- Set up an internal committee mailing list to discuss stuff.

By 2 weeks before the con

- Put up the final schedule of events as soon as possible.
- Some things need to go up quickly (like the final schedule when you get it). Put such things up right away, then make them "pretty" and put up the prettier version.

By the beginning of the con

Close off Internet registrations.

Tips

- Consider registering your con as an Internet domain name, so if you switch ISPs, all your mail will still get to you.
- You can always use the domain www.<<your_con_name>>.sf.org.nz . Contact Martin Kealey in Auckland to arrange it.

Fundraising

The obvious kind of fundraising is getting money for your con. However, it also includes getting merchandise from companies to be used as prizes or auctioned off.

Some ideas:

- Sometimes banks give out money to charities and special events, BUT you must request funding up to two years in advance.
- You can hold video events or barbecues.
- Try selling a limited edition t-shirt at the con the year before. This will be different from the final design on your t-shirt. (Make sure people know this design won't be available at the con.)
- You might be able to get one or more businesses to sponsor your con.
- Emoticon had movie outings.
- You can always have a sausage sizzle.
- Pub charities/gaming charities have money they have to distribute in the community.
- Sell off particular badge numbers (86, 99, 505, 69, 2, 11, any you can think of—charge a premium for these numbers, first come first served).

Timeline

By 12 months before the con

- You need to have applied for any grants.

Things SOMEONE will have to deal with for the con

Signs

These may be handled by the publications person. You should have

- A name sign for each guest so it can be put in front of them at each panel etc.
- Signs marking both smoking and non-smoking areas
- Signs on the door of each room telling the name of the room.

Also check in advance with the hotel, the function facility and the committee what signs they'll need, so you can prepare as many as possible in advance and make them as standardized as possible. Check with the hotel about where you can put signs, including what kind of surfaces you can put them on. If you can't attach one in a place where you need it, use something like flipchart easels.

Make the signs readable (choose a readable font and a large enough point size) and clear (not cute). Laser printing is MUCH better than handwriting.

Have material on hand to make signs during the convention—good paper, a computer and printer or good pens.

Con pack

You must include the con guide and pocket programme in your con pack. You should also include anything you can lay your hands on: pen and paper; comics; crappy books; advertising; sponsors' food or coupons; and anything else. The more the better!

Have a con pack stuffing party the weekend before the con.

Jobs at the con

The following are some of the jobs you might find people doing at the con.

Video manager

If you ask someone to be the video manager, you might want them to:

- Prepare videos
- Put programs into a format your machines can understand
- Liaise with the hotel about technical setup
- Arrange for the security of the equipment
- Organise backup equipment.

Emcee

Choose someone with personality, and tell them well in advance, so they can rehearse if they wish. If the emcee desires it, you might look for some people who can do fill-in acts.

Registration desk

The membership coordinator might handle this job.

The desk must have plenty of badge-making supplies on hand for changes to badges, lost badges and memberships sold at the con. If there's a chance you'll run out, either know where you can get more supplies or have a back-up system.

The people working at the registration desk might have to:

- Sit at the desk.
- Give members who have already paid their membership their badge and con pack.
- For people who haven't paid yet
 - find out what sort of registration is required
 - collect their money
 - give them a receipt
 - get a registration form filled in
 - create a badge.
- Ask every member about
 - furry fan registration
 - banquet sign-up
 - masquerade registration
 - Vogels.
- Guard the cashbox.

Front desk

If you have a front desk that's separate from the registration desk, the person on duty there should

- Manage the white board announcements
- Sell merchandise
- Handle general queries about the city
- Give members emergency information if required
- Keep the lost and found.

Member liaison

This is actually just another name for security. The member liaison should

- Answer queries from people
- Check badges (you'll need a supply of "emergency badges" for when the registration desk is closed)
- Act as the arbiter of "acceptable behaviour."

Technical manager

Things you might ask a technical manager to do include:

- Manage event equipment (data show, OHP, microphones, VCR/DVD, audio equipment, stereo, TV, projector)
- Set up equipment and keep it functioning

- Make sure equipment is stored securely when not in use
- Use trolleys to move equipment.

Room manager

If you have a room manager, their job will be to ensure rooms are set up as required, including setting up desks and chairs, equipment, stationery, water, and mints.

Floor manager

A floor manager might

- Handle the security of cash at the front desk
- Go to the hotel liaison for complaints about hotel problems, eg air conditioning
- Check that people doing other roles are OK
- Check that the front desk is OK
- Introduce GoHs at speeches.

Guest minder

You might ask individuals to work with specific guests, reporting to the guest liaison for coordinating everything. If so, their job could include

- Making sure their guest gets to all programmed commitments
- Ensuring their guest has a good time
- Rescuing their guest when required.

Prize administration

Whoever is responsible for prize administration will need to

- Arrange for acceptance of entries
- Coordinate judging
- Get the winners' names
- Arrange for any printing of certificates
- Arrange presentations of prizes at the closing ceremony or whenever is considered the best time.