

Newsletter Baby Steps

Issue #1 • Friday Afternoon, December 2, 1994 • Smofcon • Burbank, California • by Chaz Baden

Twelve Lessons I've Learned the Hard Way (so far)

I've learned an important lesson or two at each of the conventions I've worked newszines at. I did an underground zine at Loscon 19, and worked the newszines at Con Francisco, Loscon 20, Phil & Ed's (Pecon), Westercon 47, and Loscon 21. Note that those five are all in the last 15 months. Also note that I got a headstart on doing newszines by reading Filthy Pierre's 1984 Concom guide.

1. After Con Francisco, used at Loscon 20: Multiple distribution points, using flyer boards so all issues to-date can be displayed. Locations: near Info, Reg., Con Suite, Dealers, Art Show, Ballrooms. Also, put issue number in great big digits, preferably as a "watermark" or ghost image in the background.

The flyer boards also include a 9x12 manila envelope marked **Put News Submissions (Especially Party Notices) Here. And sign your material.** That way the news pick-up and drop-off points are the same.

List the locations of the newsstands in the newsletter. At least in the first one; maybe in the Program Book; possibly in the fine print in every issue.

2. After Loscon 20, used at Pecon: Stockpile filler material, *and make room to use it.* Also, mark all of the slots on the newszine flyer boards **Reserved for Issue #So-and-So**, to prevent other flyers from being posted there.

3. After Pecon, used at Westercon 47: Solicit art (fillos) as well. Art helps add visual interest to the newszine. Try to find space on the front page for an illustration, every issue. (I broke this rule at Loscon 21, and I wish I hadn't. There was art in every issue, though.)

4. After Westercon 47, used for wrap-up issue: A double-issue situation should result in a 4-page issue, and not two immediately successive issues. 4-pagers can be accomplished different ways, primarily either two pages stapled together, or a double-sized sheet of paper folded over.

Stapling and folding cost extra when the print shop does it. Either can be done by you and your staff. After trying the stapled method at Loscon 21, I advocate the fold-over method. You can post half of the print run in two adjoining slots in the newszine board, while you fold the other half and then swap them

around. If you put out loose sheets before they're all stapled, a lot of people are only going to take the cover page. Note that a fold-over limits you to a 4-page issue; you may need to be ruthless in your editing.

5. After Westercon 47: The last night of the convention gets lots of activity, and you should anticipate double-issue (or double-sized issue) situations to occur, and **be prepared.**

6. Other important lessons: **Design** the layout of the newszine **before the con starts.** Make sure your **equipment is up to the task.** If you're renting equipment for the con, make sure it all works first. Have **backup equipment!**

7. It helps to **decide ahead of time** which issue numbers will **appear when**, and seed the filenames for **those issues** with the issue number and date. **You'll run into trouble** when you hit the **double-issues**, but see rules #4-5 for ways around that. **If you skip those two rules, you can always name** the double-issue 6A and 6B, **in place of issue #6**, for example.

Seed the files **ahead of time** with stock articles. Put "Tip the **Maids**" articles in the evening editions, for example, and set aside Party Listings spaces in each evening edition. And don't forget to mention the Dead Dog Party in the last issue. Since you know it'll be there, set it up before the convention.

8. Put in a blurb offering the collector a complete set of the newszines via mail after the con. Make it cheap; just ask for a self-addressed envelope with the proper amount of postage. Put this blurb in every issue; don't wait until the last issue. See if you can get the blurb into the Program Book.

Offer a post-convention wrap-up issue. (This falls under the "optional" category... it'll probably be a small print run, <200.) See if the con will subsidize your postage & printing, so you can just ask the interested fans to give you their address. If not, ask for addresses and a small contribution, such as 50¢.

Put these offers on the newszine board, so they're out there throughout the con.

9. Cultivate a good crew of newsgophers. You'll need runners, typists, writers/re-writers.

Be on the prowl for a good sketch artist. While you may think you're a real newspaper, you don't have the photojournalism capability of a real newspaper (just try snapshots+scanner+laserprinter and compare it to the halftones in

your local paper sometime). So if you can get someone who can make b&w sketches, just like the old-time engravings used in old-time newspapers, you'll have someone worth their weight in unobtainium.

If you can, cultivate two (or three) complete crews. Completely relinquish authority for half (or two-thirds) of the issues, so you can see the con too. (I haven't made it to this point yet. I'm a control freak, but I'm in recovery. If I'm ever in charge of a Worldcon's newszine, or the equivalent, I'll advertise nationally for it...)

10. Train your staff in the off-season, if possible, in all aspects of producing the newsletter. If you're indispensable, you'll never sleep, and the quality of the newsletter (especially the later ones!) will suffer.

Hire a good office manager to take care of all the details. You can take on the job of Publisher before the convention, lining up the print shop and so forth, but you'll be knee-deep in editing the newszine on-site so someone else should deal with sending field reporters out on assignments, keeping track of hours worked, and so forth.

(Alan Winston's suggestion, after surviving Con Francisco.) Hire a distribution manager, and turn over all aspects of distributing the newszine. Once you've pasted up the newszine and turned it over to the runner who takes it to the print shop, you're done with that issue.

11. Beware of decisions made in the heat of strong emotions. Have someone you trust double-check anything that you're cackling with glee over.

12. "All decisions of the editor are arbitrary, capricious, and final. All typos left 30 days become the property of the management."

Party Listings Go Here

Party Groceries

At the recently-concluded Loscon 21 in Burbank California, a group of Babylon-5 fans got together and ran a party on Saturday (Nov. 26, 1994). Instead of just throwing together a shopping run Saturday afternoon for potato chips, M&M's, and Oreos, they consulted with each other, a local fan (Chaz Baden), and an experienced party thrower (Lynn Gold) a month or so ahead of time.

Chaz Baden, Elana Beach, Colleen Crosby, Diane Elliott, Lynn Gold, Dianne Hackborn, Pat Lawrence, Jacque Marshall, Nancy Osterbauer, Matt Ryan, Lee Whiteside, John Zimmer

By thorough advance planning, pre-purchasing of the non-perishable items, scrounging utensils, equipment, and staple items (flour, etc.) from local larders, some misc. cash donations from the party-goers, and a fair amount of hard work, the party planners managed to throw a party that personally cost them... \$20 each.

Soda Pop (sixpacks)

Coca Cola, 1
Cherry Coke, 1
Dr. Pepper, 1
Pepsi, 2
A&W Root Beer, 1
Sprite, 2
Mandarin Orange Slice, 2
Hansen's Mandarin-Lime Soda, 2
Vernors Ginger Ale, 1
Schweppes Raspberry Ginger Ale, 1
Wild Cherry soda, 4
Diet Coke, 1
Diet Decaf Coke, 1
Diet Dr. Pepper, 2
Diet Sprite, 1
Diet Mandarin Orange Slice, 1
Diet Schweppes Raspberry Ginger Ale, 1

Zima, bottles, 1 (sixpack)

Ice — Free from hotel machine. Filling of the big mucktubs (instead of using the bath for sodas) was done by sending runners to the ice-machine with the hotel room's trash-cans.

Miscellaneous Drinks

Coffee, Columbian Supremo (Trader Joe's) coffee fixin's (creamer, sugar, sweet 'n low) Assorted teas, mostly herbal
Bottled Water

Pizzas:

12 loaves of Italian bread (5 were left over)
3 jars (24oz?) Classico pasta sauce, 1 jar (14 oz) of Ragu Pizza Sauce. (One jar was left over.) No sugar/corn syrup/mushrooms/meat/chunky.
2 lb mozzarella cheese (only used 1)
Parmesan cheese, grated
Parmesan-Romano blend, grated
Romano cheese, grated
Oregano

Vegetables

six types of bell peppers (2 yellow/orange, 3 red, 1 dk green, 1 "glow-in-the-dark" green, 2 purple)
2 bunches celery.
4 heads of broccoli florets
1 head of cauliflower
5 bunches of carrots.
¼ to ½ of the vegs were left over.
12 oranges (five or so were left over.)

Dip and Spoo (using blue food coloring)

2 pints nonfat yogurt
2 pints sour cream
4 packets of dip mix (diff. flavors) (used 3)

Star-shaped Macaroni & Cheese

Star-shaped pasta, 2 lbs; pre-cooked, drained and refrigerated before the con
Instant Cheese Sauce, 3 lbs.
Sharp cheddar cheese for noodles, 1 lb [You can make some even better cheese sauce by spending <\$10 more, by the way.]

Bread and toppings

Pilot Bread (4" round crackers), 3 lbs.
Fresh Baked Bread: Bread Machine Mixes, 8. White, White, White; Sourdough: Cracked Wheat, Wheat, Wheat; Italian Herb. (Three or four loaves went uneaten, probably because they came out so late. Timing is important with these, 5 hours or so elapse from mixing time to eating time.)
Butter & margarine (for the bread)
Peanut Butter
Brie (well, not really, but we almost bought it for the bread. We will next time.)

Popcorn

Salt
Spray stuff to make salt stick to the popcorn

Chocolate Chip Cookies, fresh baked

Mint chocolate chips, 2 pounds
Eggs, 4
Crisco, canola oil, flour, sugar, brown sugar, baking soda, vanilla extract, and other cookie-making ingredients
Food coloring

Chocolate

2 chocolate mousse cakes
Trader Joe's Chocolate ("Pound Plus"), 8.8 lbs:
Milk Choc
Milk Choc w/ Almonds
Semi-Sweet
Semi-Sweet with Almonds.
(Two bars each variety, 1.1 lb each. We only used 5 bars; 3 were left over.)
Two slabs of fudge (one was left over.)

Alcoholic Jell-O ("Zero Gravity Drinks")

Tropical Rum Punch
Pina Colada
Fuzzy Navel (sugar-free)
Whiskey Sour (sugar-free)
Daiquiri (sugar-free)

Party Equipment

Some of this was borrowed equipment, other stuff was purchased for the party. The leftovers have been stashed away, for reuse "next time."

Non-edible consumables

Foam cups (coffee) & plastic cups (water)
Napkins
Paper plates, 2-3 sizes
Plastic forks, knives, spoons
Aluminum Foil
Gallon zip bags (for grated cheese, etc), 4

Dishes

Plastic serving platters, two
Fish-shaped serving platter
Stainless steel mixing bowls, asst.

Utensils

Spatulas, 3
Knives for cutting bread, etc., 3
[with all the volunteers, we ended up very short on knives, and were saved only by the fact that half the participants carry Swiss-Army knives, and lent them to us.]
Vegetable peelers, 3
Measuring cups & spoons
Plastic flipper/spatula
Graters (cheese, 2; nutmeg, 1)

Furniture-type stuff

Five-foot table
Extension cords and terminal strips
Tape to keep door unlocked prophylactically
Doorstop (not used)
Blue & black plastic tubs to keep drinks cold
Red plastic tub to use as jumbo wastebasket

Appliances

Giant coffee maker (used for hot water)
Regular coffee maker (not used due to breakage)
Coffee grinder
Bottled-water dispenser
Artoo-breadtoos (bread machines), 4
Toaster ovens, 3
Crockpots, 2
Popcorn popper
Food Processor (for easy cheese shredding)
Hotplate

Signs for party

(party flyers with space for room number)
"And the Plate Was Full of Stars..."
Airlock. Security officers and Nam aides should use caution.
Sheridan's Favorite Oranges
Not a product placement
Keep Out! Methane Breathers Only
Warning! Contains Crystalline Dihydrogen Monoxide
Garibaldi's Popcorn, for toon-watching
Real Food Fund
Garibaldi's Usual
Ivanova's Coffee: Private Reserve
Zero-Gravity Drinks