

Title of Session: Preparing to Exhibit and/or Speak at a Convention/Conference
Creator: Janet Beasley
Curriculum: ADVANCED

Definition: Conventions are large events where attendees come with the expectations of learning, and finding product.

Goals: By the end of the session enthusiasts will know the basics of planning and participating at larger literary conventions and events.

Tools:

Wipe off board or flip chart and appropriate markers

- Name Tags
- Small bags
- 1 table cloth
- One nice pen or sharpie
- One ratty pen or pencil
- Small floral arrangement(s) or plant(s)
- Some books (a few nice, some ratty)
- A few “free” items to hand out at the table:
 - Pens
 - Pencils
 - Bookmarks
 - Bowl filled with individually wrapped candy or such
- 2 Mock convention/exhibitor tables
 - Table 1:** Make certain this table is very presentable, neatly arranged, etc. Use the table cloth neatly placed, nice books arranged neatly “for sale,” the plant(s) or flower(s) for decoration, your autograph pen or sharpie, your give away items and bowl of complimentary candy or such, a small sign that says “Please Take One” to put in front of your free items
 - Table 2:** Make certain this table is sloppily put together: No table cloth, some ratty books for sale neatly arranged, the ratty pen or pencil, a half empty bowl of candy with some empty wrappers in it and a tacky sign that says “FREE Candy!” for in front of it, no decorations

Ice Breaker:

Have the two tables set up before enthusiasts arrive

As they arrive greet them and give them a name tag and a bag to collect their free stuff

Welcome them to the “Your Group Name” Book Convention

Direct the enthusiasts to check out the two exhibitor tables

When all enthusiasts have arrived and checked out the two tables have them gather around the two tables. Ask them to share what they liked and didn't. Ask them what drew them to one table and not to the other.

Activity:

On your wipe off board or flip chart write the following bolded points, then go through them and discuss with enthusiasts

Conventions – Opportunity~Opportunity~Opportunity! – there are multiple ways you can go to a convention/conference

- **Attendee** – If the convention is holding classes and the exhibit floor is filled with literary professionals such as literary experts – established authors – publishers – agents – etc., it is a great event for gathering knowledge and insight, networking with like minded people, and even catching a glimpse at what your competition is doing in the writing world. If the convention has an exhibit floor filled with exhibiting authors only, as an author attendee other authors will not see you as a credible author, and fans will have no idea who you really are because you are “walking” among them.
- **Exhibitor** – An excellent tool for building your fan base and networking with other authors and industry professionals from a different angle than as an attendee. Being an exhibitor can begin to build credibility. There's a chance you will be noticed by others “in the background” so you always want to remain transparent and true to those visiting your table or booth.
 - **Exhibiting can be stressful** – but it can be worth the stress! At large conventions you have deadlines to meet, dealings with convention staff and others, contracts that need to be adhered to, and many other things that make it a realm of its own. It is a fast paced event, but again, well worth it if you are willing to put aside the stress and put on your best smile to meet and greet your guests.
- **Speaker or Facilitator** – the pinnacle in the convention world for gaining attention from readers, fellow authors, publishers, and other “key” people in the writing world is becoming a speaker or facilitator at a major convention. You will need to start at smaller ones to get experience and credentials behind you before the larger conventions will take notice.
- **Writing for trade specific magazines** – This may not sound like it has anything to do with conventions, but when in reality it has EVERYTHING to do with conventions. Writing for trade specific magazines is different than writing fictional short stories for magazines that cater to the general public. If you can land a publication spot to write about the literary world in trade specific magazines you will be in front of, and making an impression big enough, the “big guys” who will start to perk up – whether

you are good or not. So be on your “A” game if you are invited to speak at a convention.

- **Best Combination Possible** – If you can land a writing column in trade specific magazines that are hosting the conference, plus exhibit **and** speak or facilitate, you will be perceived as a top industry pro by everyone – you will be perceived as the expert.

Exhibiting:

- **Dress for success**, yes, a cliché but it holds a ton of truth
- **Table set-up**
 - Neatly arranged
 - Decorate (plants, flowers, table runners, etc.)
 - Books should be displayed in an attractive manner
 - Hold out one copy of each of your books and use as a “Display Copy.” Add a sticker to the front covers that says “Display Copy.” This will keep your cost down by having the same book to sample each time. It also gives fans an opportunity to “turn the pages” which helps with sales
 - Have a sharpie or nice pen on hand for autographing
 - Create a small display board that shows off upcoming books in your series
- **Check into banners** to display behind your table. HINT: Banners on floor stands can be used more readily than those that need to hang on a wall. Most venues do not allow you to hang things on their walls or drapes.
- **Electric** – if you need electric in your booth or at your table you will need to make sure you order it at the time of submitting your exhibitor application. Don’t wait to get there and see if they have it available.
- **Have a trash can on hand** – it keeps your area neat and tidy
- **Be sure to have a locking cash box with change and, if available, a mobile credit card reader** to accept purchases (you’ll need to be able to be online for the credit card function)
- **Know your surroundings** – people will ask you more than just about your books and products. They will want to know where the restroom is, where they can get food, where a certain exhibitor is set up. Most likely at a large convention you will be given a map of the show floor. Keep it handy.
- **Sell your print books.** Do not give your print books away. Your books hold more than a cover and thousands of words, they hold passion – dedication – hard work – and unique creativity. Most of all your books hold value, they have a worth, just like you as an author. Selling your books gives them value and worth. When you give books away at a convention it can “cheapen” your overall appearance.
- **If you’re going to do a give away at a convention, don’t make the prize your book.** Everyone will tend to fill out an entry form to see if they can win rather than buy a book. It is a good idea to keep with the theme of your book when it comes to hosting a give away at a convention.
 - Giveaway ideas other than your book, but sticking with your book’s theme:
 - A spa gift certificate for a romance theme
 - A bed & breakfast gift certificate for a romance theme

- A haunted tour gift certificate for paranormal
 - A movie gift certificate if you wrote about Hollywood
 - A restaurant gift certificate that matches your books theme
 - A gift basket filled with items from the country in which your story took place
- **Make sure you make the give away “Must Be Present to Win”** and designate a time at your booth or table to hold the drawing. That way you will avoid having to ship bulky items at high costs. Plus if the convention is international you would possibly have to deal with customs if you were shipping your gift overseas.
- **Make certain you stay in your booth/at your table except for necessary breaks.** You never want to leave your booth or table unattended for very long. If you must leave your area unattended, have a nice sign on hand to lay on the table that says you’ll be back in 5 minutes.
- **Be punctual and courteous** – those putting on the convention/conference have worked hard to get the word out about the event. In their marketing they include the times the exhibit floor will be open. It is a must that you are there when they ask, and stay as long as they ask. It is highly unprofessional to start packing up early to leave because you want to beat the traffic, or get home to see your favorite show. Often times attendees have paid to walk the show floor, and they too expect the exhibitors to be there until the end.
- **Clean up your area when the show is over** – don’t leave a bunch of trash strewn around, pick up after yourself
- **Surveys** – after the event you may receive an email asking you to fill out a survey as an exhibitor. These surveys help the convention to understand where their weak and strong points are so they can continually better the event in the future.

Speaking or Teaching:

- **Be prepared** – having your ducks in a row can make you or break you.
- **Research** – find out what the industry trends are regarding your topic
- Provide hand outs – whether you create a brochure or type up a hand-out, attendees love to “take away” not only knowledge but also tangible items that help them remember what you taught. This is a prime opportunity to promote your website and add new fans to your reading audience.
- **Visuals** – having visuals such as tangible items or digital presentations (power point and/or video) can really boost retention for attendees. Visual aids make you look even more professional. If you’re using a Power Point presentation, you can easily copy it to paper for your handout. Studies have proven that 3 days after an event people have retained 10% of what they hear, 35% of what they see, and 65% of what they see and hear together. Audio-visual tools are more than just tech-toys, they are highly useful.
- **Appearance** – Many facilitators will wear the standard navy blue or black “suit.” In our experience, breaking it down to a business casual look led our attendees to feel more welcome, and made us far more approachable. There are others who dress wildly and silly – yes, there is a time and place for such where people

expect it – depending on the topic though, you may not be taken serious and only remembered as the “funny one” who had a great costume. Don and I dressed differently between our classes. We offered a special effects class where “not normal” or “unreal” was to be expected. For this particular class we would wear lab coats, mad scientist wigs and thick glasses or goggles, and have the attendees enter our “science lab” to teach them how to create special effects. This was relevant to the class. However when we facilitated our classes on production coordination or how to work with a microphone it was back to business casual attire.

- **Props** – The writing world does not lend itself to a ton of props, but if you have a special pen that you use, or items that you look at to inspire yourself for your stories, these are great to pass around the attending audience if the class is of smaller size.
- **Elements** – What are the conditions in which you’ll be speaking? Are you inside or outside? Are there background noises you have to deal with? Are you speaking in a classroom or auditorium? Are the windows open?
- **Where will you be and what will you need** - Are you “on campus” or “off campus?” Is your room well marked so people can find you easily? Do you need electric? How is the lighting? If you have a presentation does the room hold the right gear for such?
- **Classroom Setup** – relaxed not sterile! So many breakout rooms come across as sterile. Make your room welcoming, like a cozy living room setting. Have coordinating background music playing low. Stand at the door and welcome those who are entering. Give them a small packet with a business card, brochure, pen, magnet, and the class handout in it. Have some bottled water and/or refreshments if allowed. Show or direct them to your “sale” table and on to their seats. If using a visual presentation have an eye catching visual looping while attendees are arriving.
- **Main Tent vs. Breakout Room** – 180 degrees from one another
 - If you land a main tent event, then you have arrived! In a main tent event you will most likely be on a stage in front of the entire attending crowd. A common title for this position is the Keynote Speaker. It may involve speaking on a popular, hot industry topic where you will tie in personal experience and “hype” up the audience, or it could be your story of success. There are many topics Keynote Speakers cover. Preparation is a must if you have been invited to serve as such.
 - A breakout room or session is where the intimate settings occur. You may be facilitating or speaking on a specified topic or product. Some conferences offer “demo” rooms. These are rooms where you may have displays set up, a looping presentation, “hands-on” exhibits, etc. You will be present in the room to answer questions as attendees casually stroll in and out. It could be compared to an open house style event.
- **Build a relationship right off the bat.** Don’t just dive into your presentation. “Get to know” your audience. Ask questions, welcome them from the podium, let them say hello. Make certain everyone has a handout if you’re using such.

- **Be sure to leave time for questions and answers** – one way you can avoid being interrupted throughout your presentation is to ask the attendees to write down their questions then you will open the floor for them to ask once the presentation is complete.
 - **If you don't know an answer, don't make one up!** Let them know you will do some research and get back with them. This is also a prime opportunity to build yet another business or fan relationship. Honesty is a key ingredient to building trust among the masses.
- **Hecklers** – there's one in every crowd! If you get a heckler, stay calm and don't feed them any fuel such as witty come backs, this only eggs them on. If they continue, you have the full right to ask them politely to stop, and if it continues you can even ask them to leave. You can also ask them to wait until after the session and they can talk to you personally about their issue. In extreme cases, if a heckler persists and has become a nuisance to others in the session by all means call security to escort them out.

Developing Your Seminars

- **Research** – the more research you do, the better your seminar will be
- **Don't read a speech** – Eye contact with your attendees is crucial. If you're reading your speech it becomes very impersonal. It comes across as “not caring” or not knowledgeable in your field or profession.
 - **Note cards are our friend.** ☺ Bullet points are best.
- **Rehearse – rehearse – rehearse**
- **Create visual presentations** – this takes time, and should be done after your session is prepared. Keep the slides simple, not too busy, and easy colors to see and read. Fonts should be easily read, and transitions should be smooth
- **Interview people** – if you're looking for some added boost to your presentation in general, interview some people who are experts on the subject to get more ideas
- **Make your seminars interactive.** There are many attendees who want to “be a part” of the action...even if it is as simple a thing as asking them to raise their hands or clap their hands and stomp their feet if they have done “such and such.” This gives them something to relate to you, and begins to draw them in to a realm where they will be attentive.

Most importantly, have fun! The chance to speak in front of people is an honor – never take the opportunity lightly, but don't become so serious you lose your wonderful personality. If you're having fun and presenting in an energetic manner, your attendees will not only be having fun, but will also stay tuned-in to what you have to say and will probably learn something without even knowing it. ☺

Discussion:

- What would your exhibit booth or table look like? What kinds of things would you have in it other than your books?
- What do you think you would like to speak on at a literary conference?
- If you had a heckler, do you think you would be able to handle it?

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- **Attendee**
- **Exhibitor**
- **Speaker or Facilitator**
- **Writing for trade specific magazines**
- **Best Combination Possible – writer, speaker, exhibitor**

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- **Table set up**
- **Check into banners**
- **Electric**
- **Have a trash can on hand**
- **Know your surroundings**

- **Sell your print books**
- **If you're going to do a give away at a convention, don't make the prize your book.**
- **Make certain you stay in your booth/at your table except for necessary breaks**
- **Be punctual and courteous**
- **Clean up your area when the show is over**
- **Surveys**

Speaking or Teaching:

- **Be prepared**
- **Research**
- **Visuals**
- **Appearance.**
- **Props**
- **Elements**
- **Where will you be and what will you need**

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