

All Things Tech

Smofcon37

Albuquerque, NM

2019-12-08

(Updated 2019-12-10)

Who Are We?

- Rick Kovalcik (Boston, Worldcon76)
- Fred Bauer (DC, Discon3)
- Other “Techies” Around (alphabetically)
 - Eric Gasior (Balticon)
 - Bill Keaton (DC)
 - John Maizels (Australia, Aussiecon, CoNZealand)
 - Ron Oakes (Here!)
 - Bill Parker (Texas, Lonstarcon)
 - Chuck Shimada (LA, Various Worldcons)
 - Carl Zwanzig (SF area, Various Worldcons)

Description

- Conventions need A/V equipment to do programming and events. At the very least, panels need sound reinforcement, or PA equipment, to ensure that the panelists can be heard, and more and more often need projectors and screens for videos and presentations.
- How do conventions and convention organizations of various sizes go about getting what they need? What are the advantages and disadvantages of owning their own equipment, versus renting from the venue, borrowing from nearby (or not so nearby) organizations, or renting from other suppliers? And, how many rolls of gaffers tape do you actually need, and why?

Description (continued)

- You might even get to hear a horror story or two!
- How can tech be organized so that it is focused on making the convention stronger rather than on the (admittedly engrossing) details of the tech itself?
- Tech Costs and Setups. Best practices. How to work with programming. What information do you need
- How do we go about teaching panelists, moderators, MCs, etc. some of the basic things they need to know ...

Description (continued)

- How to properly talk into a microphone
- How to not abuse a mic
- How (not) to adjust a boom stand
- How to connect to a projector
- How to turn off a projector
- How to not mess with things they shouldn't
- How to not make the techies cringe or cry

Anything Else?

- Anything else you'd like us to cover?
- Or any other “techies” we've failed to give a shout out to?

Sources of Gear

- The Venue (or PSAV or other in-house)
- Local Rental Houses/National chains
- or not so Local Rental Houses
- Local Fannish Groups or People
- or not so Local Fannish Groups or People

The Venue (or PSAV)

- Probably the “easiest” for you
- ... And the most expensive
- Watch for “service charges” of 25% or more
- Important when negotiating the contract to make sure you have the right to bring in your own gear if you want to do that, or hire outside company
- Starting to see clauses like “All Truss” must come from XXX
- Expect that any Rigging will need to be done by the venue or trusted supplier, with them supplying associated equipment
- Have someone Tech knowledgeable look over the contract!

Other Venue Issues

- If They Provide The Gear Do They Need To Run It?
 - You might actually want that (if short on con staff)
- Power
 - Starting to see a venues wanting to charge for wall outlets. JUST SAY NO. Again, the time to deal with this is when negotiating the contract
 - Expect to pay for major power (Ballrooms, etc.)
 - Are PDUs included?
 - Sometimes possible to negotiate deals for the entire event
- Union requirements
 - You might provide the equipment, but might be required to pay them to set up and run it

Local Rental Houses

- Exist In Most Major Cities
- Almost always cheaper than the venue
- But you are probably going to need to pay for delivery and return
- Weekend / Holiday Weekend Issues
- Maybe you can pickup and return the gear yourself
- Will typically need insurance binder

... not so Local Rental Houses

- Worldcon often uses non-local rental houses
 - Damron
 - Group in KC expressed interest in this sort of thing
 - Etc.
- Probably more of a headache for most cons
 - But wanted to mention the option
 - If in a higher-cost area, sometimes a deal can be found a state or two away

Local Fannish Groups or People

- Several Groups / People in the USA have significant amounts of gear
 - Baltimore (Balticon / BSFS www.bsfs.org)
 - Boston (Arisia arisia.org, MCFI mcfi.org, etc.)
 - Chicago (Capricon ???)
 - LA (SCIFI scifiinc.org)
 - New Mexico (Ron Oakes, Bubonicon, etc.)
 - Phoenix (Leprecon ???)
 - Salt Lake City ???
 - Seattle (Norwescon)
 - Etc.

Local Fannish Groups ... (continued)

- Generally the cheapest (dollar) way to get gear
- But may be the most people points
- Sometimes equipment is older or you need to deal with multiple people
- Consider buying your own
 - Payback may be only one or two years if the only other option is renting from the venue
 - But you will need someone committed to taking care of the gear

Options for Buying Gear

- B&H Photo Video (www.bhphotovideo.com)
 - My favorite
- Adorama (www.adorama.com)
 - Not as good as B&H about what is actually in stock
- Amazon (smile.amazon.com)
 - smile lets you donate a percentage to a non-profit
- Sweetwater (www.sweetwater.com)
- Monoprice (www.monoprice.com)
- Ebay (www.ebay.com)
 - More work and be careful of one-offs
- Be sure to try things out ASAP (especially cables)
- Christmas Season is a good time to buy because of longer return periods
- Make sure you tell them if you are (sales) tax-exempt

... not so Local Fannish Groups

- Many Worldcons etc. have gotten gear from “far away” fannish groups (Boston, etc.)
- Recent NASFiC got some gear from LA (as well as from a “local” Filker / Fan)
- You generally need to arrange transportation or “fannish express”
 - I’ve used YRC Freight a number of times
 - American Airline “Entertainment” Shipping
 - Other airlines have similar but more restrictive programs
 - International is much more complicated
 - Use a customers broker and preferably a commercial shipper

If You Rent A Truck (Bigger Than A Van)

- You MUST stop at any open weigh stations!!!
 - Recommended to stop at first truck stop with a scale if driving out of town to check
 - It is very easy to overload a 24 foot or 26 foot truck (max non-CDL weigh is 26,000 pounds)
- Electronic Reporting May Be Required!!!
 - Even if you don't have a CDL
 - As of December 18, 2017
 - Some exemptions
 - Driving less than 100 *air-miles* from home and returning home every night
 - For less than eight days to allow paper logs for instances of a vehicle breakdown, seasonal demand, and expansion needs (which IMO covers us in a lot of cases) BUT **you still need to do paper logs** and carry a copy of the FMCSA to TRALA letter (https://www.trala.org/blog_home.asp?display=317)
 - Paper log books are available at most truck stops and turnpike gas stations
 - For more info ... <https://ryder.com/eld>
 - Other companies probably have similar info pages
- You may need a DOT Medical Certificate
 - <https://www.drivebigtrucks.com/blog/dot-physical-exam-requirements-what-to-expect-tdi/>
 - I have never been asked for one, but I know someone who has

Other Gear Issues

- How new is it?
- How different is it?
 - WC76 “standardized” on 3 different types of gear for PAV
 - As opposed to Loncon3
 - Personally I try to never buy only one of something
- Spares
 - Especially for borrowed gear
- Big tent vs. PAV

Interfacing with Programming

- How many rooms does programming need tech in?
 - Current best practice says all rooms, except small rooms (less than 50 people), should have sound amplification
 - How many microphones?
 - It is best if people don't need to share
 - Systems that take more than 4 or 6 microphones are more expensive
 - But, hopefully not all rooms need projectors
 - Try to get programming to schedule panels with projectors in as few rooms as possible
 - Try not to have to move projectors or sound systems around

... Programming (continued)

- Get information and set expectations with Program Participants
 - 4:3 vs 16:9 projectors etc.
 - Email Smofcon37 sent out is a good example
- What do they need?
 - (I had a form which I made for a past Worldcon ...)
 - Projector? (video or video & sound? VGA or just HDMI?)
 - DVD Player? Blu-Ray Player?
 - Laptop (because they aren't bringing their own)?
 - Wireless Microphone?
 - Anything Else?

... Programming (continued)

- What are they bringing?
 - They really should tell you if they are bringing anything other than a laptop (PC or Mac)
 - Having a panelist decide they are bringing their own projector generally doesn't end well
 - They SHOULD bring any adapters necessary to get HDMI out of their laptop (Mac adapters, mini-HDMI, micro-HDMI, Display Port, USB-C, etc.)

... Programming (continued)

- Standardize setups to make things as easy as possible for the Program Participants
 - Long HDMI cable from projector to head table
 - Long VGA cable from projector to head table if necessary
 - 1/8 inch jack (really 3.5 mm) for sound from laptop
 - Another 1/8 inch jack for sound from projector
 - Or be prepared to help them get sound directly out of their laptop

... Programming (continued)

- Have “crash carts” with extra audio system and extra projector / screen for last minute requests / failures
- Have a place for Program Participants to test that their laptop works with the (a?) projector
 - Program Ops / Green Room / etc.
- Allow for setup time before start of programming
 - Figure 1 man hour per room
 - Techies are often NOT morning people
 - Burning the candle at both ends is not fun

Interfacing with Events

- Like programming but more complicated
- What special things are they bringing?
 - Instruments, etc.
- What special things do they need?
 - Music Stands, etc.
- Rehearsals / sound checks
 - Make sure these are scheduled with enough time

... Events (continued)

- Sample general form
 - <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1khlGRIAvCquNAucFS6lxHil3q4-6Q-BDUrxljvLG9nk/prefill>
- Sample sound form
 - <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B58cj00FER1UQS1PeC1tdkYwN1E/view>

Interfacing with Exhibits

- As exhibits get more complicated, sometimes they want “Tech” gear
 - TVs
 - Projectors
 - Sound
 - Raspberry Pi
 - Etc.

How To ...

- How to properly talk into a microphone
 - Close
 - In Line With Your Mouth
 - Don't Stand In Front of (or Sometimes Behind) a Speaker
 - Not as necessary with a **good** mic (Shure Beta 58 etc.)
- How to not abuse a mic
 - Try not to drop
 - Don't get it wet (etc.)
- How (not) to adjust a boom stand
 - Feel free to adjust so the Mic is at your mouth

How To ... (continued)

- How to connect to a projector
 - HDMI vs. VGA
 - Mirror your screen
 - PC - Function Something
 - Mac – System Preferences
- How to turn off a projector
 - Don't just unplug it (be careful of power cords)
 - Generally press the power button twice
 - And wait for the fan to turn off before unplugging

How To ... (continued)

- How to not mess with things they shouldn't
- How to not make the techies cringe or cry

About That Gaff Tape

- Can you ever have too much Gaff Tape?
 - Well it does go bad
 - Use it up in the order you buy it
- 1/4 to 1/3 roll of black per PAV room each time you need to set it up
 - More for large venues
- 3 inch or 4 inch may be better if you have big cables
 - Don't bother with "tunnel" tape
- One roll of white useful for labeling things
- One roll of red / orange useful for marking things bad
- One or more rolls of yellow for highlighting things to be careful of
- There are also things like caution zebra tape (black / yellow)
- My preferred place for order is thetapeworks.com
 - They also have things like batteries

Bottom Line

- If you are doing “serious” tech, expect tech to be 10-20% of your total budget
- And perhaps more if you need to get stuff from the venue

Questions?

- Any questions?
- Feel free to contact us
 - rick.kovalcik@gmail.com
 - fred@bauer.xyz
- Other resources
 - tf@techno-fandom.org
 - You may need to subscribe first
 - smofs@lists.sflovers.org
 - If you are not a member, Sharon Sbarsky or Rick Kovalcik will approve it or send it on to the correct place