swancon
promotions and marketing plan
2012-2014

introduction

The purpose of the CSC is to create a sustainable long-term system that eliminates unnecessary repetition of work and allows us to build on past success. With this focus in mind, this marketing plan is the beginning of a process that will make the work of promoting and growing Swancon easier and more effective.

It is not the intention of the CSC, or this plan, to remove the ability of individual ConComs to be "creative". Rather, the intention is to make more room to be creative and have fun, while removing the need to continually re-create things that have worked well in the past. As a volunteer organisation, we need to respect the people who are giving of their time and energy by ensuring they are not asked to continually reinvent wheels. We want to free up time and energy to work on implementing, and where necessary improving, what's been done before

The first year of this plan will be dedicated to two main goals. Firstly, to increase memberships at Swancon 2013. Secondly, to put in place a permanent brand that will be used in 2014 and into the future.

Swancon has 37 years of convention history, and currently we are not using that incredible history to our advantage. Our new branding will include a logo and consistent look for marketing materials, a website and social media presence designed to remain in place over the years, to be a constant source of information and an archive of our past conventions.

Currently we are failing to attract people who would happily volunteer to put on their dream con were there more support provided to allow them to focus on doing so. Once this infrastructure is in place, individual ConComs will be given the freedom to focus on the most important aspect of their role, which is organising the convention itself. The many hours spent every year on creating marketing materials, building websites, creating relationships with businesses, publishers, and media outlets, can now be spent almost exclusively on finding guests and building fantastic programs, creating the best experience possible for convention members.

objectives

We are aiming to grow Swancon's membership in order to create a larger, more vibrant convention that attracts a wide range of people. But we cannot improve our membership numbers simply by doing things the way they've always been done.

The next few years will involve some upheaval and will require trying and perhaps failing at new ways of doing things. In other words, this plan is the best plan that we have now, but it may require changes as we begin to implement it and see the results. However, in order to make sure we are working together, any changes must be discussed and approved by the CSC.

2013 Objectives:

» Develop and implement a new, permanent Swancon brand, to be launched at Swancon 2013.
» Ensure that all individual ConCom marketing complements WASFF's long-term objectives.
» CSC and ConComs to work together to reduce volunteer workloads and make marketing Swancon more time efficient and beneficial to multiple cons.
» Increase membership sales and help return a surplus to WASFF accounts.
» Engage all members in promoting Swancon to our friends and colleagues - the most successful method of attracting new members is through word of mouth, and the influence of current members.

» Improve our relationships with booksellers, publishers, writers, editors and other businesses. We should become strong advocates of their work and in return encourage them to be strong advocates of Swancon.

2014 objectives

By launch of Swancon 2014:
» Guests and theme ready to be announced.
» Logo and style guide ready for use.
» Bookmarks/flyers etc ready to distribute at 2014 launch.
» Branded website ready before launch, which will be designed to remain as a permanent site for subsequent Swancons.
» Have a working online membership system that will feed into a permanent Swancon database.

Fandom IRL

While the internet has made it much easier to promote Swancon, it has in some ways reduced the value of the convention as a place to discuss and celebrate shared interests.

Fans can now find online communities for almost any fandom imaginable, and connect with people from all over the world who share their interests.

Therefore, we need to change our message and our approach to attracting new members. There is no over-arching "Swancon community". There are numerous communities, sometime overlapping, sometimes not. Swancon is a place for these communities to meet once a year and be exposed to fandoms and ideas they may not otherwise discover.

It's also an opportunity to catch up with fellow fans in real life, making the social aspects of Swancon inreasingly important. While groups of regular Swancon members stay in touch throughout the year, Swancon is often a once-a-year chance to catch up with others.

We can adapt to this in the following ways:

» Target members of online and offline fan clubs and groups. Encouraging them to sell Swancon to their fellow members, and provide space for them to provide program content.
» Focus on the social aspects of Swancon, and make them an essential part of the program.
» Emphasise the discovery of new interests and people, to learn what other fandoms are talking about.

2013 Positives:
» A good range of guests, each of whom has a good fan base to potentially tap into.
» A good program that appeals to a wide range of people, provided that this is released early enough to promote widely.
» Success of 2012 gold-coin donation day has given us a good list of people who will be open to finding out more.

2013 Potential problems:
» Loss of many regular members due Natcon being held in Canberra three weeks after Swancon 2013. This will mean a loss not only of those who only attend Natcons, but also of those who attend for the social aspects of Swancon, to see their Natcon friends.

» Low attendance, and thus a higher proportion of newer members, will affect the social experience of the convention and the ability to attract experienced talent for the program. If not managed well, this will have flow-on effects to future conventions.

» Timing of the Natcon means potential sponsorship and promotional opportunities will be reduced, as business and media will prefer to focus attention and resources on the national convention.

» Reducing membership price for newbie members may have a negative impact on convincing returning members of the value of full price membership. We need to find ways of making repeat membership valuable.

Social media:

» Social media provides a cheap and accessible way of communicating with current and potential new members.

» The main focus of our social media accounts should be on celebrating SF. In doing so we can show, rather than tell, people what Swancon is for: discussing, debating and celebrating science fiction, fantasy, horror and the ideas they raise.

» They are also a good way of getting information about the con itself, however this should make up no more than a third of the content.

» Announcements should have a positive focus, and match the tone of the medium. People who are unfamiliar with a particular platform should not be using the official accounts.

» When in doubt, don't post it. Write it, think about it, check it for typos and errors of fact, check that someone else hasn't already made the same reply.

» Use RT and share functions. Credit the people you found it from. Swancon accounts aren't content creators, but we can point people to fans who create and discuss.

» They are not for personal conversations. In-jokes may occasionally be OK, but keep it to a minimum.

» While growth in followers is good, the focus should be on organic growth of *relevant* followers, eg potential members or sponsors.

» If dealing with complaints, respond promptly and politely. If the complaint looks to be ongoing, try to move the conversation to private message or email.

» Don't feed the trolls. If we can't solve the problem, there's no value in prolonging the conversation.

» Encourage guests to promote us through their accounts, and in return, promote both current and past guests and their work.

» Don't bombard followers with information. Occasions such as before price rises and before the con itself will benefit from increased activity, but balance that with times of non-sales related updates.

» Pay attention to deadlines and don't overlap them: eg don't have awards voting close at the same time as a price rise. Allow each call for action to have time to itself.

Online advertising:

» Focus on finding people with relevant interests, Swancon is a niche interest, so we should choose placements wisely.

» Experiment with new, catchy ways of describing Swancon, with a focus on the theme of celebrating fandom "in real life".

» Encourage people to like/follow social media accounts. People are unlikely to join based on one ad, so we need to get them interested enough to sign up for more information.

Printed material:

» Printed material costs money whether it gets into the right hands or not. We can alleviate this problem through careful placement - SF bookstores, SF conventions etc.

» "Awareness raising" is not a useful goal. It takes time and repetition for awareness of Swancon to convert into membership sales and with our limited budget we can't afford to rely on printed material to do this. The main focus of printed materials should be to create enough interest to direct people to the website and social media accounts.

» Wherever possible, printed material should be accompanied by a low pressure sales pitch from a real person. This is another reason why good relationships with businesses are useful, to encourage them to talk to their customers about Swancon and then give them a flyer.

» The high cost and lack of personalised follow up mean we have ruled out paid ads in newspapers etc for now. Targeted, grass-roots marketing is our best option.

2013 plan

April-May

» Data entry of gold-coin attendees to be completed by 18 April.
» Email to gold-coin attendees encouraging purchase of membership before 30 June price rise.
» Flyers and/or bookmarks at bookstores and related outlets.
» Material will:
  » promote guests with short description or list of works;
  » succinctly describe Swancon to new audience; and
  » encourage people to visit website and/or to follow us at our social media accounts.
» Website completed, including:
  » simple, easy to follow intro page with clear links to online store, social media, sponsors' logos;
  » an easy to use menu;
  » individual pages for sponsors, guests, and (as necessary) art show, awards etc;
  » a working rss feed and a link to this next to social media icons; and
  » an easy to find email contact link, with emails to go to one person, who will reply or delegate within 24 hours of receiving an email.
» Social media accounts to maintain regular posting of interesting SF news, links, images etc. in order to attract and maintain followers.
» Membership lists to be compiled in a useful format to begin analysis of members.

June

» Focus for this month will be on price increase deadline of 30 June.
» Social media accounts to maintain regular posting of interesting SF news, links, images etc.
» Prepare for Supanova stall: banners, flyers, committee members to staff.
» Ads for interstate conventions happening this month, with a focus on guests and price increase deadline.

July

» Social media accounts to maintain regular posting of interesting SF news, links, images etc.
» Compile a list of relevant businesses, including the name and position of the best contact at each place (in consultation with professional relationships committee).
» Compile a list of relevant online and offline fan and writers groups,

including the name and position of the best contact for each group (in consultation with professional relationships committee).
» Prepare letters to arrange in-person meetings with businesses and fan/writers groups.

August
» Social media accounts to maintain regular posting of interesting SF news, links, images etc.
» In-person meetings with businesses and fan/writers groups. *Target: 4 meetings.*
» Create electronic information pack containing information about Swancon to be given to schools, particularly science and English teachers, and teacher librarians.

September
» Social media accounts to maintain regular posting of interesting SF news, links, images etc.
» In-person meetings with businesses and fan/writers groups. *Target: 4 meetings.*
» Compile names and contact details of teachers and teacher librarians, starting with those with links to Swancon members.
» Begin distributing individually addressed information packs.

October
» Social media accounts to maintain regular posting of interesting SF news, links, images etc.
» In-person meetings with businesses and fan/writers groups. *Target: 4 meetings.*

» In person or phone follow-up of teachers and librarians.
» Relatively quiet marketing period, focus on in-person contact and program development.

November
» Social media accounts to maintain regular posting of interesting SF news, links, images etc.
» In-person meetings with businesses and fan/writers groups. *Target: 4 meetings.*
» Relatively quiet marketing period, focus on in-person contact and program development.

December
» Social media accounts to maintain regular posting of interesting SF news, links, images etc.

» In-person meetings with businesses and fan/writers groups. *Target: 4 meetings.*
» Relatively quiet marketing period, focus on in-person contact and program development.

January
» Draft program released online.
» Social media accounts to maintain regular posting of interesting SF news, links, images etc.
» Announce prices for advertising in con book.
» In-person follow up with businesses and fan/writers groups to inform them of draft program and advertising rates.
» Prepare media release for newspapers, radio, online sites.
» Online advertising to re-commence.

February
» Social media accounts to maintain regular posting of interesting SF news, links, images etc.
» Fully staffed stalls at all O Days, ensure banners and plenty of flyers.
» Collect contact info from O day participants and have data entry completed ASAP.
» Email to all O Day contact list
» Arrange photo-ops and interviews: find people willing and able to appear in photo shoots - eg Rebel Empire, former guests, etc.
» Online advertising to continue.

March
» Social media accounts to maintain regular posting of interesting SF news, links, images etc.

» Focus on building excitement, and creating urgency with price rise one week before convention starts.
» Online advertising to continue.

April
» Count money.
» Sleep.