

PUTTING ON A CLOWN CONVENTION

By Ralph Dewey 2/18/2007

This rough manuscript is intended to be helpful hints and advice for anyone wanting to put on a clown convention or workshop. It's based upon my experience plus some input by others who have done the same thing. I hope that it will be helpful to you. If you have some input or discover that I was off on a few points, let me know.

UP FRONT AND GENERAL DECISIONS:

- You will need one or two big names in order to draw a lot of attendees. You must book most stars or headliners at least a year in advance.
- Choose the time of year for your convention when clowns are not too busy. The summer months and the time just before and after it are busy for most clowns. If the potential attendees have to choose between making \$50.00 or spending about \$150.00 on a weekend, guess which option they will take?
- Will local city events compete with your convention? Don't have it during the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. Not only will motels be full, but some people will have to make a choice about which event to attend.
- Which days: Saturday, Friday night & Saturday or several days?
- Location considerations: cost, near to motels, airports, restaurants. If using a motel for the convention, make sure that it has a restaurant or one is very near.
- Facilities: It's dumb to have the convention so that people have difficulty getting to it. Think of how convenient the convention location will be for out-of-towners. Churches are usually free or cheap, but they will need to clean up on Saturday night to get ready for Sunday morning. This may limit your convention length. If the convention is not at the motel, arrange for attendee pickup or pickup from airport to motel. Ask if there are any limitations or rules about using; pyrotechnics, water, helium balloons, bubbles or smoke devices.
- Make sure the classrooms will be large enough for the attendance. If you expect 300 people and you have 6 classes at the same time, each class would possibly have 50 people or more. Headliners should be placed in larger classrooms. Non-headliners or local lecturers should get the smaller rooms. Make sure you have enough advanced time to set up decorations, dealer tables, etc. You also need time for dealer sales after the convention is officially over.
- When making contracts (contracts are best) or arrangements with a motel or a convention site, make sure there is a complete and clear understanding of what you need. Once you've gone over all the details with the motel manager (or person in charge), ask them if there are any other fees or hidden charges. Try to determine how much flexibility that you can have with last minute changes or charges if you have to cancel.
- When booking headliners, speakers, musicians or other professionals, make sure that all is clear about his/her arrangements and accommodations. They may need to be picked up from the airport or an address to ship items ahead. It's wise to treat the headliners like royalty so they will want to come back again. One convention gave a gift basket of snacks drinks and an embroidered shirt to each of the instructors as they checked into the hotel. It was a nice touch that made them feel special.

- You must advertise the convention well in advance. Clown magazine ads are one of the best methods. Bulk mail outs, if you have good mailing list, is effective too. Most clown conventions will allow you to put flyers on their resource table. You can also send out press releases to local radio stations and newspapers. You can even put out flyers door to door. But that's a lot of work for very little results. You can advertise the convention on the Internet easily and without any cost.
- Count the cost for headliners, convention location, advertising, meals, room decorations, banquets, tee shirts, busses and other expenses. Can you absorb the convention cost if a big disaster (ice storm, flooding, etc.) prevents people from coming?
- What to Charge? At least more than your cost. {What if you have a very poor attendance?} Too high a registration fee will discourage attendance.
- Make the notices and flyers crystal clear so that people are not confused. It may be clever to call an event, "Joey Rodeo". But what is it? Is it a clown version of a rodeo, is it some sort of class or is it a real one? Is it included in the convention price or do you need to buy tickets. Should attendees bring a costume or props for it, or what? Try to thoroughly explain the events and the choices. Provide a detailed map of the convention location in the mail out.
- Think twice before video taping the performance shows. Since most background music is copyrighted, you legally need to pay royalty fees to the publisher.
- You can't do everything. Delegate the tasks to your convention helpers. But check with them to make sure all is getting done. Some workers are not good about keeping their commitments. Check with them one week before the event. Be sure to ask detailed questions about the status.
- Competition (skits, makeup, performance, etc.) tends to create a class system of stars and peons. You run the risk of generating hurt feelings. Even with your best intentions or with the best integrity on your part, losers will sometimes perceive that they were treated unfairly. If you have makeup competition, be sure that you allow enough time for the people to put their makeup on. Since it takes time for the judges to fill out skit competition evaluation forms, you will need to fill the dead time between the skits. Maybe have an emcee tell jokes.
- You may want to limit the number of skit or performance contestants. If too many people sign up, the judging may run over into another event.
- Dress-up banquets are appropriate for longer conventions of four days or more. They are not necessary for weekend conventions.
- One neat idea is to put an idea book together from submitted ideas. When they pre-register, they can send in an idea. You put the book together and they get it at the convention. However, very few people will send in an idea if it is optional. Those that walk-in can buy the book for \$5 at the door until the books run out. You will need to print up about 20% more than the pre-registration amount.
- Find out if performers or lecturers mind if they are audio or video taped.
- Assign someone to send out press releases to newspapers and radio stations.
- You can have a convention program with advertising space sold to vendors or local businesses. Restaurants will often want to offer discount coupons to the attendees.
- You may want to offer bussed outings or sightseeing excursions for the spouses that have tagged along to the convention. Any field trip or group outing has lots of liabilities connected to it. You may be covered by the insurance of a motel or church while on their property but once you are off, you could be on your own.

- What if there is a medical emergency? Do you have a plan for getting them to the nearest hospital? Offering medication (nasal spray, cough medicine, pain-killers, etc.) to sick attendees has potential liabilities.
- If you offer optional items like lunches, T-shirts, or similar items, collect the money up front as part of the pre-registration. Make it non-refundable after a specific deadline. (Be sure that the deadline allows you enough time to prepare the items.) You won't want to be left holding the bag if there are lots of no-shows. Make your registration forms crystal clear and void of any confusing verbiage. Use a single deadline date, not two or more for different situations. You can almost bet that at least a few of the attendees will misunderstand something.
- Each year keep the stuff that works, but change about 10 to 25% of the classes, activities or events. Keep looking to improve it instead of keeping the status quo.
- I've been to a few conventions that were hosted by a single dealer. No other dealers were allowed to have tables. You could only sell by consignment through the host dealer who took 30% off the top of your selling price. One thing this does is to limit some attendees and lecturers. A guy from Hawaii said that he couldn't justify the loss of income from missed gigs plus the cost of traveling to the mainland without a way to recoup his expenses. If he could have been a dealer, he had a chance of maybe breaking even by selling books, videos, magic tricks, etc.

HEADLINERS, DEALERS & LECTURERS:

- Designate someone to make arrangements with the headliners for, airline tickets, airport pickup, their motel, their contract or deal, helper for their table, etc.
- Make it clear to headliners, who handle their own flights, which airport is best for them to use. If you are reimbursing them, make it clear that it is for coach not first class tickets.
- Don't have more than one dealer for every 50 attendees. Otherwise dealers don't make enough money. Dealers are usually the best lecturers and will not come back if they didn't make a profit. When in doubt, have fewer dealers. One convention that I've attended only limits the dealers by the available space at the university where it is held. Too many times several dealers carry the same products. This situation sometimes leads to price wars which make it tough for dealers to make a profit.
- Try to pick dealers that specialize in different areas and let them know who the other dealers are so they don't bring things that compete with each other. Don't have several dealers that specialize in the same items.
- Secure the dealer room from off-hour shoppers and shoplifters.
- Coordinate performance shows with the sound technician and the headliners. Keep to the planned schedule so that the correct music gets played on cue.
- Insist that lecturers don't run over on their time slot. Allow time for cleaning up messy classes. Don't have classes back to back. Allow about 15 minutes between them.
- If headliners or lecturers want to use water (spitting classes), fire/smoke (special effects or burning Bible), cream pies that get thrown, large amounts of soap bubbles or any kind of dangers activities, make sure it's okay with the convention location (hotel, church or convention hall). You wouldn't want to start a fire, stain the carpet, create a slipping hazard or set off the smoke detectors or sprinklers. Incendiaries and flash pots may be illegal in some cities.

- Decide if lecturers can sell lecture notes or products in their classrooms. Selling products in the room usually makes the lecture run over because people won't clear out quickly.
- You may not want to let local clowns sell clown trinkets or jewelry as dealers. Even though they often don't sell very much, they could possibly keep the regular dealers from making enough profit. When people ask you to let them sell one item (or only a few), suggest that they locate a dealer that will let them place it on their table.
- Don't place dealers in different areas. Put them all in one big room. This helps with security as well. The next best arrangement is to have adjacent rooms for the dealers. Don't put dealers in open hallways where non-convention people can mess with the products. Don't put part of the dealers by themselves on a different floor. They will be too isolated and not get the traffic that they need. Determine how difficult it is for dealers with big loads to get to the dealer room. Try to avoid locations where they have to go up steps, down in a basement or through long winding paths to get there.
- Do not put dealers who sell the same products next to each other. Some customers may feel bad if a dealer sees them buy from another dealer instead of from them. When customers can readily compare prices of the same product, it may cause some hard feelings or embarrassing questions about the difference in pricing.
- Try to keep the same lecturer in the same room for all of his classes if possible. It can be a hassle to pack up your stuff and haul it upstairs for the next class.
- Some dealers may need a couple of hours or more to set up their products and to repack them. Be sure to allow enough time for this.
- Check the type of insurance coverage at the convention location. You may need to restrict the use of pyrotechnics or potentially dangerous activities. You may consider having all of the lecturers and performers sign a release form so that you won't get sued if they do something that injures an attendee.
- Decide if you need headliners or lecturers to be a judge for competition. Will let get paid for their efforts? Will be judging be anonymous or open? Sometimes dealers notice a drop in sales if they score the local favorite low.

DETAILS AND PLANNING:

- Planning the schedule of events: Allow enough time between classes & sessions. Don't have back to back events where people can't get to the classes on time. Don't have noisy music or loud classes next to other classes. Post the entire schedule at the entrance of each lecture room, but highlight the lectures for that particular room. At week-long conventions, classes are better attended the first few days, later in the week, attendance falls off due to tiredness of the attendees. Some conventions send a staff person to each class and announce when there is only 5 minutes of class time left.
- Test your class and program schedules against two criteria. In your mind, pretend to be each instructor and see if he is scheduled for more than one class at a time and if there would be enough setup time for him before each event. Test the schedule against the available rooms to make sure none are double booked. Remember that the auditorium (stage, etc.) needs to be vacant so some can setup the sound and lighting. If something is going on, you can't setup for the next show or performance. Will clowns have enough time to put makeup on and take it off?
- You can offer only one choice at each lecture time so that everyone must attend the same classes. However, most people want a choice rather than a single track. They

want to pick from several classes at each lecture time. You probably should repeat some of the key lectures so that people can attend all of the lectures that they want. Try not to have two of the same type of classes (for example, advanced magic) at the same time.

- Lecturers may need you to supply equipment for them or to assist them. (VCR, overhead projector, boxes shipped ahead, easels, stage backdrops, table covers, tape player, lapel microphones, etc.) Who pays for the balloons & pumps if they are needed for a class?
- Place pre-registrations on a computer database program. This will allow you to printout information needed for the registration tables. Computer generated labels are great for your bulk mail-outs.
- What kind of badges or nametags will you use? The adhesive type is good for single-day events. They seldom stick well enough for multiple-day events. You may like to print them out on a computer. Avery (the stationary company) has several good selections. You may like the plastic badge (with a pin) type. One way to get most of the plastic parts back is to have a drawing near the end of the convention. Have them throw the plastic part in one box and the nametag in another box for the drawing.
- If you make people exit the premises for a meal, some will not come back or get back on time. It is better to eat at the convention site if possible. At any rate, decide how to handle all of the mealtimes. One good method is to collect the money for reserved box or sack lunches as part of the pre-registration. Be sure to collect it up front. Knowing the required number of meals keeps you from preparing too much or too little. It is better to have a group (teenage church mission group) use your event as a fundraiser. You can have them sell donuts & coffee in the morning and sodas and snacks in the afternoon to make money. They need the money and you need the meals provided. It's a win-win situation. They can provide the necessary manpower that you may not have. Then to, you don't have to deal with any lack of sales. Arrange for the staff meals to be at cost or at a discount. Arrange for the staff meals & drinks to be picked up as a block and delivered to a room. If you sell extra meals at the registration desk, make sure you have all of the prepaid ones accounted for. It's easy to accidentally sell "sold" meal tickets if you aren't careful. It is better to let the lunch group sell their own on-site meals themselves.
- It's a good idea to make forms to help you keep organized. Some of the forms could be; pre-registration, walk-in registration, evaluation & questionnaire, headliner contract, dealer contract, motel pickup list, staff lunch list, show tickets (for invited guest children & parents), convention schedule and room location map, etc.
- One of the biggest problems at a convention is registration. Don't let it be a bottleneck. If you have the manpower, place all of the pre-registrations in envelopes or bags. Arrange them in alphabetical order to facilitate check-in. If you are using a database to keep track of pre-registrations (and you should), print out a list in label form with all their information. It might contain their name and address, if they bought a meal, ordered a T-shirt or if they have signed up for skit competition. Cut out the labels and staple or tape them to each envelope or bag.
- If the convention is small (less than 200 attendees) you may want to check off pre-registered attendees from a database list as they show up. Check off their names and hand them a blank name sticker so they can fill out their own nametags. A sheet of instructions and examples are helpful for people manning the registration tables. One of the biggest bottlenecks is the registration process. Think of ways to expedite it. Be sure to hang information signs from the ceiling. Don't tape them on the front of

the registration tables, because the signs will get blocked when people stand in front of them. Using thin plastic bags could be a problem. They will not stand up so that you can flip through them quickly looking for a name.

- Well in advance of the convention, contact related businesses and dealers (balloon companies, magic shops, local restaurants, etc.) who may be interested in providing door prizes, discount coupons or items for the convention “goody” bags.
- It’s okay to offer door prizes, but offering them does not sway people to come to your convention. If you decide to give them out, keep the time duration very short. Long boring sessions tend to drag a convention down.
- One good way to handle door prizes is by using numbered stickers. Place them randomly on the bottom side of the auditorium chairs or seats. Be sure to do this unobserved and before anyone arrives. Place them in chairs that have a good chance of being occupied. Draw the winning numbers from a hat.
- Auctions can be fun if not carried on too long. Never more than 30 minutes.
- DO NOT schedule events or shows while people are eating or getting their food. People can’t do two things at once.
- If possible, have next year’s dates on the program or in their “goody” bag so that they can make plans to come next time.
- If the convention address and the mail center are different, state that fact clearly and in several places on the flyer. Make it clear as to the name that checks should be made out to.
- You can have them pre-register for next year at the convention or have them mailing it in with the next two weeks. In doing so, they get a discount or benefit such as the idea book free.
- Have a pre-registration deadline of about two weeks before the event. Give full refunds to cancelled pre-registrations if they ask for it before the deadline. After the deadline, don’t give any refund. A discount of about 10% to 25% should be given for people that pre-register. This allows you to plan better for the number that will attend. It allows you to put together the “goody” bags, print up the number of t-shirts or idea books, order the number of lunches, know the number of chairs needed and other planning choices. If you don’t make it beneficial to pre-register, people will tend not to do so. Make it clear on the pre-registration form that it must be received by a specific date. However, you can give them a few days leeway. I still let them pre-register if the letter is postmarked by the deadline date. Those that try to slip past the deadline by sending the pre-registration price should be called or written that their registration was received and postmarked after the deadline. Ask them to let you know if they want to mail in the extra amount or to pay it at the door.
- Make it perfectly clear to the motel or facility as to how many chairs, tables or other equipment that you will need in each room and when you will need it. It’s better to have a few extras in case you forgot about something.
- Have a more detailed explanation of the lectures printed in your program in order to help people decide which lecture to attend.
- Remind makeup classes to powder outdoors and not to use the motel towels or drapes to wipe up their makeup. Pie throwing and clown spitting should be done outside.
- Don’t charge high prices for dealer tables. Some convention planners think that they will keep the registration low by letting the dealers pay for most of the convention cost. That’s a good way to make sure dealers don’t come back the next year. Remember that the fewer quality dealers you have, translates into fewer quality lecturers as well.

- Have someone designated to take good pictures. Not only does it help document the event, you may need them for magazine articles or newspaper stories. Video taping of the performances or skits will be helpful as a learning tool.
- Mailing out flyers too early tends to make them lay it aside and forget about it. If you mail them too late, people may think that it's too much of a hassle to rush and do it. Therefore, mail out the convention flyers about two months before the event. There is a chance that people will forget it, but two months will allow time for them to have alley meetings and allow the word of mouth process to generate plenty of interest. If you mail them out only one month before the event, some people may not have enough planning time in order to fit it into their schedule. Or they already may have something that conflicts with it.
- Check with the convention site or motel one week before the event to ensure that everything is still as you had planned it. Go over the details with them.
- Often corporations will give you free samples to give out at your convention. I have been given free samples of balloons and a handful of free books. The balloon samples were ordered about a month in advance so that I would have one for every attendee. The books were used as door prizes. I always make sure that I give the company full credit for being so generous. It's a win, win, win situation. The attendees get free balloons, the convention gets good PR and the company gets great advertising.
- When putting on a local workshop, the best time to mail out flyers is about 5 to 6 weeks just before the event. Earlier than that time frame allows them to toss it aside and therefore forget about it because they have lots of time to think about it. Less than that time frame could mean that they already have plans that would preclude them from attending.

AT THE CONVENTION:

- About 90% of the pre-registrations will come in within the last week before the deadline. Pre-registrations account for about 50 to 65% of the total attendance. Each year about half of the attendees will be new people.
- Keep the convention leader available to solve problems and answer questions.
- If you have published a schedule, don't change it if at all possible. People will get miffed at you for messing up their carefully worked out plans. Changing the lecture times or their order will most certainly goof up someone's plans.
- Have filler ideas in case there is a delay in the performance time.
- Encourage people to fill out evaluation sheets and turn them in. You may discover problem areas or a lecturer that needs to be dropped. It is important to keep the attendees satisfied with the convention. Read the evaluations and try to make improvements each year. You may want to offer a small gift for those who fill out evaluations forms as an encouragement.
- Determine when the convention has to finish. The convention location may have to be readied for the next day or event, so be sure to allow time to pack up and clear out.
- Consider having security officers to keep an eye on the parking area. Just their presence will help to avoid most problems.
- If you invite attendees to demonstrate their clown skits, you will need to limit the performance duration. Limit them to 5 minutes or some specified length. However, you will discover that some people will run over a lot. Before the performance, make them sign a form acknowledging that they will be stopped if they run over the time

limit. Have a staff person on the front row to time them. If they run over, have the staff person hold up a big poster in their lap with, "Your 5 minutes are up." Only the performer is positioned to see and read the poster. If they still keep performing, have the master of ceremonies come out and lead the applause to stop them.

- You may want to advertise a cellular phone number as a help line on the day of the convention. Lost or stranded people will appreciate the assistance.
- You can tell which classes are the weakest if you have each class sign a sheet of paper to indicate attendance. This will help you decide what to drop next year.
- Place signs along the road to help new people find the convention site. Purchase a large banner sign and place it prominently over the entrance of the convention. It may help to have a clown at the road to wave the people in.
- Don't use a lot of assembly time making announcements or just talking.
- If during the convention, you know that you want a headliner back the next year, make the deal on the spot. You can probably get them at the same price again. If you put it off, you may allow them to get booked by someone else. It could be that you wait and their price goes up as well.
- For dealers that set up early and who have not vehicle, you may need to make a hamburger run so they get a chance to eat.

SOME OF THE THINGS THAT CAN GO WRONG:

All conventions will have some glitches and miscues. Try to anticipate trouble before it happens. Keep a list of the problems from each convention and take steps to avoid them next time.

- You scoped out a motel with a large ballroom and you made a deal with the manager to use it for the convention. A new manager replaces him. The new manager decides to divide the grand ballroom into three smaller rooms. You show up to discover that it won't work for your convention plans.
- You made a deal with a motel for discounted room rates. You have sent out flyers telling people which motel to use. However, the motel misplaces the contract and therefore charges the attendees the normal (higher) rate. By the way, some motels handle their deals for discounted rates locally. So if you call their corporation toll-free number to make your reservation and expecting the discount, they won't know what you are talking about. You have to call the local motel phone number (usually not toll-free) in order to get their convention rate.
- The motel over books the rooms. Or it could be that some of the current guests decide to stay longer. The motel can't legally make them leave, so therefore some of your attendees who have confirmation numbers don't get a room.
- A protest group targets your convention for a media event.
- Rain or snow during outings, contests or parade events. When classrooms are in different buildings, attendees have to endure the weather going back and forth.
- Headliners fail to show up because of a family death or a surprise surgery.
- Sound system doesn't work. You have no backup plan.
- Meals are late or delayed.
- You have lots of T-shirts with dates printed on them left over because the attendance was down. You have to absorb the cost.
- You assume that last year's price (for lunches, busses, motel rates, etc.) are the same.
- Busses don't show up as scheduled for an event.

- The exhibitors room only has mood lighting. That makes it difficult to see products and prices. Solar-powered calculators won't work. In one case an exhibitor tripped and fell down because of the poor lighting.
- The rooms have no air conditioning. It's too cold or hot.
- Rooms not set up with chairs, platform, coffee & donuts, sound system, etc.
- Conventions held at colleges may find some very strict campus rules to deal with. There may be curfew times that interfere with some of your late schedules.
- The highway is under construction making it very difficult to get to the convention.
- To draw some big names, you advertise some large cash prizes for competition winners. It fails to draw the big names and therefore the attendance is low. There isn't enough income to cover the cash prizes. Prize winners got upset because they were given merchandise valued at the amount of the prize instead of cash.
- Shortly before the event, you send out convention information to one of your headliners and he informs you that he goofed up and double booked that date. (Since the other convention is more lucrative, he can't come to your event after all.) You have to desperately try and find another big name to fill in.
- You set a convention date for the next year and publish it, then you discover that three of your key convention workers have commitments on that date and can't come.
- If the convention site and the convention motel/hotel are not within walking distance, the attendees will have a lot of frustrations. People with cars will be okay but those who had to fly there will be forced to take a taxi or bus to get around. {I once flew to Atlanta for a convention. Since the airport and the convention site were across town from each other, I had to pay \$50 for a taxi. Not only that, but the convention site was several miles away from my motel. Therefore I had to pay a \$6 cab fare (one way) from my motel each day. The last day of the convention had its activities held at a third location in downtown Atlanta. Because of the cost of getting around, I decided to stay in my room on the final day. On my way out, I had to pay another \$50 in cab fares to get back to the airport. Believe me, I'll think twice before going to that convention again.}
- If the registration form is vague or confusing, you may have people sending their pre-registration to the convention site address instead of to your address. Or worse, they may come to your house looking for the convention.
- The T-shirts (or other items) that you took money for, didn't arrive in time for the convention. Now you have the extra expense of mailing them to each attendee.
- Believe it or not, people will bring dogs, monkeys, parrots or other animals that may be part of their act to a convention. If someone gets bitten, you could be in trouble.
- Don't allow children to attend the convention without adult supervision. If you offer a free clown show, be careful. You may find out that some parents will drop off their kids for the show. Make it clear that an adult must be with the child. Otherwise, you will be responsible for keeping them out of trouble or for babysitting them.
- One man came to a convention just for the balloon competition. He didn't seem to notice that there was sign-up deadline. He showed up just before the competition and discovered that he would not be allowed to compete because he didn't sign up for it. He threw a cuss fit and made an ugly scene.
- I once shipped a big box of books ahead. The convention hotel left them in the bed of a pickup truck overnight. It rained that night and soaked all of my books.
- At one convention, a "goody" bag was given out to each attendee. One of the items was an Oriental Trading Company wholesale catalog. It was embarrassing for the

dealers when the attendees could scan through the catalog and see exactly how much some of the items cost the dealers.

- Bags of assorted balloons given out to each attendee could compete with and diminish sales for the balloon dealers.
- A performer uses liquid nitrogen in his act and accidentally splashes some on the audience.
- At one convention, the balloon contest deadline for entries was from noon to 6:30PM and the judging by their peers was scheduled from 6:00PM to 7:30PM. In other words, some people voted before all of the entries were required to be in place.
- While learning how to do pratfalls or comic trips, an attendee injures their back.
- You have been holding your convention at the same church for years. When they find out that your attendance total will be over 500 people, they inform you of their church policy. It states that you are required to pay for two uniformed policemen during the event, a staff minister to be on site, a church trained sound man must operate the equipment and a receptionist must be on duty. In other words you have to pay \$1,100.00 you didn't expect to spend.
- One of the headliners was to be picked up at the airport. Since that was all taken care of, he didn't bother to bring any of the convention literature. His flight was four hours late due to some airline glitches. The person assigned to pick him up didn't know what had happened to him, so after waiting three hours he went back to the convention site that was 80 miles away. The headliner didn't have anyone to pick him up nor a number to call once his flight got into town. He waited for awhile then decided to catch a bus to the town that he thought was correct. He guessed wrong. Be sure to give headliners a cell phone number to call and get his number as well.
- A headliner was taken to the wrong airport because the driver was not the same one who had originally picked him up. By the time the mistake was discovered, it was too late to drive across town and catch his flight.
- An elderly woman tripped and fell at the convention (it was a college) and hurt her foot. She sued the convention for damages.
- There will always be glitches and things that don't go smoothly. Don't take negative comments personally, when they are inspired by frustration.
- One convention had a plan to shuttle the headliners to and from the airport and the convention site that was 55 miles away. When the airplane schedules were messed up due to bad weather and missed connections, the schedule had to be thrown out. There was a lot of waiting for planes that didn't show or the plane arrived without the headliner. There were many more trips needed than expected.
- When having contests, be sure that the votes or judging totals are accurate. Recently a young woman won second prize for a balloon contest. Later, they noticed a math mistake and had to take it back. They did however, create a new category (Best Newcomer) so that she still had a prize. But still, mistakes like that always leave some hard feelings.
- One convention official looked at a college building as a potential dealers room. He was shown a large room that could have fit 20 dealer tables in it. The college staff person said that they had two other rooms next to it. However the convention official didn't look at the other two rooms. He assumed they were the same size as the first. They were about 1/2 the size of the first big room. So they sold 60 dealer tables, when they actually had about 40. Needless to say some dealers were pretty angry to either not get any tables or to have to settle with less room.

- I once shipped some books to a convention held at an encampment. I marked my box to be held for the so and so convention. When I got there, I found out that my box had stayed in the back of a their pickup for several days. It had rained one night and soaked all of the books in the shipment. It wasn't obvious until I opened the box. Of course they offered to pay my cost of the books, but now I didn't have books to sell for a profit. Luckily I had taken a few of each title with me on the airplane.
- When a cash prize contest requires contestants to pay a cash fee to enter, watch out. When money is involved, people want the judging to be 100% fair. If the voting is done by each convention attendee, the local hero might win even though he's not the best. In other words, if the convention is in San Diego for example, there will be a lot of attendees from San Diego. So someone from San Diego could get most of the votes because his friends vote as a block. It is better to have a panel of experts (none from San Diego) to cast their votes and it weighs for 50% of the total. The attendee vote should account for the other 50%.

AFTER CONVENTION IDEAS:

- Have a victory dinner for the staff workers. They need to feel appreciated. Schedule it about two weeks after the convention. This will allow enough time for the staff to get their photos back in time for sharing. Pay for the dinner out of the proceeds from the convention. It's a good idea to give out a gift (the same one) to all the staff so that they will feel appreciated.
- Promptly send out thank you notes to staff, headliners and dealers.
- Promptly pay headliners, lunch people and other reimbursements.
- Soon after the event, have a meeting to capture what went right or wrong.
- Decide about headliners for next year and promptly make the contacts. Some headliners have bookings more than a year in advance. Don't wait or you may be too late to get the person you really want.
- Confirm the dates with the convention location and secure it on their calendar.
- Write an article for use in clown magazines and submit it. If it gets published, more people will find out about the convention and want to come next year.

Motel Rooms for Headliners

It may save money if you put two headliners up in a single motel room, but that may cause problems. Headliners need their own space and rest. I've had roommates who snored all night long. Sometimes I have been the roommate who snored. A night with very little sleep really affects my performance the next day. Some roommates are night owls and seem to function on only a few hours of sleep. They may stay up preparing for the next day's classes with a light on or maybe keep going in and out of the room.

I used to stay in people's homes. Sometimes that was fun, but not always. I've had times when people had endless requests to see this balloon or requests for me to do a specific routine. It was like I was their personal tutor. I felt like the show never ended and I wasn't allowed to relax.

When I have a choice, I select the top floor of a motel. All other floors can have noise coming from the floor above. Sometimes people staying at motels slam doors, stomp up and down the hallway then laugh and joke like no one else is trying to sleep. I always bring ear plugs to help reduce ambient noise.