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IRCA conventions have evolved somewhat over the years since the original convention hosts' guide was written. The average age of the attendees has risen, and although that is bad for the future of the hobby, it does mean that concerns about getting the least expensive rate for everything may not be quite as pressing as it was in earlier times, although it is still important. Though attendees are older, the only liquid provision by convention hosts in recent years has been soft drinks, as most hotels are not too happy about consumption of alcohol in meeting rooms, unless perhaps they are dispensing it.

The Sunday afternoon softball game and picnic seem to have been phased out, perhaps because many attendees need to head home by noon on Sunday. But there are often station tours and activities earlier on Friday than there was when the original guide was written.

Selection of the proper hotel is very important. Many will offer special reduced rates, and many are set up for business/convention attractions (though check that you won't be competing with a larger convention using the same facility). It is possible to get a free or reduced rate for a meeting room if it translates to a sufficient number of guests for the hotel. A location close to eating places and shopping is a great plus. Free wireless internet is a good selling point for many convention attendees. Although conventions have traditionally been in the summer, and in larger towns, don't ignore the possibility of holding a convention in a smaller tourist area slightly out of season.

Keep your potential attendees informed of events that you have planned, right up to the last minute if possible; use the e-list as well, as non-club members may want to attend. The publicity can encourage waverers to register, and keep the event front and center for those who have already made the arrangements. Also, send out personal notification / invitations to club members in the immediate area of the convention if they are not already involved. Although we hope for large attendance, don't cancel because of small attendance; the show must go on, but keep the club's Board informed of the situation.

The hotel employee with whom arrangements have been made in advance may work only from Monday to Friday, and the convention hosts will be dealing with weekend staff who may not been made aware of the full details of what was perhaps a verbal agreement. Find out if that will be the case, and try to get your contact to designate one of the weekend staff to handle any details that may arise over the weekend. A written agreement may be very helpful in case the weekend staff has different ideas from what the host thought had been agreed upon. In the same vein, pay as much in advance as possible, and confirm receipt, as, at the end of the convention, you could be dealing with different staff members than those with whom you made the arrangements, and you want to avoid any hidden or mistaken charges.

Some less expensive hotels and motels do not have formal meeting

rooms. Many have a "breakfast room", for hotel guests to use, however (a bonus for attendees as well), which are normally closed after breakfast. Hotel management is often willing to let these facilities be used as meeting rooms for the rest of the day and into the evening for no charge. However, the arrangement is often informal, and misunderstandings can arise with hotel staff during the event.

The convention host should be clear on what to expect when offered the use of such a room. If management wants the room available for other hotel guests to make themselves a cup of coffee throughout the day, for example, then it will certainly have an impact on how the convention is conducted. A host should probably insist on exclusive use of the room outside of the breakfast period, but will also need to know what management expects in the way of noise levels, when the room should be closed for the night, and what clean-up is expected before the room is closed (not to mention when it will be cleaned up before you can use it again). Again, at the very least, make sure that there is a contact available to clarify details while the convention is running. If there is not a written agreement, you may have to "stand your ground" in discussions, but remember, their point may be valid too, if the situation has not been clarified in advance.

Also, if there is any disagreement with other hotel guests as to how the convention is affecting their stay, don't deal with it yourself, if an exchange of pleasantries doesn't iron it out. Talk to hotel management.

Another concern, particularly with breakfast rooms, has been air conditioning. Conventions are usually held in the summer, but a breakfast room is used early in the day before the worst of the heat. Some may not be equipped with air conditioning, and if they are, and it fails (as happened in one recent California convention), there is not as much urgency to repair it as there may be in other parts of the hotel. Air conditioning may also be more than just a luxury in the guest and meeting rooms during the summer months, as even in cooler parts of the country, heat waves are not unknown.

If there is a choice, try to get a proper meeting room, rather than deal with the extra details of the use of a breakfast room. If a breakfast room is the only option, try to get one normally set up for business hours rather than tourist hours. They close earlier, and will allow earlier access for convention attendees after the room has been cleaned.

Although the banquet can be at a catered facility, with a formal guest speaker, and a set fee, many conventions have had successful banquets by booking tables in a restaurant, where the attendees pay for what they want, and forgo a guest speaker. In any event, attendees appreciate good food, so try to be familiar with what will be on offer, if possible

Surveys, stickers, buttons, pens, magnets etc. from radio stations all popped into a "goodie bag" can be a great hit. This is possibly a better use for multiple station memorabilia and local souvenirs than placing them in the auction. Some multiple items may be donated by companies such as Universal Radio, but you need to

inquire about them. Ask for advice from recent convention hosts.

Station tours and other outings are important, but it is helpful to have sign up sheets in advance for them, so that you know if you have enough drivers, and who will be travelling with whom. If you're touring in a larger city, it's helpful to exchange cell phone numbers between cars also. Although it is possible to arrange a convention with only one or two hosts, try to arrange as much assistance from other attendees ahead of time, for things such as driving duties, meeting room attendant etc. Those left in charge of a meeting room should know who is their contact with the hotel staff if there are any problems.

Remember that a convention is a place for putting names to faces for many of us. Nametags can be very helpful, especially at the beginning of the festivities.