



Organizing Storytelling Events in the Virtual Frontier

The Seattle Storytellers Guild has been planning events for over 40 years. Many of these have been Storytelling Programs with several storytellers. Some included or consisted of story swaps. We have also done big events – festivals back in the 80's; epics in more recent years. With the current migration of storytelling events to the virtual world – our story events have also moved to Zoom for the time being.

Most of us enjoy the events, but don't realize all that goes into organizing and hosting them. The Guild's board has experience and is a good place to learn the nuts and bolts of assembling an event. It begins with deciding on the **Who, What, When and Where?** Which means finding and booking storytellers and other performers, an emcee, and a venue adequate for the audience and in a convenient location. **Why?** Usually events will have a theme – whether determined by the organizers, the season, or the tellers. Both storytellers and venues bring in the question of **How Much** will these cost? And how, we hope, the event will pay for itself. Along with this, there are needs for various things – sound systems, stage décor and lighting, arranging and serving refreshments, and setting up chairs and tables for the above and for sales. Getting into the venue and cleaning up afterwards all of which takes volunteers!

Virtual events take a vary similar process of organization. The **Who, What, When** remains – the **Where**, the venue, now becomes a link to Zoom or Facebook or Youtube that is transmitted electronically. Organizers still have to consider the **How Much** the storytellers require, but often have to rely on soliciting online donations rather than the “gate” to meet those needs. The virtual form of the venue changes quite a few things. Zoom programs need to be shorter and often the date and times are adjusted accordingly. The virtual “audience experience” is much different – both for the tellers and the participants. Online tellers have their individual struggles with at the restrictions of “at home” staging and lighting and microphones. “Rehearsals” before the event to get those things right are usually necessary.

It takes more than one host! A technical host is needed, who creates and starts the Zoom meeting, and deals with technical issues – admitting guests from the waiting room, spotlighting, pasting chat announcements and an number of other “mute” points. Another hosts as the emcee, bringing a personal touch to the event - drawing a diverse audience together, introducing the tellers and presenting the program.

The atmosphere of a Zoom Event is different. People trickle in early and often times want to linger afterwards. They find themselves face to face with not just the storytellers, but also with a lot of other people – some familiar – some strangers. And while most are in their homes, those may be anywhere. A concert's “shared audience experience” can be lacking – of shared laughter, applause or communal sighs. And there aren't refreshments to promote smaller mingling and chit chat conversations with friends.

Publicity is what creates the audience and that now goes out all sorts of ways – especially in these days of social media. Fliers, whether printed, mailed, emailed or posted on line, need to be both informative and colorful – which requires design and production. And they need to reach their intended audiences – which used to just be local folks. Word of mouth, posters and paper fliers used to suffice. But now publicity has become mostly social media. Paper fliers are replaced by attractive media posts and pastes into chat boxes - sharing the link on a web site, sending it out via emailed newsletters, and blasted bi-monthly in emails to our list. Registration links offer advantages. But more than that – multiple postings are needed on Facebook pages, Eventbrite, and Meetup. And reaching our audience, who are no longer just local, takes thinking and strategy, targeting Facebook boosts. “Word -of-mouth” has now become “Please share” on people's personal media and during other online events.

With the obvious popularity of online events, it is probable that storytelling organizations will continue producing virtual events even after we are able once again to gather face-to-face. Developing the skills needed to produce and present virtual events will continue to be very valuable to us.

Barry McWilliams has an upcoming two hour **Workshop on Using Zoom for Storytelling Events.**

It covers Zoom's Basic and Advanced Controls, its recent updates, how to Organize an Event, and dealing with some tech issues and disruptions.

You can access and download his class worksheets are on his website at [http://www.eldrbarry.net/roos/VirtualST/Zoom Workshop.pdf](http://www.eldrbarry.net/roos/VirtualST/Zoom%20Workshop.pdf).

The blue text on the worksheets is clickable, and participants are encouraged to explore this ahead of time.

This two hour Workshop will be offered twice

December 5th at 1 pm (Pacific Standard Time) and also on **December 12th at 9:30 am.**

Please Click on the desired date and time to Register. You will be sent a link for the Workshop.

The cost is \$15, paid to the Seattle Storytellers Guild. (See the Purple Hat on page 9).