

Designing Programs for Fun and Profit – Or, Alternatively, for the Guild

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I had a couple of young Guild program designers ask me for info on how to do it. Rather than do that much more, I thought I'd encapsulate what I know here – since I tell people to write this kind of thing up, it's probably good that I do so. So, here's my thoughts about being a Guild program designer.

Tools

I use the \LaTeX program to build all of my programs, but a large part of that is expedience – I've got a lot of tools which can actually pull the data off of the website and assemble it into cast lists, assistants, and title pages, so all I need to do is throw a bunch of ads, acknowledgements, and bios into a coherent whole and send it to the printer. But I'm really comfortable with \LaTeX , and most people aren't, so I don't recommend it to everyone unless they're already really into using that software already.¹

For the Guild programs, it's probably easiest to just do the layout in Word or some other word processing program. If you have access to one of the high-quality publishing tools, like Apple's Pages or Adobe's InDesign, they're good choices as well, but perhaps more than you need. The hardest part with any of these would be making sure you can create booklets, so that when you've created a nice 12-page program layout it can easily print out on standard 8.5x11 pages in the right order. If you're using Word, you can search for "word booklets" on Google and find some Word templates that make that easier; I found one that looks good rather quickly with that search.

2-3 Weeks Before Opening Night

My usual method for gathering information is to pick a deadline – I usually choose the Saturday before we open – and send out a message about two weeks before that telling everyone to check over the information on the website and make sure that their name and year is correct, and also to submit bios. Also tell the prod staff to start putting together lists of crew members and acknowledgements, and make sure that anyone who should have a production staff position is listed on the website. They should send mail to you and the producer if they're not. Also, the publicity

¹If you really want to go for using \LaTeX , more power to you. See A for more information on how I do it.

designer needs to get you an image to use on the cover. Oh, and tell that there director person that if he or she wants director's notes, she or he will need to get it to you soon.

Check with the producer or Guild treasurer to find out what fine print the contract says has to be in the program – usually there's something there about not videotaping and the address of the rights organization. Also, find out from them what ads have been sold – the producer will probably have to ask the treasurer, so you could always go straight to the treasurer yourself and avoid the middleman, but producers like to feel involved.

Some ad copy is located in the locker under `program/ProgramAds`; most of them are pretty old now, but there are some newer ads for MIT AV and Sodexo in there – if they tell you “just use the old ad”, you can try to get it from there and just put it right into your word processor.

A Bit Over a Week Before Opening Night

Send out a reminder email a few days before the deadline. You'll have gotten a few bios right after your first message, but a large set of them will start rolling in after that reminder. Make it clear that you can't guarantee that anything you get after the deadline will show up in the program.

And now the tricky bit. The deadline will go by, and you'll have (hopefully) most of the bios, all the ad copy, but still be waiting on the crew list. At this point, you can start pretending to be magnanimous when people beg you on Sunday to get their bio in, but the truth is you've been planning for this eventuality all along. Look at them dubiously and say that you can *probably* get their bio in, but they have to get it to you that very night. It's also likely that your director will only now have enough brain space to write notes, but you should have talked to him or her early enough to know whether or not to reserve half a page or so for them.

Meanwhile, you have to start yelling at the lighting designer, tech director, sound designer, costume designer, etc. to get crew lists and acknowledgements to you. Don't send email at this point – everyone's busy doing last minute tasks, so you need to tell them directly.

Prod Week

Monday night you should print out a proof of the program. Show it to the producer, the directors, and tech director to make sure that everything they're expecting to see is there and provide another set of eyes. They'll have a few small edits, and suddenly remember a few names that they really should have added to their crew list. I, personally, like to limit the proof to only those people, so that everyone else has something new to read when you print the programs.

Your final, final deadline for information has to be Tuesday night. After that, you can spend most of Wednesday getting the final copy ready to go. Copytech is the best choice for both turnaround and price. You can print out a copy and take it down to 11-004 if you want to make sure that they understand what needs to be done, or create a PDF and use the CopyTech submission engine to submit it. In a pinch, Copytech can do it in a day, but I try to submit it to them on Wednesday with a Friday 4pm deadline so that you can review it after they do the job. Using the online PDF submission will actually result in better quality, but you need to be pretty explicit about what you want.

Your budget is probably such that you can create a 12-page black-and-white program – three sheets of paper, printed both sides, for about 24 cents a program. Charge it to our SAFO number (get that from the treasurer). Don't bother spending the cash to have Copytech fold the programs

– cast members are usually chilling out a bit on opening night between about 6 and 7, so as long as the programs are in the space by 6pm you have cheap, exploitable labor to fold them. Make sure the stage manager knows to tell the cast to do that, or just start folding in front of everyone and you’ll have helpers galore.

I often do two print runs, one before the first weekend and one just before the last, so that we don’t make too many more than we need. Usually, though, it comes out to whatever my budget was, so you can always just do one run of all the programs that will fit the budget to make your life easier.

– Stephen Peters

A Using L^AT_EX for Guild programs

The MTG program locker, under `/mit/mtg/program`, has several sample programs. Most of them are impressively old. Some were written in an obscure page formatting language called Scribe. But an example of a recent L^AT_EX design is in `2006-Urinetown`.

Under there you should be able to find everything I’ve use to make Guild programs under L^AT_EX. But here’s the top-level description: We use an `mtgplaybill` document class, which defines most of the environments that get used. This also sets up default cover page styles, but most of these can be overwritten.

There’s a neat little Makefile (type `gmake`) which can take info from the web and put them in files that can be included into the program file. You’ll need to change your Makefile to use the right year and season for the show so that it will find the right files.

The `program/ProgramTools` directory holds some useful tools for pulling data from the website and converting them to L^AT_EX files, and for taking a PDF program printed one page per sheet and reassembling them into a program booklet that can be properly folded.