

Eventbrite™Britepaper

FANDOM CONVENTIONS: BEHIND THE MASK

How you can tap into the new faces of fandom
to throw an event of heroic proportions





With fandom conventions setting attendance records all over the country, it's no secret that comic, gaming, anime and pop culture cons are big business. At Eventbrite, we estimate that fandom conventions in North America grossed \$600M in ticket sales in 2013 alone. Ka-pow!

The economic impact of those events to local communities, as reported by convention centers and local chambers of commerce, is often a multiple between 5x and 20x gross ticket sales. That means fandom events are potentially a multi-billion dollar enterprise—and everyone has a stake in keeping the fun rolling on, and the money rolling in.

But who are the fans? What draws them to these gatherings? And what opportunities does the surge of fan enthusiasm hold for retailers, media companies and organizers?

In June of 2014, Eventbrite conducted an online survey of more than 2600 customers who had purchased tickets to fandom events through their platform in the past two years. The purpose of the survey was to gather data to help organizers, exhibitors, attendees, local communities and other interested parties better understand the opportunities that fandom conventions really present, as compared to old stereotypes about nerds, costumes, and the Simpson's "Comic Book Guy." Better information can lead to better events that connect with today's fans and provide more relevant social and selling opportunities for everyone concerned. The following britepaper will outline what we found, and what it means for your business.

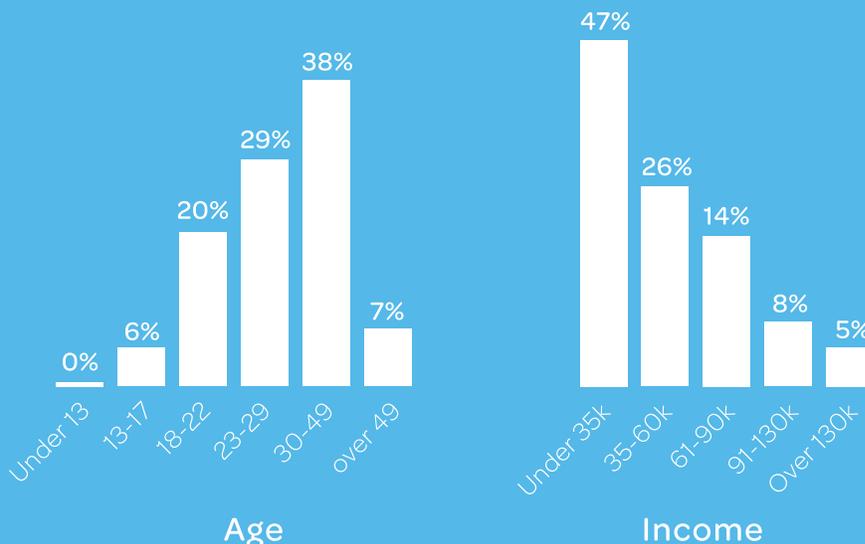
THE FINDINGS

FANDOM ISN'T A "BOYS CLUB"

Responses to our survey came back **55% male** (1217 total), **45% female** (986), and 248 not specifying gender. For fans under 30, it was almost exactly **50/50**. Our survey data showed there were very few behavior differences between male and female fans in terms of fandom intensity, frequency of con attendance, motivation for going to conventions, and spending habits both inside and outside the convention.



There's no age (or wage) limit on fandom fun: 38% of con-goers are between the ages of 30-49. An even larger chunk of con-goers (55%) are under 29 years old. When it comes to cash, 47% of fans make less than 35k, with just 13% earning over 90k.



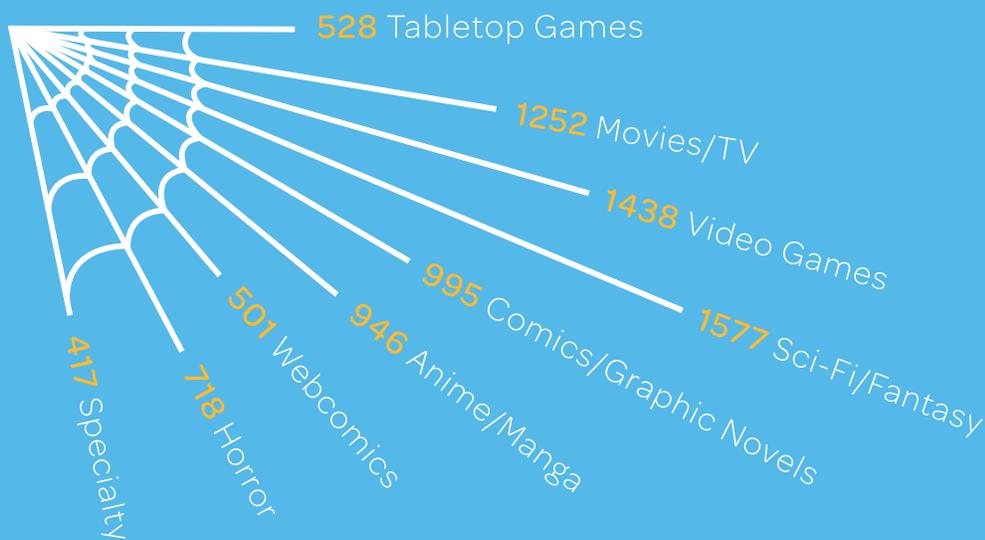
The takeaway: The future of fandom is heading toward gender parity. As geek culture becomes more and more mainstream, the spectrum of fans across social and economic background widens. Events should be designed to be inclusive and embrace fan diversity.

TODAY'S FANS ARE FANS OF EVERYTHING

Fans have a reputation for being deeply into narrow areas of interest, with little crossover between genres such as comics, videogames, anime, and so on. Our survey data shows that con attendees have a much broader pop culture palette these days.

Given a non-exclusive choice of identifying as “superfans,” “casual fans” or “not fans” of nine different categories—anime/manga, comics and graphic novels, genre-based movies and TV, horror/zombies/vampires, science fiction/fantasy, specialty fandom (furry, brony, steampunk, etc.), tabletop gaming, videogaming, and webcomics and online communities—**respondents self-identified as “superfans” of 3.4 different categories.**

Respondents claim to be “super fans” of 3+ Genres on average:



Opportunities are everywhere: Media and entertainment companies have spent billions in the past decade to drive fan interest across different platforms. As an event organizer, you too can go beyond the old categories and offer a broader range of exhibitors, programs, and guests, at your fan events.

There's still plenty of room for specialty shows that cater to distinct fan subgroups. Just remember that even if your mission is focused primarily on a single genre or theme, your attendees will be fans of lots of different stuff, and your exhibitors can be successful selling a wider range of merchandise.

BIG FANS ARE EVEN BIGGER SPENDERS

Nearly 70% of respondents across all subsegments in the poll listed “buy stuff I’m interested in” as one of their three primary motivations for attending a con, making that the top response by far. Meeting celebrities and creators, the next most popular motivation, garnered 53%, followed by meeting fellow fans (50%). That 70% buying number held firm across comics, anime and gaming superfans, across men and women, and across cosplayers.

Almost half of the respondents in the poll said they spent \$100-\$500 at conventions over and above admission, travel, hotels, food, and parking. About 7% of survey respondents report spending over \$1000 on merchandise at conventions. Those fans spend more at cons than at physical or online retailers. Most survey respondents who reported spending more than \$1000 per year at either physical retailers or online say they typically spend between \$500-\$1000 at conventions.

Average \$ spent at conventions per year outside of travel and lodging:



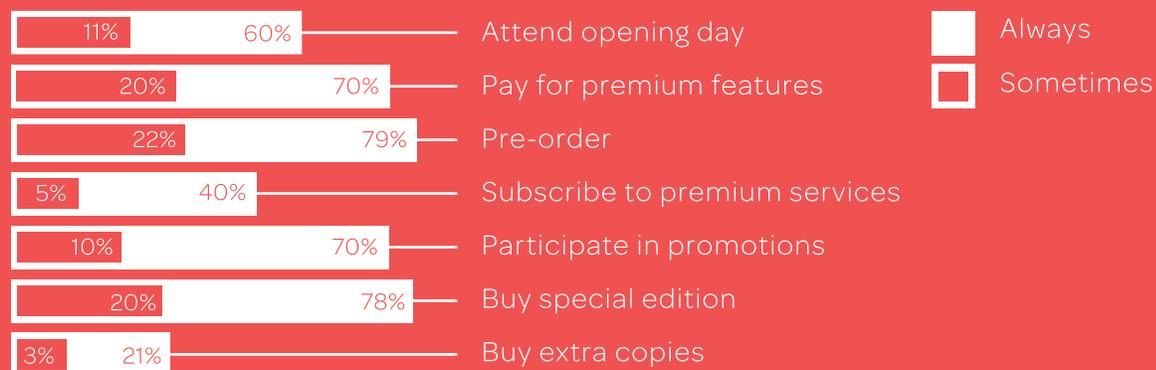
The bottom line: Cha-ching! First of all, this is great news you can share with your current and prospective exhibitors who need to show a return on investment for their booth space. Second, if you are reaching out to local retailers as potential exhibitors, this data shows that the people who spend money at conventions are the same people who spend money at their stores, at roughly the same rates. Winning customers on the convention floor can translate to better retail performance year-round. The same is true for online retailers.

CON-GOERS SPLURGE FOR THE MEDIA THEY LOVE

Movies, TV, and media franchises exhibit at fandom conventions because they figure that those fans are their best, most influential customers—and they’re right! According to the Eventbrite poll, convention attendees spend big on premium entertainment experiences: 26% of respondents say they “always” buy the special edition or deluxe Blu-Ray; 25% “always” pre-order announced items at their retailer or online, and 25% “always” pay for premium features at fan-oriented movies. 15% “always” line up for opening night (another 50% do this “sometimes”), and 8% will subscribe to a premium media service like Netflix or HBO just to get access to fan-oriented programming.

The big picture: Some in the media and entertainment world might feel that hardcore fans are already sold on their genre-based franchises, so they’d be better off investing their marketing dollars to reach other audiences rather than exhibiting at cons. This data shows that con attendees are still worth the money because they’re higher value customers: they buy more expensive tickets (IMAX, 3D, etc); they attend opening nights/weekends that the industry considers “must-win,” and they pre-order merchandise in numbers that can influence retailer demand. This information can be helpful to organizers trying to attract media guests and dollars.

Fan spending and behavior as it relates to entertainment and media:



BIGGEST CONVENTION DRAW? OTHER FANS!

Fan events are social occasions. In a multi-response question, 65% of respondents say cons are a great place to meet new friends. 55% like to bring their families, and 43% go to connect with people they've met online.

Fan reasons for attending a con:



65%

Make new
friends



55%

Bring friends
and family



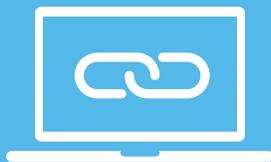
40%

Reconnect with
fans I've met at
past events



15%

Meet potential
love interests



43%

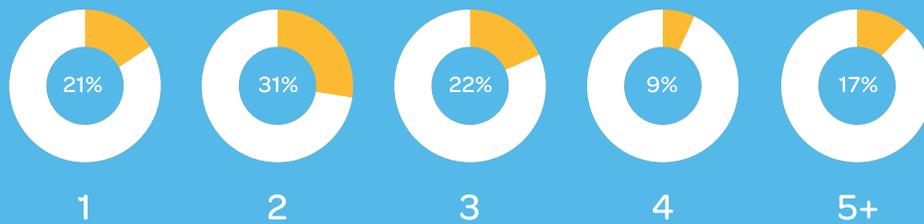
Meet people I've
connected with online

Meet and greet: Make sure your programming offers fans opportunities for social experiences. Low cost, DIY programs such as fan meetups, live versions of online communities, and "speed dating"/singles events can be as popular with attendees as traditional panels and celebrity appearances. They can also help give your convention a different vibe and personality from competing shows.

ONE CON IS NOT ENOUGH

Our fandom survey shows that a huge percentage of con traffic is driven by repeat customers. **Over 80% of respondents say they routinely attend 2 or more shows per year, with 16% attending five or more.** 47% of male and 51% of female con attendees go to 3 or more shows per year; only 21% attend just one. 19% of anime/manga superfans—most of them women—say they will attend five or more events this year.

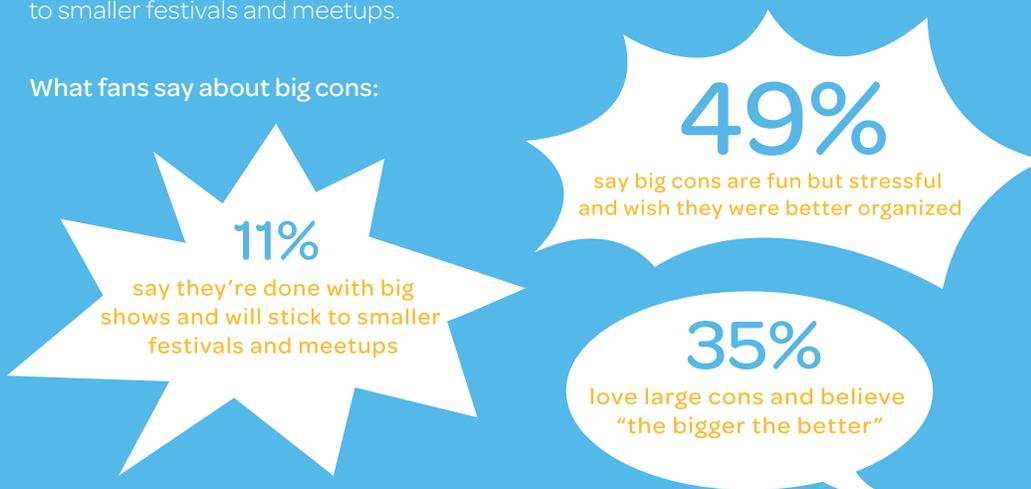
Average # of fan-related events attended per year:



Keep the fun going, con after con: The surge of interest in fandom events is helping small and mid-sized events get big enough to max out their venues, and turning already large events into mega-festivals that take over communities for entire weekends. That's a huge revenue opportunity for all concerned, but because it's many of the same fans going to many different shows, organizers who want to ensure their events are competitive and sustainable year after year need to be sure to give fans a great experience every time.

Don't let frustrations around ticket availability, venue access, and security dilute the enthusiasm that fans have for attending your event. Our survey data shows that logistics and organization, including ease of ticketing and on-site management, contribute significantly to convention success, especially at larger shows. And while many fans believe "the bigger the better," **nearly 50% say that big cons are fun but stressful and wish they were better organized.** Among women, that number is 55%. 11% of respondents say they are done with big shows altogether and will stick to smaller festivals and meetups.

What fans say about big cons:



ORGANIZERS' SWAG BAG: TIPS AND TAKEAWAYS

Fan and geek culture continue to dominate popular culture. And with dozens of new big budget movies based on fan-favorite comic, sci-fi, fantasy, animation and gaming franchises on tap through the end of the decade, there's no end in sight.

If you want your convention, festival, celebrity autograph session, fan-oriented party, or other event to connect with this growing, enthusiastic and diverse audience, here's our advice in a nutshell:



Embrace fans of all flavors

Don't assume your audience is made up of one particular demographic or interest group; fans today embody all ages, genders and ethnicities, with fandom truly transcending the old boundaries. Create an inclusive event where all fans feel safe and welcome to foster the best experience, and protect your reputation.



Help your exhibitors see the dollar signs

Fans come to conventions to spend money. Fans who spend at cons also spend on retail, online, and media purchases outside the convention center. Exhibitors should update their booths and attitudes to reflect today's fanbase. Those who do are making big bucks at fandom shows large and small, across the country.



Delight fans with a well-run show

Fans, as you may have noticed, are a talkative and opinionated bunch. Make them happy and they'll be your show's best PR. Work with a partner that makes it easy for your attendees to get tickets and gain entry to your event smoothly, so they can focus on the activities they love. Talk to Eventbrite about solutions specifically designed to help fan events of all shapes and sizes manage peak ticket demand surges, handle tiered ticketing levels (VIP vs. standard tickets), and simplify entry so attendees can get to the exhibits and programs they want to see as quickly as possible.

About Eventbrite

Eventbrite provides a simple, streamlined ticketing and registration platform to help event directors—small and large—set up, promote, and sell out their events. Organizers can reach a broader network of fans, and make smarter decisions along the way with social marketing tools, personalized event discovery, and access to real-time data, all in one place. Eventbrite is one of the fastest-growing registration and ticketing services with more than \$2.5 billion in gross ticket sales to date.

To learn more, visit eventbrite.com or call 1-800-994-2515.

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