SpinCon and SpinCation: A Pen Spinning Convention Proposal

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Abstract

We analyze the options of a large scale, community-organized live event for the pen spinning community, and propose a novel option based on events organized in other niche communities. Fen Spinner believes that for the continued promotion and growth of the hobby that an event such as this should be arranged within the next few years.

1 Introduction

At present, the largest pen spinning live events are either short meetups, often for only part of a single day, or the rare appearance of a corporate sponsored event such as the WPSAL tournament hosted by the Zhigao corporation of Guangdong, China. Other organized events of note include the live tournaments hosted by JapEn Board in Japan, who are also known to host the Naranja Penspinning Festival.

Outside of these, there does not appear to be an attempt to create an international, community-organized event in the history of the hobby. The closest event would be the old FPSB meetups, which would involved camping out on a member's back yard for the night.

Given the scale of the Pen Spinning community, it appears that there is sufficient funding and populace to arrange a formally booked event with a company providing lodging and event spaces for 3-4 days. Such an event would attract not only local attention but also some international attention, which would not normally be expected for a smaller event.

2 Analysis of requirements

2.1 Headcount

The ideal number to hit for the initial event would be around 50-100 attendees to prove the concept. Hitting an attendee cap for the first event is not an issue, as it can always be increased for a later event, but having attendees below expectations for the venue can quickly make the event no longer financially viable

Smaller headcount affects the type of venues available. Large scale convention centers are off the table, but it opens up possibilities for more novel locations.

2.2 Location

There are four main geographical areas that are viable according to headcount and potential funding:

1. North America (United States)
2. Mainland Europe (France, Germany, Poland)
3. Mainland China (Guangdong Province, Hong Kong)
4. Japan (Tokyo)

For the purpose of this whitepaper, we focus on the English-speaking community, so North America or Mainland Europe.

North America has a smaller population of spinners than mainland Europe, and transit would largely take place on domestic air flight. However, they tend to be wealthier and more likely to be able to afford travel and fees for lodging at the event. That being said, they may also be able to afford attending an event outside of the North America.

Mainland Europe has a larger pen spinning population, and transit would be possible via air or by the extensive train network present across Europe. In many of the countries, the individuals will be wealthy enough to easily attend, but in others such as Poland, Hungary and similar this may be more difficult. The choice of country within Mainland Europe is very important. France has the largest population of spinners by far, followed by Germany and then Poland, but Germany is centrally located, providing only a single country hop away from Poland, France, the Netherlands and Belgium.

2.3 Venue

The two requirements for a multi day event such as this one are lodging and booking of event spaces for panels, tournaments, trading goods and so forth. Traditionally, this would be associated with a hotel that provides the spaces plus further amenities. Given the small scale of the initial convention, the expectation would be to book out a medium-sized hotel, rather than a massive convention space, which typically accept corporate conferences.

This is not the only option, however, particularly when the headcount is low. Holiday parks are a novel alternative, which provide powered static caravans, event spaces and tend to make little profit outside of peak months in the summer. Because it is more open-plan, this works better for events with fewer panels and more focus on informal meetups over the event duration.

Essentially, the expectation of how many panels and structured events would determine which is the better option. Do we require a static "Dealer's Den" style market and conference rooms for talks about pen spinning minutiae? Then a mid-sized hotel is better. Would we prefer larger, more flexible living spaces, more freedom and an open-plan layout, with less focus on organized panels? Then the holiday park is better.

2.4 Date

The ideal time to organize the convention is during months not associated with holidays, such as May, September, October and November. Not only is the venue off-peak, but it also cuts down travel costs for airlines.

2.5 Cost and funding

The ideal goal would be to find a ticket cost for an individual at $150 or less. This would include the lodging for the basic event (Friday and Saturday night stay, leaving Sunday), and the ticket for the convention to cover the cost of booking event spaces, hiring equipment and other overheads.

This is quite a narrow margin, with lodging for this alone post-negotiation likely at $100+ dollars already. Because of this, it's common to offer a "Sponsor" tier at conventions, around $30-50, that provides additional limited edition goodies, with the profit being a donation towards running the event.

The base ticket lodging can also scale, of course, with change to the quality of the living arrangements in both venue types, and extra days before and after the convention allowing people to stay from Thursday-Monday if they wish.

Platforms like Kickstarter offer a risk-free way to secure a lot of funding at once, as if there are insufficient funds to run the convention, the backing will not go through.

It may be possible to acquire some degree of sponsorship from certain pen spinning business owners, for example PenWish or Mr. Nope, but this should not be relied upon for a community-organized event.

2.6 Promotion and outreach

The scale required to make the event a success requires community leaders within the geographical location and outside to be fully cooperative with promoting the event to their members. The following groups are listed in order of priority to the organization of the event.

For Mainland Europe, this would mean official backing from FPSB, GPC and PPP at a minimum.

International communities such as Fen Spinner and The Workshop would be beneficial as well, as they contain members that while not being resident of these countries, have the means to attend and are involved in the international community.

Next, the backing of smaller communities in mainland Europe such as SweSpin, NLPSC and SPSC would also provide additional interest.

Finally, the backing of communities not typically associated with the international community and outside mainland Europe such as PSH, THPSC, VNPS, JEB, TWPS and HKPSA may provide additional individuals interested in attending an international-accepting event.

2.7 Organization and structure

The convention would need to be handled with the formation of a new company, likely an LLC. This company would handle all the funds and expenses. The chairman of the convention should be someone who can choose correct individuals for vital tasks and has the outreach required to receive the backing needed to start the event.

Essential volunteers would need to be found to handle tasks such as managing the convention's funds, promotion of the convention, and day-to-day tasks like moving and setting up equipment, running panels or tournaments and so forth.

Some technical infrastructure will be needed, even if basic to start, to collect payments, display needed information about the convention, provide tickets and display schedules of the individual events within the convention.

3 Rough suggestions

3.1 Convention events

There are five key event types for the convention:

1. Opening and closing ceremonies
2. Panel discussions
3. Tournaments and competitions
4. Video viewings
5. Trading events

The opening and closing ceremonies are simple enough, we take a venue location big enough to fit all attending people, then talk through general convention points of the venue and where to go, how to get schedules, hygiene and personal well-being and some code of conduct matters. Then we officially welcome everyone and bring in a guest of honor/other important speaker to give a small 5-10 minute presentation before letting everyone go.

The closing ceremony should emphasize events that occurred during the convention, what we got right and wrong, thank everyone for coming and possibly end on a musical note.

Panel discussions are a common feature in conventions, and it's a good opportunity for individuals skilled or knowledgeable in various things to set up a presentation either individually or together in a way that will be of interest to convention attendees. For instance, an analysis of pen modding by VORE-TEX, or tips and tricks on power combo creation by i.suk would be great examples. This is also a key area where we want to scout out guests of honor, highlight them for panels they will run.

Tournaments and competitions can come in more than just the expected single elimination spinning tournament format. For instance, a live round robin tournament where everyone has to use the same (rsvp mx) pen mod or a single round live pen modding competition against time. There is a lot of room for experimentation here.

Video viewings are a little like panels, but focused more on watching a new video or series of videos. In Japan there have been CV viewings where people sit down to watch a new CV live, and this is something we could certainly do here.

Trading events would be either run on a short period to bring focus in, or held throughout the duration of the convention in a "dealer's den" format. Given the initial small scale, it does not seem very feasible to expect a dealer to maintain a table for 2 days for only 100 attendees, so it would be better to focus on a couple of smaller duration events.

Not only would it be feasible to trade pen mods, cases, merchandise and parts, but it would also be possible to allow commissions for certain pen modders like VORE-TEX for instance, which could be completed during the convention.

A possible trading event would also be an auction, either for raising money for the event or for charity, where certain special items are put up for sale. For instance, rare pen mods or unique signed pen cases.

3.2 Sponsor compensation

It's typically expected that Sponsor tier ticket holders will receive some degree of merchandise for what is essentially a donation to the event. This usually amounts to merchandise worth around 50% of the sponsorship fee, and would include a clothing item like a hoodie or t-shirt plus several other bonuses such as custom notepad, a VIP convention badge, sticker sheet or custom printed RSVPs in the case of a pen spinning convention.

These can be ordered in bulk from promotional item manufacturers, and the smaller items can be provided also to regular ticket holders for attending the convention, e.g. a convention RSVP.

As a side note on ordering RSVPs, razzle dazzle is ideal as it has a colored barrel while also allowing you to easily order matching packs of black HGGs if you intend to distribute those also to allow people to make an MX.

3.3 Why holiday parks

It sounds a little ridiculous at first, but the advantages for low headcount events are clear. First, they're not very active outside of family holiday months, so the costs can be cut down and you're not sharing as much space. Second, the size of the accommodation is significantly larger, and there's a focus point on being able to cook and dine within your own accommodation, reducing the need to spend on restaurants. Given as the average spinner that can attend this convention would be in their early 20s, this would help tremendously.

The amenities at a holiday park differ significantly from a hotel, and there's space to do things *other than pen spinning*. It's a holiday with pen spinning, not just a pen spinning event. With specific events sparse and likely to be booked in evenings, that leaves a lot of room for attendees to be flexible with what they're doing.

Anyone who's been lucky enough to go to a Zhigao competition knows that the best part is when you're *not doing Zhigao shit* and get to do whatever you want with the people you wanted to meet up with.

3.4 Why hotels

It's easier, and a lot simpler to explain. Hotels with conference rooms are used to hosting conferences, and a convention is just a lot of conference room booking plus lodging.

It's heavily centralised, so you're going to have a lot of focus in the hotel lobby area for the attendees that do appear. The conference rooms will be easily accessible, and there will typically be some form

of hall for larger ceremonies or events. Unlike with holiday parks, you can keep a static "Dealer's Den" for trading events if you wish.

The location of the venue is generally better when it comes to hotels. They tend to be located in ideal areas of towns or cities for dining and excursions, and are easier to reach via public transport. However, this does come with a cost premium, as you can't cook for yourself and depending on the area dining out may be quite expensive. Lodging may include some or all meals at the hotel.

It's definitely "A convention" and is what most people expect when told so.

3.5 Location extras

It's not a huge deal whether you hold it in France or in Germany. It takes about 8-14h to get from anywhere in Germany to anywhere in France if you're using the right rail network, and it's very easy to get to either country in a day from any part of Europe.

Ideally though, West Germany or East France are the best located.

For those who balk at the train costs, there are always coach services like Flixbus which will happily take you on the longest coach ride of your life across Europe.

For those who hate the travel times, you can always fly! Budget airlines can often be even cheaper than trains or coaches. Albeit, you'll have to arrive 2-3 hours at the airport to give enough room to get through security and luggage check-in.

3.6 Guests of honor

Guests of honor are famous individuals that can bring in extra attention or skills to the convention. Typically, you'll want to bring someone with significant impact in the wider pen spinning community, so it would be individuals like Kay, i.suk, VORE-TEX etc. At larger conventions, these individuals get their tickets paid for, but with the smaller scale, that's simply not much of an option.

Instead, we can offer them space on bigger events or panels, and bring attendees to them. As a general rule, they are like people who volunteer to run panels or judge tournaments, but there are only a few of them and they are heavily advertised as a key part of the event. "Look, we have Spinnerpeem here!".

3.7 Volunteers and staff

It may seem like you wouldn't need a whole lot of staff to point people around and run some panels, but you'd be very wrong. At the high level, you need someone to handle finances and someone to handle the technical infrastructure, who are ideally not the chairman, who'll be busy handling all the volunteers.

You need volunteers for security, because if some dipshit drinks too much and starts causing a scene, you want to get to him before the hotel security or the police do. That means that you need a head of security who can handle training the volunteers who perform the security role.

You need general volunteers as well for pointing people around and setting up events and panels. You have dealers clogging up the lobby with folded up tables looking lost, they need to get set up and ready in time. Any equipment we rent will need to be managed and accounted for where it's not provided by the venue. Nobody wants to arrive at a panel talking about videos to find the projector has gone missing.

We also need media volunteers to man the social media accounts and provide running video and photographs of the event. If there's a competition going on, we might need someone to set up a laptop and camera so that they can stream it live to YouTube and Twitch for people who aren't able to attend the event.

Graphics have to be drawn, schedules need to be created and plans for who is doing what need to be written up. With some luck the volunteer staff will be managed in a way that means they will never be overloaded and serious mistakes won't happen, but it's also very possible for this to be very stressful on the people running the event.

3.8 Backing woes

It's no secret that community leaders are very lax in the pen spinning communities. It can take a long time to arrange even small, informal gatherings, and there's plenty of infighting to boot.

For instance, assume Fen Spinner was to announce SpinCon tomorrow, with a venue, kickstarter and website. The first barrier would be trying to negotiate with community leaders to get backing for the event, which would be a PR nightmare. As an example as to how ridiculous it can get, Fen Spinner currently can't even receive recognition that it is a pen spinning *board* to begin with, leading to dilemmas over its inclusion in SpinFest and the changing of the WT21 rulebook so that Fen Spinner couldn't register as a community.

That's not even scratching the surface either, because Pen Spinning drama is so petty that it would be almost impossible to bring GPC and FPSB leadership to the drawing board for the convention if it was headed by Fen Spinner.

Knowing this, the only possible outcome is to instead found a new organization with a new, trusted individual as chairman, who is considered neutral or at least fairly neutral across the pen spinning scene, who can bring in the right people to get the event underway.