

Background

Graphic-Con began in 2013 as a one-day event designed to promote reading through the celebration of graphic novels, comic books, film, and other media which have long been identified as effective means to promote literacy among “reluctant readers” and other demographics for whom reading represents a challenge. Promoting these forms of literature and film both helps legitimize these often ignored and trivialized media while also making the connection that Greater Sudbury Public Library supports these media through its collections and other services.

Since its inception the event has grown each year, attracting increasingly greater numbers of visitors, vendors, artists, and special guests. In 2016 Graphic-Con moved to the Sudbury Community Arena, a venue that allowed for a significant expansion of the event's programming and a corresponding increase in participation.

The 2016 event also saw the establishment of key partnerships including Launchpad Creative who provided in-kind marketing and promotion support and Downtown Sudbury who provided key financial support. Attendance in 2016 nearly doubled that of the previous year, with artist and vendor participation also undergoing significant expansion.

The success of the 2016 event led to the creation of a community advisory group to assist with planning and delivery for 2017. Community group members representing a diverse range of interests, backgrounds, and skill-sets provided input into the planning process, helping shape the continued evolution of the event. Community group members also provided critical hands-on assistance in the lead-up to the event and played key roles during the event itself. Given Greater Sudbury Public Library's mandate to identify and support the needs of our community, the community advisory group's involvement in the 2017 event has been invaluable.

Event Details

In 2017 ticket sales totaled approximately 3,700 with an estimated additional 1,500 participants taking part in the “Kids Con” event at The Market. This, in addition to staff, vendors, volunteers, and special guests brings the total number of participants for 2017 to an estimated 4,500 to 5,000 unique participants.

Year	Location	Number of Attendees
2013	South End Library	300
2015	Science North	2,000
2016	Sudbury Community Arena	4,000
2017	Sudbury Community Arena	5,000

In keeping with the mandate of public libraries in Ontario, Graphic-Con operates on a cost-recovery basis: nominal fees for entry and for table rental are intended to offset operating costs while ensuring that the event remains as affordable and accessible as possible. In-kind donations from a wide range of sponsors and community partners also help support the event and offset additional costs.

For the 2017 event admission was priced at \$5.00 per person with children 12 and under receiving free admission. Advanced tickets were available for purchase online: approximately 300 tickets were sold prior to the event. Total revenue from ticket sales amounted to \$12,305. Additional revenue from table sales and grants resulted in total revenue of \$20,819. Total expenses related to the event, totaled \$21,931 plus Greater Sudbury Public Library's contribution of \$1,112, achieving a break-even budget for 2017.

A total of 52 exhibitors and vendors participated in the event. An additional 14 "special guests" also participated including professional cosplayers, authors and artists, and celebrities including two members of the original cast of Degrassi.

Social Outcomes

Through the event's evolution inclusivity has emerged as a major theme. Graphic-Con provides a safe, inclusive space for individuals to gather, to meet other participants, and, importantly, to share and express their unique interests with others. This inclusivity has produced an environment of respect and belonging for all participants, including those who might otherwise experience social exclusion as a result of their interests, beliefs, or expression. While Graphic-Con is primarily a fun and engaging event we have learned that it also contributes to the general wellbeing of participants. Further, Graphic-Con provides participants with opportunities to connect with authors, artists, and makers. These are important opportunities for aspiring children and teens to meet role-models and explore sources inspiration.

Economic Outcomes

Vendors and exhibitors represent the most significant economic activity associated with Graphic-Con. Many of the 52 vendors and exhibitors use Graphic-Con to sell merchandise or promote commercial services. While vendors are not currently required to report sales figures, but will be a requirement for future events, we estimate total direct sales for the day of the event to be in the range of \$50,000. This does not account for indirect business as a result of the event. Most of the vendors and exhibitors are from Northern Ontario, many of whom are located in the City of Greater Sudbury. Tables for local artists are allocated among those available for exhibitors: artist tables are provided at no cost giving up-and-coming artists an opportunity promote their work and generate revenue with minimal overhead costs.

In 2017 Graphic-Con attracted approximately 5,000 people to Sudbury's downtown core. With limited options for food and refreshments on site a significant number of attendees supported local, downtown businesses. While there is no data on the economic spill-over of the event anecdotal reports from local business owners suggests that Graphic-Con contributes to a significant increase in business. Locating the Kid's Con event at The Market also drew Graphic Con attendees to the farmer's market vendors. Graphic-Con coincided with the annual Downtown Rotary Blues for Food event on Durham Street: the close proximity of these two large events produced a "destination" effect with participants spending an extended period of time in the downtown while taking in both events.

Greater Sudbury Public Library and Science North partnered to deliver the 2015 Graphic-Con event. Though the 2015 event was a success for both organizations the number of participants exceeded the capacity available within the Vale Cavern requiring Greater Sudbury Public Library to seek a larger venue for 2016. Nevertheless, Greater Sudbury Public Library and Science North have continued the partnership with Science North hosting Graphic-Con related film screenings over the Graphic-Con weekend. This partnership has been particularly valuable in encouraging out of town visitors to extend their visit, producing further benefits for local hotels and restaurants. Further, the partnership between Greater Sudbury Public Library and Science North forged through Graphic Con has continued to develop and strengthen, leading to further opportunities for cross-promotion and event production. The co-organized Maker Fest event that took place in May 2017 at Science North is an example of this continued partnership.

As a library-led initiative Graphic-Con has also been significant in raising the profile of the Greater Sudbury Public Library within the library community, both across the Province and nationally. Staff from the Greater Sudbury Public has presented on Graphic-Con at the Ontario Library Association Super Conference, Canada's premier professional conference. This session, instructing librarians from across Canada on the process for organizing an event of the scope and scale of Graphic-Con, has raised the profile of the Greater Sudbury Public Library and influenced other libraries to adopt the model created in Greater Sudbury.

Next Steps

Planning for Graphic-Con 2018 is underway. The event will take place June 9th, 2018 at the Sudbury Community Arena.

For 2018 key areas of development will include:

- To focus on the theme of art and artists, ranging from comic books to film
- To provide greater opportunities for local artists and artists from across Canada to present their work through exhibitions, workshops, and panel discussions
- To leverage Graphic-Con's past success in attracting sponsors, particularly to enhance the event's marketing and promotions and to support the hosting of special guests from outside Greater Sudbury

While Graphic-Con has grown out of the Greater Sudbury Public Library's programming initiatives the increased size and scale of the event presents certain operational challenges. Organizing an event of this size requires a significant number of volunteer support and staff hours.

The next stage in this process is to ensure Graphic-Con's long-term sustainability by further integrating the community whom it is designed to support into the event's planning and operation. A townhall community event is planned for early fall with an open invitation to any potential stakeholders with a continued interest the event. The Greater Sudbury Public Library will continue to guide and support the event for the foreseeable future to ensure its continued success.

Attachments

Appendix A – Graphic Con 2017 Advertisement