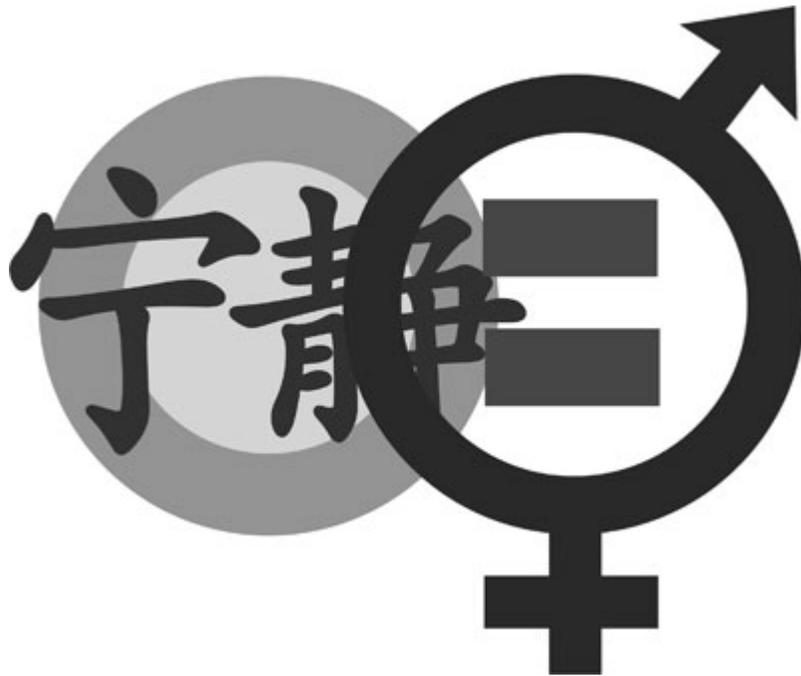


# A GUIDE

## ON HOW TO ORGANIZE A CAN'T STOP THE SERENITY EVENT



2009

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Welcome

So you've heard about this wonderful event called “Can’t Stop the Serenity”, and think you'd like to get involved. That's great. The more the merrier. It's a very rewarding experience, you learn so much, and you meet some great people.

## 1.2 Background

“Can’t Stop the Serenity” (or CSTS for short) started in 2006 by a man known as The One True B!x in Portland, Oregon. This very avid fan decided to show “Serenity” on Joss Whedon’s birthday as a charity event to raise money for one of Joss’ favorite charities that his late mother was involved with, Equality Now. When B!x decided to share this idea with the world and invite them to join in, we are sure he had no idea that 46 cities across the globe would sign up to organize similar events, across the US, Canada, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. These events ranged from simply screening the movie, to elaborate shindigs, parties, and even Browncoat feasts! Many were organized within just a couple of months. After all the screenings were done, these fans stood by proudly as their combined efforts raised over US \$65,000 for Equality Now.

Immediately after, there was chatter about holding the event bigger and better in 2007. It wasn’t long before it was decided to make the event an annual one. So in 2007, with Devin Pike at the helm of the ship, 47 cities signed up to hold a screening. A stunning logo for 2007 was designed by Adam “Lexigeek” Levermore-Rich and from that global merchandise was organized: T-shirts and movie-size posters. The same design was used to create other merchandise locally such as magnets, mugs, badges, and many other shiny items. We received Global sponsorship from Universal, BenBella Books, the Bedlam Bards, Read My Chest, Things From Another World, Dark Horse, Dragonweave Jewelry, Quantum Mechanix, the Browncoat Cruise, and Done The Impossible. With more time to organize their events and a stronger global support network in place, the organizers in 2007 went on to raise an impressive US \$106,000 for Equality Now.

## 1.3 What is “Serenity”?

Joss Whedon, creator of hit shows “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” and “Angel”, also made a short-lived series called “Firefly”. Although it was cancelled after only 11 episodes, its fan base snowballed until it reached a similar cult standing equal to any of Whedon’s other longer lived shows. The fans tried their hardest to get “Firefly” back on the air, but to no avail. Eventually Joss was approached by Universal to make a movie based upon “Firefly”, which is commonly accepted to be because of the fans insistence that more of the story be told. Whilst not being a smash hit at the box office, “Serenity” has gone on to sell more than 2 million copies and had a special ultimate Collectors Edition released last year on top of the previous special edition. Rumors suggest this was because the original versions of Serenity kept selling out. The movie itself was a big hit with the fans, who call themselves Browncoats after the rebels who fight against the Alliance in the Serenity ‘Verse.

*Plot Summary:* The future. A passenger with a deadly secret. Six rebels on the run. An assassin in pursuit. When the renegade crew of Serenity agrees to hide a fugitive on their ship, they find

themselves in an awesome action-packed battle between the relentless military might of a totalitarian regime who will destroy anything - or anyone - to get the girl back and the bloodthirsty creatures who roam the uncharted areas of space. But, the greatest danger of all may be on their ship. From the mind of Joss Whedon, comes a new edge-of-your-seat adventure loaded with explosive battles, gripping special effects and fantastic new worlds.

#### **1.4 Who or what is Equality Now and why are we supporting them?**

Equality Now was founded in 1992 to work for the protection and promotion of the human rights of women around the world. Working with national human rights organizations and individual activists, Equality Now documents violence and discrimination against women and mobilizes international action to support their efforts to stop these human rights abuses. Through its Women's Action Network of concerned groups and individuals around the world, Equality Now:

- Distributes information about human rights violations
- Takes action to protest these violations
- Brings public attention to human rights violations against women

The Women's Action Network is committed to voicing a worldwide call for justice and equality for women. Issues of urgent concern to Equality Now include rape, domestic violence, reproductive rights, trafficking of women, female genital mutilation, and the denial of equal access to economic opportunity and political participation. Human rights violations against women have historically been denied the attention and concern of international organizations, national governments, traditional human rights groups and the media. Meanwhile, hundreds of millions of girls and women around the globe continue to endure debilitating and often fatal human rights abuses:

- **India:** A 10-year-old girl is rescued by a flight attendant who notices her crying. Her father has sold her to the 60-year-old Saudi Arabian man sitting next to her for the equivalent of US\$240.
- **Kenya:** At a boarding school, 300 boys attack the girls' dormitory. Seventy-one girls are raped. Nineteen are trampled to death in the stampede to escape. The school's vice principal remarks, "The boys never meant any harm against the girls. They just wanted to rape."
- **Brazil:** A man who confessed to stabbing his wife and her lover to death is for the second time acquitted of murder by an all-male jury. The acquittal is based on the argument that he acted in legitimate defense of his wronged honor.
- **Ireland:** A 14-year-old girl, raped by the father of her best friend, learns she is pregnant. She is prohibited from traveling to England where abortion is legal. Only when she indicates she will commit suicide if forced to carry the pregnancy to term does the Supreme Court allow her to proceed.
- **United States:** A 51-year-old woman is stabbed 19 times and killed by her former boyfriend as she waits inside a courthouse to extend an order of protection. Twice before he had been charged with harassment. Both times the charges were dropped.
- **17-year-old Dua Khalil** was pulled into a crowd of young men and was kicked and stoned her to death, instigated by her family. She was of the Yazidi faith, and was seen in the company of a Sunni Muslim, and possibly suspected of having

married him or converted. That she was torturously murdered for this is not, in fact, a particularly uncommon story. But now you can watch it on the news and on places like YouTube because as the girl was on the ground trying to get up, the few in the group who were not busy killing her for 'honor' were filming the event with their camera-phones.

These are only a few instances of abuse that occur every single day. Human rights violations against women must be documented, publicized and stopped. **We need Equality Now.**

CSTS and Joss both feel very strongly about these things, and so as our birthday present to Joss, we hold these events, and raise this money to give to Equality Now who try to make the world a better place for us all, men and women alike. Last year, Joss auctioned off a dinner with himself for Equality Now, as well as some very cool collectible items and raised over US \$52,000.

### **1.5 What do Joss and Equality Now think of this event?**

*"Thank you. All. First, for all your birthday wishes, which meant a lot to my spectacularly old self. But the second "Thank You" is obviously for the screenings, and everyone's involvement. Apparently there is only One True B!x and we should stop worshipping false B!x's. What an achievement. I wish I could have been at one, but destroying my enemies is time-consuming (and where the @#\$% do I hide Goddard's body? He's ENORMOUS!). I got an E-mail from Jessica Neuwirth, who was of course thrilled and grateful for the whole thing. It's by your efforts that my movie has become inexorably linked to such a vital, under-recognized cause, and so y'all should be frantically patting yourselves on the backs. Thank you. It matters. Plus, fun!"*

-Joss Whedon (Posted on Whedonesque.com)

*"All of us at Equality Now continue to be amazed by and grateful for the Browncoats' and Serenity fans' generous and committed support for our work. Their energy and enthusiasm is inspiring and these screenings are coming at a critical time when we are especially in need of funds! We thank each and every one of them and Happy Birthday to Joss!"*

-Amanda Sullivan, Equality Now

### **1.6 What's happening in 2009?**

As has now become the tradition, we started off 2009's event with a new Global Organizer, Anne Barringer. For 2009 we have a global goal of 60 participating cities and a combined donation of US \$175,000. We hope to hold the event within a 2-3 week radius from Joss' birthday, but due to the accidental destruction of 3/4 of the 35mm film prints in the US last year, an extension of this will be considered if a closer date could not be met due to lack of a print. Several global sponsors are back on board, and global merchandise displaying another Lexigeek design is in the works. New this year is a Global Committee, a team of organizers around the globe who will be helping the 2009 GO in the quest to raise money for Equality Now, and an art contest to see who designs the awesome CSTS logo to be used in conjunction with Lexigeek's work.

## 2. How to Plan a CSTS Screening/Event

### 2.1 Check if your city is already holding a screening

Check out <http://www.cantstoptheserenity.com> to see if your city/town is listed. If it is, contact your organizer and offer to help. I'm sure they'd love all the help they can get. If your city is not listed, **let us know you're interested**. Many of the CSTS organizers are doing this for their third or fourth year this year, and have a lot of experience and wisdom they are willing to share. We will attempt to buddy you with one of these, to help you out as much as possible, although we are all willing to help where we can. Email Anne at [anne@cantstoptheserenity.com](mailto:anne@cantstoptheserenity.com) so our global coordinator is aware of who you are. Introduce yourself briefly, and send her your contact details. New this year, there will be an official registration form and a US \$20.00 pre-payment that will be put towards shipping your city's global swag (t-shirts and posters).

### 2.2 Selecting a date

CSTS centers around Serenity and Firefly's creator, Joss Whedon's, birthday on June 23rd. Events normally play out in the week or two on either side of this date. The closer, the better, but we know it can be hard to do this, when factoring in school/college holidays and your cinemas availability. In the US, because of the print shortage, later dates will be authorized on a case by case basis. Earlier dates are not recommended as you miss out on the opportunity of global merchandise. Think about what date(s) would work best in your local area. You should consider things like public holidays, school terms and other events that may draw people to or from our event. Weekend evenings are often the best option, but venue cost and availability may make it more worthwhile to hold your event on a weeknight or during the day.

### 2.3 Selecting a team

Organizing a CSTS event is a big responsibility and a lot of work, which goes a lot smoother with someone to help you. Send their contact details to Anne also. If we can't get hold of you, then we can make sure you are OK by asking them. Find a crew. To put on a successful event (without it taking over your life and stressing you out) you need some help. We recommend a minimum of three people to spread the work around. So, how do you find these helpful people? Ask your friends and family. Check out the web for local Browncoat groups. Ask for help on Firefly/Serenity message boards and online communities. You'd be surprised at how easy it can be to find a crew once people know you're looking. Once you've got your crew together, find a time to meet. If possible, a face to face meeting is best. This should be in a relaxed environment, so that you can all get to know each other. If there are many people willing to help you out, utilize them. The more people you have on board to help, the easier it will be for you as an organizer, and the better your event will end up being, if only because you are less stressed.

### 2.4 Finding a venue

You obviously need somewhere to show the movie. Start with your local cinemas. The main things you need to think about when choosing your venue are:

- Screening facilities (DVD or 35mm film)
- Public Access (including disability access)

- Local transport options (including parking)
- Venue layout (foyer, sales area, seating)
- Availability on your chosen date(s)
- Size (number of seats)

You want a good deal for venue hire, as this is often where people get caught out. Look for a flat fee, or a very small, per ticket sold fee. Try to avoid flat fees plus per ticket fees, as this can add up very quickly. Try to avoid using a cinema that wants a fee per seat, rather than by ticket, especially if you aren't sure how many people will come in your first year. Make sure your venue knows that 100% of profit goes to charity. Call your venues of interest during the mid-afternoon (around 1-2pm) and tell them that you'd like to speak to someone about renting the venue for a charity event. You will most likely end up speaking to a salesperson or manager. If the sales staff are not available, be sure to get the names and contact details of the relevant people (more than one if possible) and try again later. Don't count on getting a return call or email response on your first enquiry – you will need to be proactive and follow up. Be prepared for the venue sales staff to refer you to their national headquarters – get a specific name and note down who referred you. Here are a few tips when making enquiries:

- Mention the event name, the movie name and Equality Now. It's helpful to have a little blurb prepared about the event and about Equality Now.
- Discuss your preferred date, and be ready to negotiate dates and times that are beneficial for both your crew and the venue. Venues may be reluctant to hold a private event during their peak times (such as Saturdays) and may have premium rates for particular times. Be prepared to be flexible.
- Find out the rental rate. For theatres, this should be either by seat or per ticket. Rates can vary widely, from \$200 to over \$1,000. Ask if they are willing to reduce their rate, as the event is for charity.
- Find out their minimum and maximum seating capacity. They may ask how many people will be attending. You may have no idea until you start selling tickets, but try to provide an estimate. If their rental rate is based on the number of attendees, find out when you will need to provide a "final" headcount.
- Find out what you would be getting as part of the hire agreement. Can they sell tickets for you from their box office? Do they provide any staff? Can you set up tables in the foyer/lobby to sell tickets or merchandise? Can they advertise the event by displaying posters and posting the details on their website?
- Find out when you would need to make a deposit to secure the date and time, and when the final payments would be due.
- They may mention that "Serenity" is out of circulation. Let them know that our organization has been in touch with Universal, and have negotiated special licensing rates for this event with no additional royalties due.
- Talk about concessions. Some cinemas will let you use the venue for an agreed amount of food/drink sales.
- Don't be afraid to negotiate with them. Suggest the possibility of them being a sponsor for a better rate.
- Talk about setting up and packing up time. You will always need some time to prepare and to pack up, so when you ask about a booking be sure to include this time not just the

time for the movie (approx 120mins in length). You might also need time for introductions, raffle prize drawings, or to show a PowerPoint presentation or other footage.

- Talk about AV equipment if you think you'll need it (i.e. microphone, projector etc).
- Talk about ticketing options. Will they do this for you or do you have to organize it yourself?
- Do you have to pay for house staff?
- Can you get special deals at the candy bar by having your attendees show their ticket?
- Do you have to pay a deposit? Do you have to pay the total fee upfront? (We suggest avoiding this).
- Look into smaller chain or independent cinemas, they are often much easier to deal with, and will do better deals.

This is all just rough guidelines and questions you should think about. Once you've found the venue you want, you will most likely be asked to sign a Hire Contract and put down a deposit. Make sure you read the contract carefully and understand what you're getting and what's expected of you. Can't find a cinema that will give you a good deal? Think DVD. Look for a venue that has DVD screening capability. Universities, halls, sport clubs. All sorts of places are possible venues when you are looking at using DVD instead of 35mm, although the quality of the actual picture obviously won't be of the same standard, but can still be pretty gorramn good. At this point, Serenity is available on BluRay and HD DVD. If your venue has a BluRay or HD DVD projector, then this is good for everyone involved. Because of the print shortage, finding a venue/cinema that has BluRay, DVD or HD DVD projectors of a high quality will allow you to have your event as close to the 23rd as possible.

## **2.5 Finding attendees**

For the event to be successful, you need to have people attend. The best way to do this is to let people in your area know about the event. Put out feelers early. Check Myspace, Facebook, Livejournal, Yahoo groups, Google groups, and anywhere else you can think of for local Browncoats, and see who would be interested in coming. Also look out for conventions happening in or around your area, these are often attended by people who are interested in Serenity or Sci-fi in general and you may pick up a bit of interest this way. Have some fliers ready to hand out. If you don't think you have enough interest to have a profitable screening, see the section on Affiliate Cities

## **2.6 Budgeting and financing your event**

So, you've got a date picked out. Now you need to work out how you're going to fund the event. All CSTS events are funded by the local crews. There is no seed funding or financial assistance available from the Global Steering Committee. The things you and your crew have to cover include: venue hire, equipment hire, film rental, advertising, printing, ticketing etc. All these costs should be factored into a budget, so that you are clear on just how much money you'll need to run your event. And you'll need to make sure that you have enough financing available to get you started. It is less stressful if you have enough funds to cover the venue hire and film rental to start with. There are lots of ways that you can finance your event. You may have a generous individual who is willing to front the money. You can spend a few months before the event fundraising by

selling chocolates and other similar items. You can also sell advertising space and get sponsors. Some sample forms have been provided to help you sort it all out in Section 7.

## 2.7 Organizing licensing

As much as this is for charity, we can't just stick our own copy of Serenity into a DVD projector and charge people admission. Universal own the rights to Serenity and fairly claim compensation for the viewing of it. They are aware of CSTS, and have set us up with a nice deal. Use of a 35mm film print of Serenity will cost \$250 + shipping. This is organized directly through Universal for all countries. DVD licensing in a conventional cinema is also handled directly through Universal and will cost \$150.

For DVD licensing in a **non-conventional** venue, such as lecture theatres, halls, churches etc, the licensing will be handled by your local DVD distributor for Universal:

- USA - Swank
- Australia - Village Roadshow
- Canada - Audio Cine Films

If your DVD distributing company is not listed here, Universal should be able to tell you which company handles their non-theatrical DVD licensing. Things to take note of:

- 35mm print booking is to be done through your cinema. *They* need to call Universal, not you, the organizer. Make sure they let Universal know the print is for a CSTS event.
- If you are granted DVD licensing you will need to supply your own copy of Serenity. **Be aware that only the movie is licensed for showing, the extras are not, and cannot be licensed for showing.**
- Whilst previous CSTS events have also shown Firefly, Buffy, or Angel episodes, this is no longer allowed as Fox has forbidden all non-theatrical (and theatrical) use of their episodes, which includes all our favorite Whedon TV shows. So unfortunately, no combining with a "Once More with Feeling" musical extravaganza.

## 2.8 Confirming CSTS status

Now that you have a venue, licensing and date all set, it's time to email Global again to confirm your CSTS status. Send an email to [anne@cantstoptheserenity.com](mailto:anne@cantstoptheserenity.com) and inform her of your venue and the date. Between you, you can work out if you are able to have a 35mm print or need to use DVD. This may mean you need to think about changing dates or venues. Once all of this is sorted, you will become an official CSTS event.

## 2.9 Affiliate Cities

So you've looked into how many Browncoats are in your area, and there doesn't seem to be a lot of them, or maybe all the venues you've tried want far too much money. Well this doesn't mean you can't be part of CSTS. Become an Affiliate City and hold a fundraising event within the acceptable CSTS screening dates. You could hold a bake sale, a BBQ, a carwash, a quiz night, almost anything you can think of that'd make a great fundraiser. Your city's name will be listed on the main web page, and your contribution will go towards meeting the 2009 donation goal of US \$175,000. If you are unsure about what is and isn't allowed for an Affiliate City, simply drop

us an email, or ask your questions on the forum. As this is only our second year of having Affiliate Cities, no question is a stupid one, and your questions could help us define this type of event better in the future.

## 3. Making Your Event a Success

### 3.1 Sorting out advertising and handling the media

Start thinking about how you can get the word out to Browncoats in your community. Design posters and handouts/fliers. Are there local sci-fi clubs you can contact? Local sci-fi events, conventions, or any other kind of event you might find a Browncoat at that you can ask to distribute fliers at? Ask at any local universities, there are usually several clubs that fit this description. For templates for posters check out the forums. Promotion is the key to a successful event, and the first thing you need is a way for people to get the necessary information, such as venue, dates, cost etc. There are four main areas for event promotion:

- Traditional Media – newspapers, magazines, radio, television
- Online – social networking sites, message boards, banner adverts
- On-site promotion – displaying and distributing flyers and posters at conventions, schools, businesses etc
- Word of mouth – telling friends, colleagues, family etc

Each of these kinds of promotions works in a different way, and you'll need to prepare a specific plan of attack for each.

This year, we have two global accounts for organizers to make use of. One account is with PR Newswire (a broad and global media guru, as it were). If you would like to submit a press release to PR Newswire, please contact Diana Lopez ([diana@cantstoptheserenity.com](mailto:diana@cantstoptheserenity.com)) via e-mail with your name and interests and she can get you more pricing information and options in a convenient PDF package.

The other account is with VistaPrint.com. They have many promotional materials available to you at a reasonable cost such as key chains, postcards, business cards, flyers and brochures. The CSTS insignia will be available for you to use as you'd like and you're more than allowed to upload your Browncoat Group's logo as well. The site is secured for online payments and your credit card information is NOT stored. You will be able to get items delivered directly to your doorstep! To get access to this account, please contact Diana Lopez at the above e-mail address.

#### *Traditional Media*

For this, you will need to put together a Media Release. For ideas see here:

<http://www.prweb.com/releases/2007/05/prweb524105.htm>

<http://www.prweb.com/releases/2007/1/prweb497086.htm>

You should include your date, venue and website as well as a local media contact. The media contact should be available by phone and email, and they should be prepared to field calls from journalists regarding the event – so make sure they know exactly what is going on! Get a few people to review your Media Release before you send it out – there's nothing worse than having a journalist spot a spelling error. The Media Release can be faxed or emailed to local newspapers,

radio stations, television shows (like talk shows, morning shows etc), podcasts and any other traditional media outlets you can think of. Don't be afraid to send it far and wide – the more attention you can get the better! Send your Media Release at least 4 weeks before the event, or in time for any deadlines. It is a good idea to make enquiries in advance so that you know who to send it to and when they would need it by.

### *Online*

A lot of information is spread online now, and it's often considered one of the best ways to reach specific target audiences. The Browncoat Community is a great place to start, so post your event where local Browncoats will find it – this could include Browncoat specific websites/message boards, and other websites where fans of television come together.

Social networking sites are also a great place to promote your event. Sites like MySpace, Facebook, Ning and Live Journal are home to many people who may be interested in your event. On MySpace, you can create a profile for your event, and invite people spread the word and become a “friend” of your event. With Facebook, you can list the event, and invite people to attend. For Live Journal, you can search for communities with similar interests (e.g. Firefly, Serenity, Joss Whedon) and post an entry about your event. Contacting fan friendly websites is also a great way to spread the word. Check out other sci-fi fan sites, fan clubs, television news/review/gossip sites... anywhere you think your potential audience may be. Approach the organizer of the group or media contact and tell them about the event – if you can get them excited about your event, they are more likely to promote your event to their members. You can also list your event on community websites such as local event guides and Craigslist, and if your venue has a website, ask if they can post the details of your event.

Links to some useful sites are provided at the end of this guide, in Section 6.

### *On-site Promotion*

Not all of your target audience is hooked into the internet, so it's still extremely useful to print off flyers and posters and put them where your target audience will see them. If your venue permits it, put up a poster with the event details clearly visible. You should also contact local businesses and ask to put up a poster on their wall, a flyer in their window, or leave some flyers on a counter. Some of the places you might try are: cafes, bookstores, libraries, video stores, recreational centers, community notice boards, college campuses, comic book stores, hobby stores, supermarkets, department stores, shopping malls, gas stations, etc.

### *Word of Mouth*

Telling everyone you know about your event can be a very successful way of getting people to attend – not just your friends, but friends of friends too. Keep some flyers with you at all times so you can pass them out. And don't limit it to just your family and friends. Tell your work colleagues, neighbors, school contacts, members of any teams or clubs you're in... even random strangers! You just never know who might be interested (or know someone else who might be interested). However you advertise, just remember the key point – it's all for a good cause.

### **3.2 Participating on the Global CSTS forums**

One of the best places to get advice and ideas from is the forums. Be sure to sign up, have a thread for your city, and be an active participator. Don't be afraid to ask for help, or to give suggestions, or to even jump in and offer help. We were all first time organizers once. There is a special section for Organizers only. You need to be added to this group manually so once you've contacted Anne the first time, email [kazia@cantstoptheserenity.com](mailto:kazia@cantstoptheserenity.com) to have access granted. There is a lot of valuable information in this forum section, so be sure to do this, as this information will not be posted anywhere public.

### **3.3 Organizing merchandise and fundraising**

Having souvenirs and merchandise available for purchase can add to your profits and increase the appeal of your event – especially if you're in an area where such items are hard to come by. Think about the kind of items that might appeal to local fans – this could include event souvenirs (like shirts, magnets, bags or posters) and licensed merchandise, such as DVDs etc. You could staff a sales booth yourselves or negotiate with a local vendor to sell on site and donate a portion of their sales to your event.

In 2009, there will be globally ordered T-shirts and posters again, using a bulk order for all cities, rather than going solo, to get much cheaper prices. Look around the forums for information on prices and cut off dates. Many organizers will also set up orders for things like magnets, mugs, pins etc, so keep an eye out for those. You can do merchandise of your own as well. Just make sure you follow all the copyright rules, currently listed here:

<http://community.cantstoptheserenity.com/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=88>

(Found in the Organizers only section)

New this year, there will also be a central website, VistaPrint.com, that will have an account with CSTS. On this site you will find advertising supplies such as postcards, flyers, keychains, business cards and much more. The CSTS logo will already be uploaded and ready for you to plaster onto whatever you'd like. The costs for these items are relatively low and you can have them mailed directly to your doorstep. This will allow you to edit the information so it has details that relate to your city's event. Please contact Diana Lopez ([diana@cantstoptheserenity.com](mailto:diana@cantstoptheserenity.com)) to gain access to this site and for more information about it.

Think about doing some fundraising. CSTS is not an organization. It is run by fans. There is no central fund to help you pay for any T-shirts you might want to sell to your attendees, or to pay for a deposit for you venue, so either Organizers use their own money to fund deposits or use presales of tickets or merchandise to cover costs. BBQs, bake sales, chocolate sales, whatever is readily available in your state. Raffles are an excellent way to fundraise, if your Local/State laws allow it. Some States require a license to hold a raffle that will cost more than the raffle would bring in. Some have a limit on the amount the prizes can be worth before a license is required.

### **3.4 Setting up a Website**

Whether it be a Livejournal community, Myspace, Facebook, Wordpress, Ning or a more professional site, you need a place your potential attendees can easily find information specific to your event, a place to set up ticket/merchandise sales if they aren't handled on the day/by your venue. It's also an easy way to point media to your own event. Once you have set it up keep it up

to date! Even if you don't have a lot of new information to share, just adding a short note on a regular basis will encourage people to keep checking for when you do have important information to share. Add information, photos etc on previous events to give new people an idea of what goes on.

### **3.5 Seeking sponsorship**

CSTS is lucky to be blessed with global sponsors. 2007's and 2008's events saw each participating city receive a box full of wonderful items from the global sponsorship effort, including CDs, books, magnets, and many other cool things, both Serenity related and simply shiny items. Some of these Sponsors have signed on for 2009, and others are being negotiated. A list will be posted in the Organizers Only Forum, so once you've signed on to hold a screening you'll find out what marvelous things we have lined up. Seek local sponsorship. It never hurts to ask. Book stores, comic book stores, collector/memorabilia stores etc are often very Browncoat friendly, or are owned/run by Browncoats themselves. Sponsors can come in all shapes and sizes – and can provide all kinds of benefits. A sponsor could make a cash donation, provide free/reduced rate advertising and services, or donate goods for a prize draw/raffle/auction/goodie bags.

Think about the kinds of things that could benefit your event and appeal to your target audience. Then, think of the kinds of businesses that could help. Your venue could provide discounted venue hire, candy bar coupons or free movie tickets. Retailers could provide items for raffles, auctions or giveaways, such as DVDs, books, Serenity merchandise, gift vouchers, etc. Radio stations, newspapers and websites can provide free advertising and raise awareness of your event. And you could get free/discounted printing and other services from local businesses. You can get ideas from other charity/community events by looking at their websites/advertising to see who has provided support.

Develop a sponsorship plan. Think about how much sponsorship you would need, and what kind of things would benefit your event most. Work out what you can offer sponsors, and remember that some kinds of sponsorship should receive more benefits than others. You may consider sponsorship levels with different benefits. It may be tempting to give each level a Firefly/Serenity themed name, but remember that this will generally have no meaning to the people you're approaching. It is best to keep the names simple and easily understood – e.g. Platinum, Gold, Silver and Bronze. When preparing to approach potential sponsors, work out in advance what you want and what you can offer. Do your homework and find out as much as you can about the organization, and who you should speak to. Target companies/stores who might benefit from the love and affection and general good vibes of a lot of local Browncoats. If you sent a letter, or email, follow it up about a week later with a phone call. Have a pitch prepared, and a written sponsorship request drafted – you may be asked to email your request and it's best to have something ready to go immediately. Be flexible about what you want and be open to things you may not have even considered. Be prepared to spend some time repeating your request to many different people, particularly in large organizations, until you reach the person who can help you. Then, sell them on your event...but be careful not to oversell. They will often ask you to send in a written request, so make sure you write down the postal/email address and get the full name (including spelling) and contact number of the person you've spoken to.

Once you've made your submission, remember to follow up. When you're making your enquiries, find out when it is appropriate to follow up with them, so that you don't appear pushy. Some organizations need at least 2 months to consider sponsorship proposals, so don't leave it to the last minute! It can be a long slog, but it's very worth it when someone is generous. Be very good about giving your sponsors something back for their support. Offer advertising on your website, by way of a sponsor list, or an actual advertisement for more professional sites or in a printed program if you use one. Mention them at your event and include them in any printed material you offer your attendees, make up a PowerPoint presentation and include your sponsors on that – you can display this before and after the screening. Verbally thank your sponsors and ask your attendees to thank them by giving them your business. After your event is over, write a letter and thank them, tell them how the event went and about the global success of the event. Happy sponsors will be more likely to support you again next year.

### **3.6 Organizing Ticketing**

Before you begin selling tickets, you need to work out your maximum venue capacity. This figure will be provided by your venue, and must be adhered to for health and safety reasons. Each guest must have access to a seat, and you should avoid having guests sit in aisles, on stairs or on the floor. Event staff are also counted in this figure. For the purpose of this Guide, let's say that your venue capacity is 300 and you have 6 event staff. The maximum number of people you can have at your event is 300, including your crew of 6, so the maximum number of tickets you can sell is 294.

It is recommended that you print off exactly the same number of tickets that you intend to sell. Some groups have designed custom tickets, which can make great souvenirs. Whatever kind of ticket you choose, these should be numbered 1-294 to ensure that you don't risk accidentally selling more tickets than your venue capacity allows, and to ensure no one photocopies a ticket to get in free (although we'd hope no Browncoats would do this, it still must be considered). You definitely don't want to be turning away people who have bought tickets, just because you miscounted.

The price you charge for entry to your event depends on the cost of your event, and how much "mark up" you want to add. This "mark up" is the part that goes directly towards the charity. Go over your budget and work out how much income you need to cover the costs of your event. There is plenty of discussion about this on the forums. DVD licensing often is based on a set amount or a % of ticket sales, or both. One way to keep your costs down here is to have lower ticket prices and make your money back in raffles. If you have a bigger event, such as combining with a quiz night or a sit down dinner, obviously your ticket prices can be a bit higher. Generally, however people sell their tickets for \$10-15. You can also choose to have a discounted price for pre-sales as an incentive to buy tickets early (and guarantee you some income before the event). Put your tickets on sale as early as you can once venue, date, licensing and CSTS status has been organized. Online options include PayPal, sales checkout software, and online ticket vendors which can be set up to work from your Website. You may also be able to sell tickets through local stores, through your venue (although often they will take a fee per ticket for this). Direct pre-sales could also be sold by crew members by allocating them a specific number of tickets to sell. You can also set up merchandise pre-orders in a similar fashion. You can organize to sell tickets in person (be sure to take safety precautions of course) at a set date/time/location. Advertise that

tickets are on sale on your website, on networking sites etc. Think about whether you will have physical tickets which can be picked up at the venue, or mailed out to buyers. Some stationary companies sell pre perforated ticket paper/card that can be printed on to nice effect.

### **3.7 Keeping records and handling money**

This is a very important part of being a CSTS event organizer. You are responsible for a lot of people having a good time and a lot of money in some cases. So keep track of what merchandise people order, who has bought how many tickets, what money you have coming in and what money you have going out. And definitely keep receipts wherever possible. If you have all of this, and a record of money being donated to EN, there should hopefully be no problems if the tax man comes knocking to audit you. No organizer has had a problem with the event and tax to date. Think about all the ways you'll be handling money, from pre-sales of tickets and merchandise, advertising sales, on-site ticket and merchandise sales, raffle tickets, auction sales etc. There are so many ways that something could go wrong. But if you're well prepared, you can minimize that risk. Designate one person on your crew to be "chief money handler". This person will be responsible for keeping a record of finances, and accepting cash/payments. For the event itself, you should have one person at each sales location that handles the money – too many people handling cash can lead to mistakes, confusion and risk. It is also best to keep different kinds of sales separate. Have one cash box for ticket sales, one for merchandise sales and one for raffle/auction/donations. This way, when you tally all of the money at the end of the event, it will be easier to tell how much you made in each area. Your sales people should also keep a running tally of all the things they sell. This could be as simple as a notebook where they mark off each sale (e.g. 2 shirts, 1 poster etc). This way, you can reconcile sales and money received. Some people might ask about receipts and tax deductible donations. For specific information on this, please contact Equality Now. Some sample forms have been provided for you in Section 7.

NOTE: Equality Now is only a 501 (c) tax deductible charity in the US and the UK.

### **3.8 Planning a schedule for your event.**

Now that you have a date, a venue and some sponsors, it's time to start mapping out what is going to happen once people arrive. Work out what activities you want to have. You want your event to be fun, entertaining, and memorable. Look at other events for ideas, and don't be afraid to be creative and think outside the box. Here are a few ideas to consider:

- Costume Contest
- Theatre Sports
- Trivia Contest
- "Done the Impossible" documentary clips (confirm you have permission to show them of course)
- "Mosquito" Mockumentary (confirm you have permission to show this)
- Auction (silent or verbal)
- Raffle
- Door Prizes

Choose an MC to host the event. This could be a member of your crew or a local personality, such as a comedian, radio/television host. Whoever you choose, you should make sure that they're

confident, entertaining and well spoken. Special guests and guest speakers can add a bit of difference to your event. “Serenity” related guests are always popular, but you may need to budget for accommodation and travel arrangements. Local celebrities can also be excellent draw cards and make your event appeal to new audiences. A guest speaker from the Women’s Action Network can give attendees a fuller understanding of the work of Equality Now, and may encourage them to dig a little deeper for raffles and auctions. Plan out your event and develop a time line. This should include preparation and clean up times, and who will be doing what. Allow time for attendees to visit the concession and merchandise stands, before and during your event, and give them time for bathroom breaks. Think about the order you want to do everything in, and consider how you can keep your audience engaged and entertained. Work out when your MC needs to be on stage, and what they need to say – you may even draft up a script or notes for them to use. This should include talking up the charity and remind your guests about auctions, raffles or other fundraising activities throughout the event as well as thanking sponsors and your team. Put it in a printed program if you have one, which is a good idea as you can put in information about sponsors and Equality Now in there.

### **3.9 Decorating your venue**

So you’ve promoted your event and hoards of people are going to start arriving at your venue. What are they going to see when they get there? Decorating your venue can have a very significant impact on the success of your event. You want to create an environment where people know that they will be comfortable and have a great time. And hopefully, this welcoming environment will encourage them to open their wallets for a good cause. Your venue may have rules and restrictions on decorations, so be sure to check with them before you start making plans. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Add some color to your ticket sales table/booth with a Chinese design table cloth or table runner (for a counter top).
- Think about how you’re going to display your merchandise – where possible, items should be displayed at eye level and clearly marked with prices, sizes etc.
- Signs can be very effective to inform your guests, so print up some attractive signs to give information on the charity, ticket prices, raffles, auctions, kinds of payments accepted, sponsors, and anything else that you think people may need to know.
- Decorate your crew! Your crew should be easy to identify, so how about matching shirts, name tags, Crew ID cards on lanyards, or even Kaylee-styled parasols?

### **3.10 Finding time for yourself**

Perhaps the most important thing of all is to have fun. Try not to let things overwhelm you. We have a vent thread on the forums for letting off steam when things start going wrong. It’s aptly called the “Exploding Heads” forum. A common line used by organizers is “I can’t brain, I have the dumb.” We all go through this. Things can get you down; we know and understand because we’ve been there at one time or another. Take plenty of deep breaths; find time for just you to relax. Don’t neglect your family. Involve them if they will allow it, and find time to spend by yourselves. Friends and family are often very understanding, so don’t be afraid to call on them for help either, especially when it comes to the event and having someone to take pictures, footage, and generally help out. Remember this is fun to do most of the time.

## 4. Post Event Obligations

### 4.1 Tallying everything up

Congratulations! You've run a fantastic event, you had a great time and you've made bundles of money for Equality Now. Well done! Count up your proceeds and keep it safe until you can get it to a bank. Record the amount. Record how many people attended. Ask for feedback – find out what people liked, what they didn't and what they'd like to see next year. All the information you gather can help you run better events in the future as well as help to get sponsors on board for future events. If you like you can get them to fill out a survey about age, sex, email and anything else you might want to include that is not an invasion of privacy. This data could be collected to form an email list which can be used as a way to contact people directly about your grand total, or to tell them about an event the following year if you decide to have one. You could also post age/sex stats of the Browncoats who attended from your area. Post your attendance numbers, and amount raised along with a paragraph or two about how awesome your event was. Even if you are still selling off left over merchandise or are doing one last fundraiser, an estimate is required as soon as possible after your event as you can manage.

### 4.2 Catching up on sleep

After what has inevitably been a very hectic week/month or two for you, you deserve some sleep. Pack up, secure any money, and get yourself some much deserved sleep. Everything doesn't have to be done the minute your event finishes.

### 4.3 Thanking your sponsors

Don't forget to thank your sponsors and let them know how your event turned out. They like to know how their donation was received by everyone, and how their donation helped to support charity. So if it was an item that was auctioned, let them know how much it went for. Let them know your final donation. Thank them profusely. Send them something little if you want, or some small CSTS merchandise you might have. Keeping your sponsors happy will help them to decide to sponsor you again if you do the event again. You can also thank them by name at your event. Don't to forget to also thank your attendees, without them you wouldn't have an event, but obviously these do not need individual thank-you letters. Thank your venue too. If you were a tame, clean bunch of Browncoats they'll be more likely to let you come back again and maybe give you an even better deal.

### 4.4 Sending the donation to Equality Now

Before you send it all off, make sure you've reimburse anyone that needs reimbursing, paid any bills, and got all the money that is due. Check that you have all the records you need, such as receipts, invoices and sales lists. And put together a financial summary using a budget template provided in Section 7 of this guide. Once you know exactly how much money you will be donating to Equality Now, tell your crew. Then share the good news with the CSTS Global Organizer and the rest of the CSTS organizers! There are a number of ways to send your donation:

- By a check in the mail, preferably registered for security reasons  
Amanda Sullivan  
Equality Now  
250 West 57th Street #1527  
New York City, NY 10107  
US
- By Credit Card online  
[https://www.equalitynow.org/english/support/support\\_join\\_en.html](https://www.equalitynow.org/english/support/support_join_en.html)
- By Paypal  
[info@equalitynow.org](mailto:info@equalitynow.org)

You will also need to email Amanda Sullivan at EN ([asullivan@equalitynow.org](mailto:asullivan@equalitynow.org)) just after you have sent your donation stating how much and for what city. Also email this and any copy of the check, receipt etc to Anne. **Please don't send just a check in the mail**, include a letter saying who you are and what city you are donating on behalf of. Also, in the most likely situation, when submitting your donation by credit card or PayPal online, include your CSTS donation reference, which is *CSTS09CITY NAME* i.e. CSTS09AUSTIN Please try to have your donation finalized and sent no later than one month after your event, and be sure to both post this amount in the forums, and email it to Anne. If you need more time, please contact a member of the global team to advise them of your situation, but try to get it all sorted as soon as possible.

As of 2009, the Global Organizer and team have decided that, since CSTS is really about supporting Joss' choice of organizations, at least 75% of proceeds must be donated to Equality Now. The other 25% or less may be donated to whatever worthy charities the local organizer/Browncoat group running the event deems worthy. (So that 25% or less can go to one or be split however among the other charities.)

Please note this does not include money raised at the event via a separate donation button/donation box, or from a gathering of can goods or other items donated toward a particular charity, money raised from silent auction items purchased for the benefit of the other charities etc. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask. Hopefully this information will make things easier to plan your events.

#### **4.5 Wrapping up**

Now that everything is over and done, your event can be wrapped up. Write up a report of your event for your website and for the CSTS website, gather all of your records and organise your papers, then file them away carefully. Financial records should be kept for seven years – just in case there is an audit by Equality Now or government agencies. Before you put this event behind you, take the time to get together with your crew and celebrate your success. You've done a wonderful thing and you should all be extremely proud of yourselves!

## 5. Global Team Contact Details

**Andrew Louis Marnik** – Viral Video Head  
[almarnik@cantstoptheserenity.com](mailto:almarnik@cantstoptheserenity.com)

**Anne Barringer** – Global Coordinator  
[anne@cantstoptheserenity.com](mailto:anne@cantstoptheserenity.com)

**Beth Nelson** – Global Swag Head  
[beth@cantstoptheserenity.com](mailto:beth@cantstoptheserenity.com)

**Diana Lopez** – Administrative Head  
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**Jen Cummings** – Communications Head  
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**Kazia Hodges** – Webmistress Head  
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**Laura Barba** – Webmistress Assistant  
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**Marg Grady** – Financial Head  
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**Pete Thornbury** – PR/Marketing Assistant  
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**Richard Davis** – PR/Marketing Head  
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**Sheena Barnett** – Global Organizer Assistant  
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**Tanya Morris** – Mentorship Program Head  
[tanya@cantstoptheserenity.com](mailto:tanya@cantstoptheserenity.com)

**Tara Fallon** – Merchandising / Promotional Materials Head  
[tara@cantstoptheserenity.com](mailto:tara@cantstoptheserenity.com)

## 6. Useful Links and Sites

### 6.1 Basic Information

- Can't Stop the Serenity Homepage – <http://CantStopTheSerenity.com>
- Equality Now Homepage – <http://EqualityNow.org>
- Some Great Information on Fundraising – <http://www.fundraisers.com/index.php>  
<http://www.fundraiserhelp.com/>  
[http://nonprofit.about.com/od/fundraising/Fundraising\\_Tips\\_and\\_Tools.htm](http://nonprofit.about.com/od/fundraising/Fundraising_Tips_and_Tools.htm)  
<http://www.npaction.org/resources/WORC/fundplan.pdf>  
[http://managementhelp.org/fndrsng/np\\_raise/np\\_raise.htm](http://managementhelp.org/fndrsng/np_raise/np_raise.htm)  
<http://www.fund-raising.com/>  
<http://www.fundsraiser.com/>

### 6.2 Website Creation

Site	Cost	HTML Experience Required?	Use Your Own Domain?	PayPal Buttons?
Ning.com	Free	No, but allowed	Yes, for a price	Yes
LiveJournal.com	Free	No	No	?
Facebook.com	Free	No	No	No
MySpace.com	Free	Yes – Minor	No	Yes
Craigslist.com	Free	Yes – Minor	No	No
MeetUp.com	Fee for Organizer	No	No	Yes
VistaPrint.com	Monthly	No, but allowed	Yes	Yes
Yahoo.com Groups	Free	No	No	?
Geocities.com	?	Yes	Yes	Yes
LifeAndStuff.com	?	No, but allowed	Yes	Yes
BlogSpot.com	?	No, but allowed	Yes	Yes

All of the above sites are ones currently used by CSTS Organizers and Administrators. Technically, all sites can have a personalized domain name. You just have to buy the domain on a separate account and place a redirect code on the domain name you want. It'll point to the site of your choice. Because let's face it:  
[www.somespace.com/groups/global/charity/cantstoptheserenity](http://www.somespace.com/groups/global/charity/cantstoptheserenity) is much harder for your audience to remember than plain old [www.cantstoptheserenity.com](http://www.cantstoptheserenity.com). See what we mean?

### 6.3 Forums & Communities

As an organizer, you'll need to be registered on the CSTS Forums. Just go to the CSTS Homepage ([www.CantStopTheSerenity.com](http://www.CantStopTheSerenity.com)) and click on "Forums". You may have to register if this is your first year or first visit to the forums.

Once you've registered, picked out an awesome screen alias for yourself and filled out the basic information, please send an e-mail to Kazia Hodges ([kazia@cantstoptheserenity.com](mailto:kazia@cantstoptheserenity.com)) so she can give your account access to the very essential "Organizer Only" section of the forums. This is

where you'll find all the vital information you need to set up an amazing CSTS event! Please include your real name, the city your event will be held in, and an e-mail address you can be reached at.

There are tons of other communities out there for Browncoats to rally each other's support. Go be adventuresome and find some in your area!

## 7. Forms

The following pages have some sample forms that you are more than welcome to make use of for your CSTS event. If you have something else that works better for you, you're more than welcome to use that, too.

NOTE: The rest of this page is left intentionally blank. Forms start on the next page for easier printing. All forms will have an example or two of how they could be used.



### Can't Stop the Serenity 2009 Donation Records

Name	Date	Amount	Type	Wishes to remain Anonymous?
Smith, Jane 111 North Drive Noplace, Alabama 12345	2/15	300.00	Cash	No
Rogers, John 12 Happy Lane Titus, Alabama 23456	5/12	50.00	Paypal	Yes

