

MLB Fanfest and the Creation of the Sports Fan Experience

It is July 2007 and the city of San Francisco has been seized by baseball fever, as fans from throughout North America joined thousands of local fans to celebrate their passion - the game of baseball. Major League Baseball DHL All-Star FanFest - a live event that extends the All-Star Experience to hometown fans who might not be able to buy a ticket to the All-Star Game itself - occupied 3 floors of the city's Moscone South convention center. Our company, BaAM Productions (Toronto) planned and executed all aspects of the event, transforming the space into Baseball Heaven on Earth.

The process of creating this compelling Sports Fan Experience is a lot like project development for a permanent venue.

Floorplan and Design

A project development process is activated, following the same steps as would be used for any experience design project. As with any project, some steps receive more emphasis than others. In devising the floorplan for FanFest, for instance, the project development team makes at least three site visits and insists on verifying site dimensions (an often mammoth task in a 500,000 square foot venue). Updated as-built drawings of the venue are a rarity but they are requested from the outset, from both venue management and the original architect. More than 1,000 hours are spent on the overall layout and the layout of each attraction and area. Major League Baseball recognizes that this is important in order to ensure the best visitor flow, optimize capacity and provide the best visitor experience possible. And they also understand that given the limited window of time available for setup, everything must be planned down to the last ball and bat. The time and money spent at this stage will pay off later in the form of smooth, efficient load-in and setup.

The fan experience guides design development, production, and operations. This is a collaborative process; working with Major League Baseball and key stakeholders, ensuring that all factors are considered in helping to define what the experience should be. Ultimately it will include the right combination of interactive experiences, media-based experiences, hands-on activities, demonstrations, player appearances, shows, clinics, retail, food and artifact and mem-

orabilia displays. The design integrates scenic components, graphics, audio, video and lighting.

Being Prepared - and Robust

Planning, organization and preparation are everything - and because this show is installed every year, the opportunity exists to correct problems and keep them corrected. Part of the show setup includes an on-site graphics shop and a tool bin/workshop housed in a tractor-trailer at the loading dock. These didn't exist the first year the show was presented, but were introduced in response to a particular challenge encountered along the way. Since the first year, they have usually paid for themselves through the ability to quickly address certain needs on the spot. Local vendor partners are pre-qualified and in addition to providing goods and services in advance of the show, they are often on-call as an additional, just-in-case resource. All of these things are in place so that the production team can be as proactively flexible and responsive as possible.

by Christine Kerr



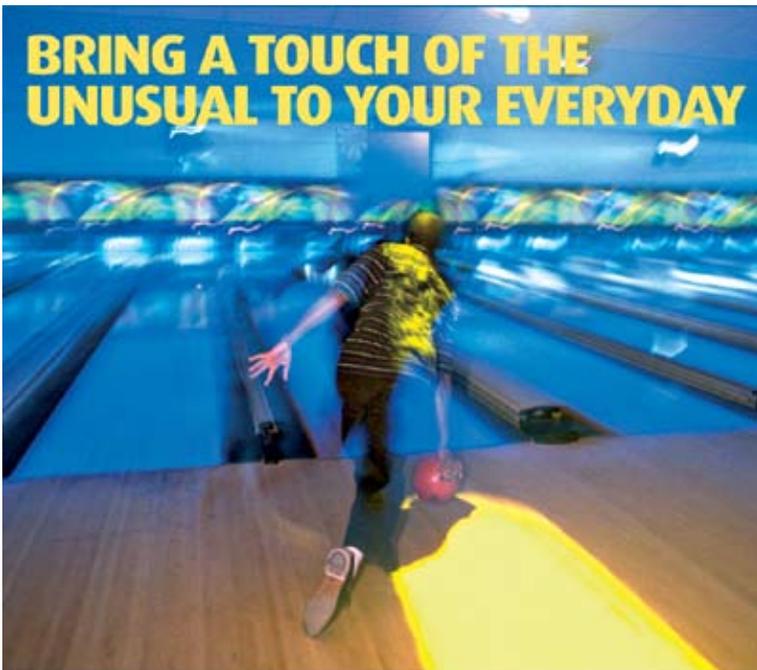
+ 1 614 760 8690
www.rotostudio.com



WE DESIGN **CLEVER INTERACTIVE SPACES**



planning, design, and production for museums,
entertainment attractions, and family destinations



In branding yourself apart from the competition or keeping your venue new and unique, dynamic colored lighting can play a major part.

Martin Professional has over two decades of creating exciting venues and unique experiences through the application of dynamic color and design.

Martin
www.martin.com

Logistics and efficiency are critical not just because the show typically is installed in eight days or less, but also because the workforce is primarily union labor. Keeping labor costs in check is a fine art. Step one is ensuring that the show comes off the trucks (upwards of 50 of them) in the right order. Of course, the show floor must be ready to receive the experience components when they arrive. This is achieved by dividing the installation of the show into manageable chunks, each with a supervisor. Using crews efficiently and keeping them motivated to do the best work possible is really important. Effective supervision and maintaining positive relationships with all jurisdictions are critical to the efficiency of the install and dismantle.

The show uses engaging but practical design, materials, and technology that will be easy for the visitor to use and easy for the staff to maintain, operate, and update if desired. All exhibit components are designed and fabricated to be durable because they are subject to intense wear over a short period of time and lots of handling - packing, transportation, setup and tear-down. They are refurbished annually. The scenic and graphic components must also be designed to showcase sponsors, partners and brands. These change every year and might include teams, corporations, or partners such as the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

The 2007 FanFest event broke attendance records and records for advance sale of tickets; demand was so high that timed admission was necessary for all five days of the show. Since 1991, almost 2 million fans have been able to immerse themselves in everything baseball by attending this annual event. The show has been presented in 17 cities (it has visited Pittsburgh twice) and has been scaled to work in venues that vary from 300,000 square feet to 500,000 square feet, often spilling out into the streets surrounding the venue to ensure all activities are included. Next year, the show will visit New York City for the first time and will take up at least 500,000 square feet in order to accommodate attendance projections.

Juggling and Mixing it Up

Coordination with various internal and external stakeholders is ongoing and at times intense. Establishing effective working relationships with the venue management team and union leadership is critical from the outset. The show also requires interaction and negotiation with outside parties that typically include municipal authorities (Police and Fire Departments, Emergency Response Services, the FBI, Homeland Security, etc.) and often extends to architects, general contractors, and the like. Naturally, maintaining regular client contact throughout the duration of the project is critical, as it is in every project.

Producing high-quality live guest experiences of this caliber calls for the same kind of design development, project management, fabrication and installation techniques as for permanent installations at museums, science centers and theme parks. Rather than being polar opposites on the project spectrum, event production and permanent exhibit design share a lot of territory - and require very similar project strategies and know-how.

Like many other TEA member companies, BaAM Productions has its roots in theater and we recognize the close relationship between experience design and theatrical design. We have observed that by deliberately mixing it

up - putting together teams with diverse skill sets, backgrounds and experience, we create an ideal balance of expertise that enhances the team's ability to easily move from one type of project to another. We've acted on this by adding designers, detailers and project managers with backgrounds in architecture and the construction industry to the core group with the theatrical training, and then mixed in a few museum professionals. BaAM has also invested in PMP certification from the Project Management Institute for its project managers, for additional credibility and professionalism. The result is a team fluent in the language of Experience Production across multiple markets: theater, architecture, construction and production for special events, trade shows, theme parks and cultural heritage attractions.

Moreover, we have found that there is a positive and mutually reinforcing relationship between what might otherwise be considered diverse areas of business. The experience with live events such as Major League Baseball All-Star Fanfest as well as fan experiences BaAM has produced for the NHL and NFL has, in turn made us better design developers of permanent exhibit and attraction projects. It's a great way to keep things fresh and keep your staff engaged. ■ ■ ■

Christine Kerr is the Director of Project Development and Operations at BaAM Productions in Toronto. Before joining BaAM six years ago, she spent almost 20 years working in theme parks and attractions. Christine is a theater grad from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. Her career highlights include: Director of Entertainment, Canada's Wonderland; Director of Guest Services and Operations, CN Tower – Toronto; and, Director of Operations, LEGOLAND Parks (Windsor, England and Carlsbad, California- she was involved in the design, construction and operation of both of these parks.) Since joining BaAM, she has expanded the scope of their work in the experience entertainment field.



FOX STUDIOS STAFF SHOP

Fast, custom
fabrication to
keep your project
on track.

- Vacuumforming
- Fiberglass
- Plaster, resin & acrylics
- Fire-rated materials upon request
- Quick turnaround

310.FOX.INFO / 310.369.4636

Fox Studios Production Services
10201 W. Pico Blvd. • Los Angeles, CA 90035 • www.foxstudiosstaff.com

™ and © 2006 Fox and its related entities. All rights reserved.

