

First Signal



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TRANSMISSION RECEIVING // IACON.UK NETWORK

COMMUNITY 0S · GUIDE ARCHIVE

TURNING YOUR DECISION TO HOST INTO A REAL, DATED, FINDABLE THING, THE GROUNDWORK BEFORE YOU EVER THINK ABOUT A VENUE.

You've done the thinking in Guide 00. You know roughly what you want and what success looks like for you. First Signal is about turning that decision into a real, dated, findable thing: the groundwork that comes before you go looking for a venue, which is Guide 02's job.

01 SOMETIMES THE DATE CHOOSES YOU

Your date is rarely a completely free choice, and that's fine. Usually something chooses it for you, and your job is to spot which.

Sometimes the event chooses it. A film release, an anniversary, a fixed occasion you're building around: the date isn't yours, so you plan around the knock-on effects, like travel and local traffic.

Sometimes the venue chooses it. You pick a sensible date for good reasons, then the room you want isn't free that day, so it moves. Pick your first date knowing it might shift once a venue's involved, and hold it loosely.

And sometimes the people travelling choose it. If folk are coming any distance, watch for things like school holidays, which fall at different times across the UK and Ireland, and dates where a weekend-away crowd can't easily justify the trip.

On top of all that, keep an eye on what's happening around you. Other conventions and community events nearby can split your audience, so try not to clash with them. IACON.uk is building a community calendar to make exactly this easier to see at a glance.

Example: the Newcastle Transformers the Show meetup had its date fixed by a cinema screening, which happened to land on the same day as a home football match. Parking and transport got messy for people heading to the Metro Centre, and turnout took a moderate hit. The date couldn't be moved, so the only lever left was telling people early enough to plan around it.

02 YOUR DIGITAL HOME: SET IT UP TO LISTEN

Once you've got a rough date in mind, you need a place people can find you. Usually that's wherever your community already gathers rather than a fancy new website. At this stage, though, set it up to listen, not to broadcast. The full, locked-in announcement, the date, the place, come along, deliberately waits until you've got a venue.

For now, use your space to gauge interest: "I'm thinking of hosting something around April, roughly this area. Very early days, but it'd really help me plan to know who'd be keen." That feeds everything that comes next.

This first signal doesn't have to be public at all. It can be a quiet word with the right handful of people. If, back in Guide 00, you decided four of the right people is a success, then your first signal is simply finding out whether those people are interested. The question to answer is whether the right people would come. A crowd can wait.

03 SIGNAL WITH MOMENTUM

The risk with a first signal is putting one out and then disappearing. A tease followed by months of silence doesn't build anticipation. It burns trust, and people stop believing it's happening. So never signal without a next step attached.

When you put that first interest-check out, tell people when they'll hear from you next. What they need from you is a rhythm, even before there's a full announcement: "I'm looking at this, give me a week to gauge interest and I'll be back once I'm on to venues." Then keep to it. A week later, close the loop, even if it's just "thanks to everyone who responded, we're now shoring up a venue and a date, back to you soon." That keeps momentum alive and keeps you honest.

04 A ROUGH HEADCOUNT TO CARRY FORWARD

You're after a working guess here, nothing precise. Take your numbers from the people you've reached out to and spoken with directly. Some who said yes won't make it on the day. Others you've never heard from will turn up anyway, which is one of the nicer surprises of hosting. Hold your number loosely as a starting point. We'll get properly into what to do with it, and how to size a venue around it, in Guide 02.

Example: Newcastle set its bar at four people and ended up with around twenty.

// CLOSING NOTE

Next up is Guide 02, Finding Your Base, where your rough date and rough headcount meet a real room.

And remember, if you'd like support, Moff is happy to mentor and support anyone, just shoot him an email at moff@iacon.uk.