

If you can't find it, what will you use on stage?

Costume Inventory Resources has a plan for you to catalog your costumes, props and gear.

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Costume Inventory Resources www.costumeinventory.com

Only you can turn the stage from a dark, silent floor to a dazzling scene. But if you can't find the right costume, prop or set piece, microphone or lights - how will you do it? You don't want to make or buy everything again.

An inventory system can help you.

- Create Records for each item
- Do Searches on a variety of criteria to see what you have in stock and find what you need
- Print reports (paper or PDF) to share information with others
- Rent/Loan/Checkout items to other organizations and keep track of where everything is
- Assign items to Productions to create a Production Catalog. Print a "List by Storage Location" of everything you need.

Organizing a large (or even a small) collection of costumes, props/sets and equipment is a huge task but it is so worth the effort and expense.

Every inventory project requires planning, money and people. Most of you will have to prepare a proposal to give to your principal, theatre director or booster club to get funds to make the inventory project happen. As we go along in this lecture we will be going over several points that you will want to include in your proposal.

I have set up seven steps for getting started.

1) What is your goal or motivation for inventorying your collection?

Get organized to make better use of your costume and props?

- Generate revenue from and manage rentals?
- Your theatre manager or administrator is requiring you to do a count/value assessment?
- Or all three? Or something else?

It is a good idea to know what your goals are so when it comes to budgeting and purchasing software, hardware, tags & labels, and other equipment and finding people to help - you are committed to getting what you need to meet the goals.

2. Start planning your project !

Recognize that this is a project. Like any big project it should have :

- 1) a planning phase
- 2) a budget - there are costs that will occur so there has to be money
- 3) a source for software, hardware, inventory tags & labels, storage racks, bins and other equipment.
- 4) a group of people who are or can be trained to do the hard work of putting the id tags and labels in your costumes or on the props, and entering the data in the inventory software.

As part of the planning phase you will want to **gather some data** about your theater:

1) What are your current activities and services?

- How many productions (black box, main stage, children's theatre and traveling shows) do you do each year?
- How many people (volunteers, students, etc) are involved in the productions? What are the attendance numbers?
- How much revenue do you bring in from ticket sales or other sources?
- How are community members involved? Do you do shows for schools (like elementary/middle schools) or take productions to other venues in the city or district?

You want to show that you do a lot of productions that use the costumes, props, lighting, etc. and that lots of people are served. You also want to show that members of the community benefit from the productions.

2) What are your *estimates* (emphasis on estimate) of the number of items you have in stock

How many Costumes? _____ Wigs? _____
Props /Sets? _____ Lighting Equipment ? _____
Sound Equipment ? _____ Tools? _____

Remember and remind the reader that these are estimates and that a complete inventory has never been done. You will have very good numbers after you have completed the inventory.

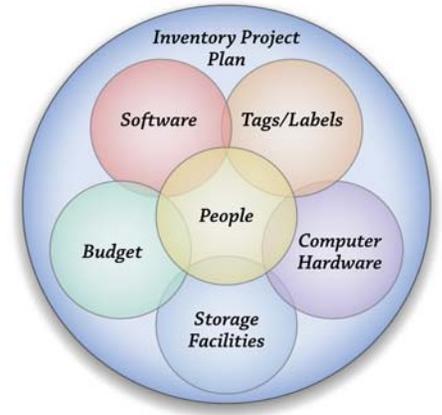
3) What is the value of the stock (costumes, props/sets, etc) ? Think of the cost of buying or making the item, the replacement cost (if lost or damaged) and the amount you would charge for a rental. Again this is a rough estimate as you haven't inventoried each item and placed a value on it.

List the **benefits** of having an inventory system. Here are a few examples:

- 1) The inventory will provide a count of all the costumes, props, etc in the theatre. It will allow you to enter many details in the descriptions, take photos, and list a storage location and current location (where is my costume now?) Additional features of the inventory program are that you can do searches to find costumes and props that will meet your current needs and print detailed reports.
- 2) You will be able to plan productions by knowing what you have so you will know what new items have to be bought/created and what you can use from your stock.
- 3) An inventory system will allow you to set up a rental program so you will know what items are checked out and to whom. You can charge for your rentals and generate money for the theatre program. You will be able to teach students/ volunteers new skills that they can take beyond the theatre :
 - a) Computer skills - using a database, managing photos, creating reports from the database and emailing them to production staff
 - b) Costume & Props/Sets knowledge - learn about different styles, time periods, construction and sizing.
 - c) Inventory management - understanding how an inventory works and using the inventory program to help them do their job. Using a barcode scanner and understanding barcoded tags.
 - d) Customer relations - helping customers with rentals and returns
 - e) Photography - learning to take photos of costumes and props that have good lighting, composition, and show important details.

The Inventory Database Project Plan has 6 parts:

- 1) People
- 2) Software
- 3) Inventory Tags and labels
- 4) Hardware
- 5) Storage Facilities
- 6) Budget



As you create your plan and proposal - think of each of these areas:

» People

People are the most important part of the plan. Who is in charge? What staff, volunteers, or students are available? How much time can they commit to the project? When are they available? How much training will they need? Who in the organization has to approve the project? What do you need to convince them to allocate the funds and resources?

» Software

How will you store your records? In a Database or Spreadsheet? What functions do you want in the software? Do you want to include photos? Who do you want to have access to the data? How much control do you want to have?

» Identifying Tags / Labels

Identifying tags for costumes and labels for props, accessories, shoes, and equipment are needed to track each item. What kind and how many of each kind do you need? What numbering system do you want to use - sequential numbers or letter and numbers combined? Do you want barcodes? Do you have the tools to apply tags to garments (small iron, sewing machine) ?

» Computer Equipment

PC or Mac or In-the-Cloud?? Do you want to share it on a network? Do you need access from multiple devices and locations? How much IT support do you have (try to be realistic) ? Can you get more IT support if you need it? If your tags have barcodes you will need a scanner for each computer. What kind of barcode scanner do you want?

» **Storage**

How are things organized now? How would you like to change it? Do you need more racks, shelves, bins, ladders ?? Are you planning a move soon? Does your storage area meet fire codes?

» **Budget**

All parts of the plan require **money**. Where can you get the money - existing budget, grant, donations, rental payments ?? How much do you need? When will the funds be available? How can you bring in more income to support the inventory system? Look at the Resource Guides at www.costumeinventory.com for a sample budget.

3. Make preliminary decisions and purchases (and stick to them !)

- 1) **Investigate which software to use.** You will be spending many hours over many years with this software so pick one that you like, is easy to use and has the features you need (to meet your goal).
- 2) **Test a variety of tags and labels.** There are many manufacturers and different types of tags (for garments) and self adhesive labels (for accessories, shoes, props, sets, equipment). Get samples and test them to be sure they will be suitable.
- 3) **Check if your current computers meet your needs.** If not, start looking for new or donated equipment. You need to get a computer before you can install any software.
- 4) **Buy the software, hardware, tags & labels and other equipment.** Get it all in the place where you will be doing the work

4. Become the Expert !

- 1) **Take the time to learn the software.** Set aside a few hours to go through the manual and get familiar with the features. You are the one everyone will come to with questions - so it is best to learn as much as you can early.
- 2) **Put 25 or more tags in garments and/or labels on props.** Make decisions on where the tags should go (under the collar on the inside for shirts, in the waistband for pants, etc). Your volunteers who will be putting these in will want to know how to put them in and where.

3) **Practice taking photos of the garments and props.** Resource Guides-- Photos Tips and How to Make a Backdrop. Create a folder on the computer to hold all your photos.

4) **Make a floor plan** of where groups of costumes will be stored. It may be that it is time to change what you have. When you have volunteers coming in they will not know where things are or where they should go back to once they are inventoried.

We have a free "Become the Expert" online class to help you and your students learn about Inventory management, basic computer skills, and the Theatre Inventory Database. Take a look at it here: [Become The Expert](#). There are 20 lessons that are easy and straightforward for you and your students. There are optional exercises at the end of each lesson. You and your students can complete the exercises and send the exercise and any attachments by email to bte@costumeinventory.com. Once all the exercises are complete you will be awarded a ***Certificate of Completion***.

Once you are the expert you can train all the staff, volunteers or students who will be helping you.

5. Train your staff, students, and volunteers

Everyone I talk to tells me that their inventory project took longer than they thought it would. They are very happy with the results but wish they had more people and better trained people to help.

- 1) **Gather your training materials.** Every database application should have a user guide - either on-line or printed. Read through it to be sure you know it well enough to point your volunteers to the sections they need. Have the user guide at hand so everyone will be able to find it easily (it will save them asking you too many questions).
- 2) **Download the "Data Entry Guidebook"** from www.costumeinventory.com. It has 6 chapters with pictures and descriptions of costume types, styles, fabric patterns, fabric swatches, and size information. Encouraging your volunteers to use this will help them enter better descriptions into the database. The better the data is going into the database - the better the results are.
- 3) **Set aside training time for each new volunteer, staff person or student.** The better trained they are the faster they can work and the better the project will be.

Make a list of the most important functions each volunteer needs to know (how to add a costume/prop record, how to find a costume/prop record, etc.)

- 4) **Teach everyone which tags to use for garments and which labels to use for everything else.** If you are using Iron-on tags then be sure the volunteers know how to put them in. Iron-on tags require a very hot iron and a firm hand. If they tags are not put in with a very hot iron they will come off during washing/dry cleaning. Click here to go the Resource Guide page and look for the guide on Applying Tags.

- 5) **Reward your staff/volunteers/students.** Tell them how much you appreciate their hard work. Maybe set up a coffee break with treats when you reach certain milestones - like 500 costumes or props.

6. Look critically at your storage area

Decide how it is best to store your items – on hangers, plastic bins, hooks on the wall, shelves ... ? The way you have it now may not be how you want it in the future. Do you need more racks? Are your bins for shoes and accessories falling apart? Can you move easily between racks or is it too crowded?

- 1) **Calculate how many racks you need.** Racks can be fixed to the wall or on wheels. Think about the best way to maximize your space. Remember that a rack of men's suit coats will hold fewer items than a rack of dress shirts.

- 2) **Review your bins.** Think about buying new bins that all fit together. You can store more in bins that fit together and fill your shelves than in a random collection of bins bought over the course of a few years. Be sure to number each bin. You can print bin # labels from the Theatre Inventory Database.

- 3) **Know your local fire department regulations and follow them.** Be sure to have ample space between costumes/props and the ceiling. Have wide walkways. Keep the floor clear. Many theatres have been told to reduce their stock by half to meet fire codes.

- 4) **Review your stock:** Every theatre has garments that need to be thrown away, repaired or cleaned. Make a list of reasons to get rid of something and post it so your helpers will know how to make those decisions.
 - A) Is it torn (not distressed) or just worn out?
 - B) Does it smell or is dirty?

- C) Is it too bad to wear on stage but has historical or sentimental value? If so take it out of the collection and create a special place for these items.
- D) Do you have too many of one item?

7) Set up a schedule and get started!

Meet with the theatre management to discuss upcoming productions or events so you can find time when you and the collection are not urgently needed.

- 1) **Set up a time line with the following dates** when:
 - the money is available to purchase what you need
 - the hardware and software will be installed
 - the inventory tags and labels will arrive
 - the storage area is cleaned and ready to work in
- 2) **Contact your staff, volunteers, and students to determine their availability.**
- 3) **Make a schedule and let everyone know when they are needed.**
- 4) **Review the Resource Guide on “Suggestions for a Costume Inventory Day”**. Create a plan for setting up stations for everyone to work. On the first day - take a deep breath and get started.

Summary for Proposal:

- 1) Do the Numbers:
 - Summarize how many productions your department does each year.
 - Count how many students / community members are served.
 - Estimate how many costumes, props/sets, pieces of equipment you have.
- 2) Outline the benefits to:
 - The school or theatre
 - The Theatre Dept. in the school
 - The students and the community
- 3) Show your plan:
 - Decide on inventory software and hardware - give the reasons you selected these items.
 - Order tags and labels for costumes, props, equipment
 - Make a priority list of what sections to do first, second, etc.

Do training - with the "Become the Expert" series or other sources

4) Show your schedule

List the people committed to help

Show the time line of when items will be order/received

Show the calendar of dates when people will be working to enter data and take photos.

5) Show your budget

Using the spreadsheet you can download at:

<http://costumeinventory.swmirror.com/2203d> or

your own - list all the details of the costs.

6) Summarize

Be sure to state reasons why you need to do this project now (and not 5 years from now)

Summarize the benefits vs costs

Explain your willingness and commitment to do the project

** Link to the Become The Expert:

<http://www.costumeinventory.com/become-the-expert>