



# HOW TO

Plan  
a

# MOVIE EVENT

***For Missional Connection***

*By Charlie Swain*

 church at  
**cane bay**



**1.800.876.5577**  
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## HOW TO PLAN A COMMUNITY MOVIE NIGHT FOR MISSIONAL CONNECTION

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The Church at Cane Bay

**“We** were on the verge of planting The Church at Cane Bay in the Fall of 2011 and we knew we had to make a huge splash in our community. We wanted to introduce ourselves, make a relational connection, and show our neighbors that we loved them. So we borrowed all of the equipment, asked a lot of questions, did some advertising, and had about 200 people show up at our first “Movies at Cane Bay” in June 2011. We are now in our 4th year of producing the event and will average between 800 and 1,000 people. We make a ton of Missional connections, our reputation is very healthy in the community, and we do it all at zero cost to the church. Yup, that’s right... it doesn’t cost us a dime.

In the following guide you will find many things that you will want to think through to have a successful movie night.

***I’m excited for the possibilities and the ground you will be cultivating for the Gospel! If I can be of any assistance to you and your church, please send me an email and I’d be glad to help. ”***

## THE WHYS, THE WHATS, THE HOWS

### WHY

#### Why do you want to host a Movie night?

Are you simply doing this to fill the seats on Sundays? If so, check your heart. If your intent is to ultimately connect people with your church, read on.



### WHAT

#### Before you announce your event, get into the family movie night mindset!

Although it’s good to use movies to share the gospel, let’s be honest, American churches haven’t had as much success hosting faith-based movie nights as they have with family-friendly fun movie nights.



### HOW

#### Conversation and connection are paramount.

Once the movie starts, you have done your service. We always start our event at 7pm and the movie begins at 8:30 or 8:45, depending on the sunset. It is the 90 minute window that is the most important time for you and your team to make as many connections as you possibly can. The goal is to engage your audience! Think through exactly what you want people to do next and invite them to take a step.

It may be:

*A BBQ dinner at someone’s house.*

*Joining a missional small group that serves the charity you are advocating.*

*Serving in the next movie night.*



**“Enjoy my first-hand, step-by-step guide on how to host a successful Community Movie night! ”**

## BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

### **A** It’s more about the personal connections made before the movie and not the actual movie itself.



If you want people to attend - show a popular movie you know they have heard of! Yes, you need to show a “secular” movie. *The Passion of the Christ* and *Heaven Is For Real* are good movies for specific events, but I suggest showing a family-fun film, such as *Frozen*, *Wreck it Ralph*, *Despicable Me 2*, *The Lego Movie*, etc. A family or community event is not necessarily about what is showing on the screen, but all the personal interaction you get before the movie starts. Check out Swank Motion Picture’s website: <http://religious.swankmp.com> to view many family-friendly, wholesome movie ideas.

### **C** Commission your people from the start.

The church has always relied on the actual movie to make the connection, and to share the Gospel. But we know that it is our responsibility to share our testimony and proclaim the Gospel personally. Commission your people who are volunteering to seek out and initiate personal conversations.

At some point in the evening, either through a general announcement or on a flyer you hand out, don’t forget to invite the audience to your services and other activities, just don’t make it the main emphasis of the evening. You will find this is the perfect forum to do good!



### **B** Don’t put your name on it.

This should be a community event, not a church event. The difference between 100 people showing up and 500 people is your willingness to not make it about your church. Make it about the community and more people will show up. The audience will eventually learn who is hosting the main attraction, they will appreciate your approach, and you will start to see your crowd size grow from event to event. You may not realize it but your church or campus has a giant invisible shield that detracts people, especially at events like this. Ideally it would be great to host the events in a neutral location, such as local parks, schools or other open locations, to draw in larger crowds.

**“Choose a school or local “neutral” charity that the community knows and loves.**

Ask people to donate various supplies as their “fee” to get into the movie. As a connection point, ask people if they’d be interested in helping to sort the supplies and deliver them.

**”**

# THE NUTS & BOLTS OF HOSTING A SUCCESSFUL EVENT...

## 1 Venue:

You can use your church grounds but if your church is too small for the audience you are intending to host, you will want to find a neutral location that has ample space, and one that has plenty of parking. City parks are great with ample space and the ability to reach a lot of people, schools and private communities are also great options. It's also good to think outside the box, large business parking lots are a great open space AND the business might help sponsor the event to get the exposure. You will need to work with the ownership when finalizing all details, including any rental fees and necessary permits.



## 2 Secure a date:

I recommend Friday and Saturday nights which seem to be the most ideal for families but Sunday nights are great too, during the summer months. Most importantly, try to plan ahead! Three months of planning is ideal. Don't forget to take weather and the temperature into account when you are scheduling your events. Planning rain dates up front is also helpful to secure the date/venue as well as inform your audience of the dates should weather prohibit you from having your event on the originally scheduled date. Also, think about doing a series of movie events, plan two or three movie nights in advance and show different family friendly movies. Planning up front will allow you to promote your movie series at each showing and invite your audience to come back. If your showings are separated by three or four weeks and the first show is a great experience for the audience, they will spread the word and more people will show up for the rest of your movie series.



## 3 Equipment:

**Monitor/Screen:** Find the right screen you need for your audience size. If you need a large screen, you can research various equipment rental companies. Should you need assistance with this, contact Swank Motion Pictures and they can provide referrals for companies in your area.



We actually ended up making our own 12' x 20' screen because we host movie nights 4-5 times a year, which you may want to consider too, as this is an effective cost savings (feel free to contact me if you are interested in this possibility).

**Audio:** You'll need a sound system with solid speakers and subs, if you want to make it a memorable theatre-like experience, make sure the audio is good and loud.

**Electricity:** Depending on your venue, you may need a generator. Ask around, you can usually find someone in the congregation who is willing to lend you their generator.

**Projection/DVD Player:** I'd recommend a good projector and Blu-ray HD player for the best results. This is also something you can rent from a local equipment rental company, someone in your congregation may own projection equipment you can use or you can invest in your own equipment. For your reference, we use a 5,000 lumen projector. Reminder, make sure to have all the appropriate cables to run the systems.

**Extras:** Look into getting some shade tents for your sound booth and to setup a Registration table, 10x10 Tailgate tents work really well.

Inflatables are an added bonus to get the kids involved before the movie. Through past experience, I recommend three inflatables, two for Elementary school kids, and one specifically for preschool kids.

Don't forget about public restrooms. You may need to rent portable toilets, depending on the venue.

Scout the location prior to the event and see if you will need to place some extra trash receptacles around the area.



## 4 Movie License:

To show any movie to the public, you need a movie license (the technical term is a public performance license) to be legal and copyright compliant. You cannot simply set up your equipment, rent the DVD and show the movie. It is illegal to do so and comes with a significant fine (up to \$250,000) and possible jail time. Check out the details: <http://religious.swankmp.com/copyright>.

“ The good news is that ordering a movie license is easy! All you have to do is call Swank Motion Pictures at 1-800-876-5577 or go to [www.swank.com/religious](http://www.swank.com/religious) for more information.

The licensing fees will vary depending on the movie and your crowd size you can contact Swank for the specifics. They are really easy to work with and they have great customer service.”

I often get asked “Well, who polices that?” And the answer is, anybody that works for the movie business, someone in the area who also shows movies, etc. A local movie theatre manager can make one phone call and you may need to get yourself a lawyer - you are taking away his business.



## 6 Food Vendors:

What good is a Movie without Snacks and Food? This is the cherry on top and its super easy to do.

**Option 1: Produce the food yourself.** Depending on your budget, some churches hand out free food or charge a nominal fee for Popcorn, Snow-cones, sodas and various candy. Many times you will find that you can even get local businesses or members to donate some of these items.

**The Pros:** You may be able to make a little money back or possibly just bless people by saying “free food”

**The Cons:** You have no idea how many people are going to show up and how much to prepare. It may ultimately end up costing you money.

**Option 2: (which I highly recommend):**

Invite a couple of food vendors or food trucks to come to the event. This is a no cost relationship and a simple invitation to the vendors to show up and showcase their products.

**The Pros:** You do not take any of the risk and it doesn't cost you any money. The food may taste better and this will omit an area where you need volunteers.

**The Cons:** Someone will be making money and things may be a bit more expensive than you would probably charge if you did it yourself. For what it is worth, we have had tons of compliments on this and no complaints.

## 5 Advertising:

You need to get the word out! Promoting your movie series is key to having a great turnout and this can be as cheap or as expensive as you'd like to be. Here are some different platforms to consider:



Swank Motion Pictures offers free customizable promotion materials that are available to download on their website. You can also have someone in your congregation design an invitation and create artwork to go on postcards, posters, social media and/or a banner.

Utilize your church welcome sign and marquis or put a banner on the lawn so people driving by can learn about the upcoming events.

Make the most of social media platforms: We use Facebook and Twitter and ask people to hit the “share” or “retweet” buttons, which really does help.

Community calendars are a great forum and are usually free.

Press Release: Invite the local press to come out and cover the event, seriously they might do it, news agencies are always looking for a great feel good story.

“ Honestly, the best advertising is word-of-mouth and comes from people on your team personally inviting friends, co-workers and neighbors.

The Sunday before, hand 3 invitations to every person who walks in your worship service and commission them to give them out that week.”

“ BONUS!! If you have 3 or more Food Trucks, which are a huge trend right now, you can call it a “Food Truck Rodeo” which is a BIG selling point!”

# MORE OF THE NUTS & BOLTS OF HOSTING A SUCCESSFUL EVENT...

**7 Volunteers:**  
 You will need warm bodies to help take charge of areas on event day. Of course you can always recruit from within your church, but also try to ask other people to help you with the event.

“When we first started Cane Bay we had 13 Adults on a core team.  
 For our first event, the Cane Bay Egg Drop, I put out yard signs all over the place that said “Cane Bay Egg Drop: Volunteers Needed.” We got 150 people to come out and serve for four hours.”



**Set up Team**  
 Ask about a dozen people to show up 2-3 hours beforehand to make sure everything is where it should be and functioning before the event begins.



**Inflatable Team**  
 This is a tough job, but you need responsible people to make sure your Inflatables don't become a huge liability.



**Tech Team**  
 Have a group of people that are tech savvy that can help run the audio visual equipment and keep things running smooth.



**Connection Team**  
 Get several knowledgeable and personable people to walk the crowd, introduce themselves and simply begin conversations with people.

**Registration Team**  
 Recruit outgoing and friendly people with a smile to nicely ask people to sign in and sign up for door prizes. You can also use this team to help record data once the movie starts.



**Safety and Security Team**  
 A small group of volunteers that are looking out for everyone's best interest. Have a few of these people carry small first-aid kits. If your event gets large, you may also want to look into hiring an off-duty security guard or police officer to stand post just in case you need assistance.

“It is very important that you pump vision into all of your volunteers. Educate them as to why they are a part of these teams and what their ultimate goal is.”



**8 Door Prizes:**  
 If you are looking to collect contact information at registration, you will need to give away decent door prizes. Recruit a couple volunteers about a month before the event to approach local merchants and restaurants asking for door prize donations. Make sure they have a letter from the event producer explaining your event so they know it is official. Assure the merchant that their company will be announced at the event as a sponsor for items which is free advertisement for their business. I would recommend 10 to 12 door prizes per event.



**9 Sponsors:**  
 And now I get to the part that makes it free for you. Because it is a community event and not a church event, you can approach local businesses to sponsor the movie nights. Businesses are often looking for great advertising opportunities like this. You are providing them a captive audience where they can set up a booth and your emcee can consistently mention their sponsorship with 15 to 20 second spotlights throughout the night. As long as you follow through with your commitment to the sponsoring company it will be a great relationship. We usually approach one major sponsor to cover the entire cost of the event. We have created successful relationships with developers and homebuilders that want people to come and see their neighborhoods. Restaurants and Grocery Stores are also great sponsors and you can host your events in their parking lots. The opportunities are really endless.

“One thing is for sure. If you do this right, you WILL have people come to your event. You need to be ready to engage them and join in a relationship with them.”



# NIGHT OF THE EVENT CHECK LIST

**Registration:** You need to get contact information. Some people will be reluctant to give it, which is okay, but most people are fine with it, especially if you are giving away door prizes. Use individual cards that can be pulled out of a hat for the door prize drawings. Ask for their name, email address, primary phone, and a “How did you hear about the event?”

**Music:** It is great to have music playing over the speakers in the background leading up to the start of the movie. We always play music that people recognize that is clean and family friendly.

You can choose to play Christian music that is easy and modern to listen to. Please think twice before playing any worship type music or having your band play praise songs. This may make your audience feel weird and uncomfortable as you wouldn't normally hear this in a theater while you are waiting for a movie to start.

**Make Announcements every 10 minutes:**

Use this time to give away door prizes, mention your sponsors and make important announcements about bathrooms and other logistics people need to know. Be sure to thank your audience for coming to the event and encourage them to bring their friends next time.

**Shut down your inflatables about 10 minutes before the movie starts:**

Kids and inflatables in the dark don't mix, and they are a huge distraction for people attempting to watch the movie.

**Data Entry:** Enter all the registration information into some type of spreadsheet during the movie. If you are equipped with a wi-fi hotspot you can immediately send out a “Thank you for coming” email message or text to your guests.

**Ask people to join you in the clean up effort:**

I wouldn't beg or enforce any rule, rather simply ask if there are any families that would like to join your team to help clean up. You may get 3 or 4 that will make an immediate connection. Of course, you can also ask everyone to throw their trash away in the provided receptacles which will help ensure you can continue to have these great events.

**A few items for thought:**

- We do not allow alcohol on site
- We do not allow sparklers or other fireworks
- If people choose to bring their own food that is fine with us
- Glow necklaces are sometimes a great addition if you want to give them away
- We always make sure the venue is completely cleaned up when we leave



“ Most Important:  
EVERYONE is a  
connection point.

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