

An Overview of Event Publicity for Autocrats

By Thegn Steffan yr ysgolhaig

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Thegn Steffan yr ysgolhaig has been living and working within the Barony of Tir Ysgithr for thirty years, and has successfully autocratted many and various types of events, ranging from local populace meetings to full Kingdom-level events.

When the SCA was young, there are only a few players in the Principality of Atenveldt, and all knew each other. There were fewer centers of population and only a limited number of events each year. Communication was easy. We were all well aware of upcoming events, and many of us looked forward to, and attended, each event. But that was then...

Now, there are six baronies, nine shires, three colleges, one march, and four incipient groups within the Kingdom of Atenveldt (as of June 2003). Many Baronies have over 200 active players, and there are over 1000 in the tri-barony region, as well as many others in outlying areas. Within the Kingdom there are as many as four events happening on a single weekend, and events occur on almost every weekend of the year. In addition, many local meetings and events happening during the week within each local group. Now we are forced to balance our mundane lives with our participation in these Current Middle Ages.

What tool do we have which assists us in deciding which events we wish to attend? This can be answered with one word: **PUBLICITY!** Early publicity allows those needing to plan well in advance the opportunity to do so. Good publicity tells us everything that will happen, what facilities will be available, and how to get to event, allowing us to make appropriate preparations. Considering the amount of “friendly competition” for event attendance in these Current Middle Ages, the publicity campaign can “make it or break it” for an event autocrat.

There are two types of “official” SCA events (not counting Populace Meetings) in Atenveldt. The first type, a **Kingdom Calendar Event**, is held by a Barony, Shire, or College; is listed on the *Kingdom Planning Calendar* (which is published in *Southwind*); and, has an article published in *Southwind*. Because the *Kingdom Planning Calendar* is made available both in *Southwind* and online months in advance of events actually happening, this is in itself good publicity. *Southwind* is the “official” Kingdom newsletter, and is delivered to all SCA members in Atenveldt monthly. There are a number of rules about what must be included in a *Southwind*-published event article, and autocrats who follow these rules well can produce both widespread and comprehensive information packages about upcoming events. These articles, with the addition (if necessary) of further details, may also be placed on the Kingdom and local websites and in local newsletters.

The second type of event is a **Locally Publicized Populace Event**. Here, a Barony, Shire, or College also sponsors the event; however, these events do not appear on the *Kingdom Planning Calendar* and are not allowed an article in *Southwind*. Because an *Event Form* must be completed, information about a local event is readily available to be published via local newsletters, flyers, and through local electronic media (websites, discussion groups, etc.), and current (June 2003) Kingdom Seneschal written policy requires such publication. In addition, the same policy requires verbal announcements to be made at any “official” local group meetings within 30 days prior to the event.

So, how is publicity distributed? The following list gives the major means and a few of the advantages (or disadvantages) of each:

1. **Printed Article**—A printed article, published in the *Southwind*, is the “most official” form of publicity for an event, and has precedence above all other forms of publicity. The Kingdom Chronicler requires that a signed, completed *Event Form* accompany each article sent for *Southwind* publication or the article will not be published. Printed articles may (and sometimes *must*) also appear in local newsletters. There are no disadvantages to a well-organized printed article.
2. **Electronic Media**—Electronic media can include websites, discussion groups (lists), and e-mail (given here in order of importance). Having an article posted to the Kingdom or to a local website has the enormous advantage of ready availability of information to a large number of interested parties. However, regular computer users sometimes forget that not all SCA players may have ready access to the Internet (my personal guess is that only about 50% of the populace currently has access); so, while posting information to a website may be important, this method of publicity should be considered only supplementary to a printed article. Posting to discussion groups or sending e-mail have the distinct disadvantages of reaching far fewer people and of reaching them only once with each posting.
3. **Flyers**—Flyers have the advantage of being printed information that may be distributed by handout, mail, or inclusion with other distributions, or by being made available for pickup at popular locations. Another advantage is the ability to include and make known last-minute changes or details about an event. The disadvantages include the cost of production and distributions in terms of both money and time, the probability that only a percentage of your intended audience will receive the flyer, and the probability that many recipients will misplace or lose a flyer.
4. **Announcements**—Announcements at events and meetings are enormously useful because they continually refresh people's memory of the upcoming event. In the case of Locally Publicized Populace Events, announcements are mandatory. Advantages of announcements include the relative ease of making announcements (or of having them made) and the fact that announcements may be tailored to the audience. Disadvantages may include, again, the small percentage of the populace being reached, and the reality that announcements need to be kept brief.

A majority of the items that need to be included in an event article appear on the *Atenveldt Kingdom Event Registration Form*. These are as follows: (1) The name of the event; (2) the date(s) of the event; (3) the name of the group sponsoring (and/or holding the event); (4) the date and time of site opening and site closing; (5) site details and restrictions, including site “wet/dry,” pets, smoking, camping, shade, water, fires, and other important restrictions or details; (6) the complete [mundane] name and address of the site, a phone number, and clear directions for reaching the site; (7) the complete [SCA & mundane] name, address, and phone number of the main autocrat (as well as any other means of contact); (8) the site fee (remember to include any details and remember to mention a non-member surcharge); (9) if a feast, complete contact information for the feast autocrat; (10) if a feast, the feast fee (including details and discounts); (11) if a feast, details (deadline for reservations, attendance limit, availability of sideboard, menu, serving time, and any other pertinent information); (12) if fighting, the names of the responsible Marshall and List Officer; (13) and, if any money is mentioned, an explicit statement detailing to whom checks should be made payable (see *Event Registration Form* for details).

The previous list represents only the mandatory details for an event article. The Kingdom of Atenveldt has at least one Kingdom Calendar Event occurring on almost every weekend of the year, as well as many Locally Publicized Populace Events scattered throughout the year. A good autocrat will also include non-

mandatory details of an event in an article to entice attendance. These may include such items as an activity schedule, themes, brief descriptions of individual activities, and listings of what potential attendees may need to bring with them, or be prepared for, in order to get the most out of the event.

Where publicity is concerned, **timing is everything!** Current (June 2003) Kingdom Seneschal written policy requires, for Kingdom Calendar Events, that *Southwind* receive an article, “no later than the first of the month preceding the month of the event.” For Locally Publicized Populace Events, “During the thirty (30) days before the event, a full announcement about the event include in date, time, and place must be publicized to as many members of the sponsoring group as possible...” In an effort to stem a history of poor publicity practices, current guidelines within the Barony of Tir Ysgithr suggest that autocrats have an event article published in *Southwind* (Kingdom Calendar Events only) and in their local newsletter three months before an event occurs. Publicity well in advance of an event can build expectation, allows those needing to schedule vacation time and/or to make travel arrangements in advance to attend an event to do so, and gives potential attendees time to complete any special projects that will, in turn, make an event more special. However, a long, detailed article doesn't need to be repeated in each issue of a newsletter preceding and event. A series of quick articles that start small and build in scope to the month before an event is a far better approach—this will save often-limited space within a publication and give readers a sense of building where the climax is the event itself.

Organization is important where the writing of articles is concerned. Each article in a series should contain basic information about an event; however, details need not be presented until needed. A lot of variables come into play here, including the length and scope of the event, the distance people will need to come in order to reach the event, and how much preparation will be required for each activity plan for the event. Writing an article is not always easy—an autocrat often needs to be willing to ask for help! Having one (or more) persons, especially those with prior autocrat and writing experience, proofread an article before submission helps to insure that required information is included, that the presentation is well organized, and that details needing to be included have not been overlooked due to close familiarity.

In summary, potential autocrats should heed the following advice where publicity is concerned:

1. **Start early!** For a Kingdom Calendar Event, the current rules indicate that the Kingdom Chronicler must receive your final article no later than the first of the month prior to the month in which your event will occur. Local guidelines may suggest earlier publicity. For larger and a complex events (requiring earlier planning by potential attendees), or where non-local populace is invited, earlier publicity is strongly suggested.
2. **Be sure required information is included in articles, and that articles sent for *Southwind* include a completed, signed *Event Form*!** The required information lets the populace know how to plan for an event and how to obtain additional information. The completed, signed *Event Form* makes the event an official Kingdom Calendar Event. There have been cases where articles missing a bit of required information or the signed *Event Form* have not been printed. This has, in turn, resulted in a Kingdom Calendar Event becoming a Locally Publicized Populace Event, whereat planned awards could not be given.
3. **Have articles proofread prior to submission!** Proofreading for spelling, grammar, general errors, and the inclusion of required information will ensure that the general populace reading your article will not be confused or misled. This will make your life as an autocrat much easier.
4. **Check receipt!** Be sure to check with both Kingdom and local chroniclers to make sure that your article and the *Event Form* were received, are readable, and contain all necessary information. The

should be done within two days following the deadline for which your article was submitted, giving you sufficient time, working with the chronicler(s), to resolve any problems and still have your article published on time.

5. **Use more than one form of publicity!** Publicity is a wonderful tool to attract populace to your event. Complete and readily available information, combined with continual (and often subtle) reminders, will result in greater interest by the populace. In addition to printed articles, autocrats should also make good use of electronic media and of announcements.