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Building Your Haunt with "PODS"

A Quality Fabrication Solution for Haunts On The Go! by John Hawkins and Alex DeRito

For those of you in the industry that have temporary haunts, you are all too familiar with the struggle of “building a haunt from scratch” each year. The time it takes to construct walls and assemble panels can be mind boggling- especially when you are on a tight installation timeframe! We all know when you have a haunt consisting of pre-painted wall panels it is never as easy as just screwing them together... they never fit just right, past scenic treatments are hard to match-up and venues frequently change! In addition, a haunt consisting of pre-painted panels lacks much depth and scenic detail. By incorporating these details further, quality elements, more time, and costs are added to erecting your haunt. So what is the solution for building a haunt on a very tight deadline while still producing a world-class event? The answer is one simple word: PODS!

What is a “POD?” A POD is a grouping of thematic props that are used to create walkways and block sight lines while being self-contained for movement and transportation ease. In essence, they replace a vast percentage of typical haunt construction techniques such as wall panels with a much more efficient design. The huge advantage to PODS is that they can be moved in and out of position with a forklift or pallet jack very quickly- thereby producing an entire attraction in a matter of hours!

How it Works

A POD can be made out of dozens of different items, depending on what type of theme you have. At Oak Island we primarily build PODS out of wooden pallets or shelving (metal or wood shelving depending on the theme). First, we flame retard and paint pallets or shelves and then fasten appropriately themed materials to them. This is the basic idea but there are certainly many other items you can use as your base. The important thing is making sure you are using a base that is big enough to “hold it all together” allowing access underneath the piece or set for a forklift or hand truck.

The best way to describe the POD process is to use an example theme- let’s use the example of a haunted chemical factory. Instead of traditional walls, a theme such as

this can use metal barrels, metal shelves and large industrial equipment to produce a maze experience. Here is how to make PODS using these elements, thereby creating our example of a haunted chemical factory:

- **Metal Barrels:** Start with a standard shipping pallet and paint it with flame retardant paint. Stack your barrels on the pallets (we recommend two barrels high, four barrels total) and then weld them together at several different points. Barrels are great because stenciling simple phrases on them can give wonderful theme variation and they are inherently flame retardant! Next, use self-tapping screws to fasten your barrels to the pallet. You now have a POD- a self contained and transportable themed unit that can be made into a wall panel or large impactful prop for your haunt!
- **Metal Shelves:** Start with industrial metal shelving or shelves made from 2 x 4's and plywood that have been flame retarded and painted. Next, take dozens of theme appropriate props to crowd the shelves, i.e. cans of cleaners, boxes of stock chemicals, etc, and fasten them to the shelves. You now have a POD- a prop that is completely ready to set into place in your haunt that is portable.
- **Large Industrial Equipment:** Find some large, old pieces of metal equipment, making sure there are no sharp edges or flammable liquids on or in them. Next, put them on a flame-retarded pallet and fasten them to the pallet using self-tapping screws. That's it- you now have a POD!

So, How do I Design My Next Haunt Using Pods?

A) Prop Procurement:

In traditional haunted attraction design prop procurement usually is done toward the end of the design process. Unless there is a major prop that is a vital part of the design, props are usually after thoughts. Using the PODS system you will want to consider your props first since you are designing your entire haunt around them. Is that large prop that you are going to make into a POD 2' or 4' wide? You will want to know this before the "design on paper" begins....

B) Perimeter Walls:

"Box" your attraction in with traditional wall panels and emergency exits. These wall panels do not need scenic treatment other than a black finish. They are simply used to create a controlled environment for the purposes of containing effect lighting, audio, sensory perception effects and guests! These should be the only wall panels you will need, and since they are black and laid in simple squares, they can be installed very quickly!

C) Insert Your PODS:

Now that you have your perimeter walls in place and an idea of what props/PODS you have, you can place your PODS, thereby creating a maze.

POD Ideas...

PODS can be great with modern themes such as the example of a haunted chemical factory, but they can also work very well with dozens of other themes. You might be

amazed at just how many themes PODS can be incorporated into! Below are some other examples of PODS the Oak Island Team has constructed to create a maze experience.

Think about these items and how they could be used as walls instead of traditional wall panels: Stacks of circus crates, rows of whiskey barrels, rows of file cabinets, cubicles, shelves of junk, fencing, wine racks, stacks of hay, rows of scarecrows or bodies, cornstalks, old cars, large crates, etc. The opportunities are endless!

Many of the props we use are similar no matter what the theme; whiskey barrels in an old theme become steel drums in a more modern theme. Wooden shelving in an old theme becomes steel shelving in a modern theme. Large wooden crates can be used in abundance in just about any POD based haunt because wooden crates were used just as much in the past as they are today. Your theme will simply determine how weathered your crates should be. All of these pods can be used in multiple ways; as individual props, to create walkways, to block sight lines, or to create scare opportunities.

Oak Island Productions is a haunted attraction design, fabrication and scare products company based in Tampa, Florida. Oak Island can be reached at 800-761-5636 or www.oakislandproductions.com

A Few Notes:

1. Residual Value: PODS become most beneficial in the years to come because as your haunt changes and grows you will already have a large stash of props to move to new places and help improve your event. In addition, installation costs will be less than traditional construction costs year after year. We have used PODS in area theming or a scare zone on several occasions after these pieces have spent time in a haunt.
2. Scares: So how do we create performer/actor scares in POD based haunts? The best way is to utilize your PODS to hide performers and create gag illusions. Crates, barrels and large pieces of equipment can all be utilized to hide performers within them, having them appear for a great startle scare! In addition, the POD format allows performers great access to many areas of the maze letting them weave in and out of the PODS achieving high impact scares!
3. The Down Side: There has to be a setback to using PODS, right? About the only one we have ever found at Oak Island Productions is that using PODS may utilize a little more space than using traditional walls. If you have enough square footage at your disposal this would not be an issue, but if you are tight on space (under 2,500 square feet) you may want to reconsider using the PODS system.

Building your haunt predominantly out of PODS has many advantages, from the ease of installation to the quality and uniqueness of your attraction. Challenge yourself with this question this haunt season: How can I design my attraction with PODS using as few walls as possible while still creating a completely saturated haunted environment? We are sure your answers will get your creative "haunt juices" flowing. We look forward to hearing how PODS worked for you!

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