

# IS A TRAILER HAUNT RIGHT FOR YOU?

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As we all make our plans for TransWorld's Haunt Show 2012 in St. Louis, many ask "what is Larry going to do this time?" It is a good question. Each year that we have been in St. Louis he has pulled out all the



stops preparing his haunts for a tour. With the interest in the Trailer Haunt Concept, many have asked about touring Larry's Trailer Haunt, Ravens Manor, at CreepyWorld. Since there are already scheduled tours at the Darkness and Lemp, Larry decided to do something different and asked if I would be interested in doing a more informational tour at CreepyWorld.

I have written several articles and presented several seminars on the

Trailer Haunt Concept. I am by no means the inventor or creator of the concept. I have dealt within the constructs of this style of haunt since 1999. Believing strongly in this concept I have become the unwilling "expert" so to speak.

Larry asked if I could write another article on the Concept, so I went back over the articles that I have previously written looking on how I could update them. To be perfectly honest, there is a lot of information already there. If you read through all the articles you will have a pretty good grasp of the Concept. So the only question left would be "Is a Trailer Haunt Right For You? "

Now with that question in mind, the idea of a walk though Larry's Haunt with some sort of question and answer period makes a lot of sense. Covering this question here allows you to really think about the Concept and how it could possibly work in your particular situation. Chances are it will create a few questions. The tour will give us an opportunity to address specific questions that you may have from reading or questions that will be generated once you have toured an actual attraction.

I will take note of the questions we generate and then write a follow up article addressing those topics. This will be useful whether you attend the event or not. So this event gives you an opportunity to actually walk the Concept see it up close and personal which will probably generate additional questions on the Concept.

Is the Trailer Haunt Concept right for everyone? Not really, but then again no concept is. Is the Trailer Haunt Concept right for you? That is a question only you will be able to answer. Let's see if we can give you enough information so that you can make that decision.

The Trailer Haunt Concept was born out of necessity. Although it is seen in most parts of the country, it has become synonymous with the Las Vegas area because of this necessity. Most haunts are located within a commercial property either permanently or temporarily. With the unprecedented growth in the Las Vegas area we did not have that space available. Tents were tried, but we get wind gusts up to 60 mph in October (and they call Chicago the Windy City!) One local Haunter was complaining on the whole set up and tear down procedure, you pack it in a trailer, move it to the site, unpack it, set it up, run the event, tear it down, pack it back in the trailer and move it to storage. The question arose, so why take it out of the trailer?? Our entertainment cousins, the carnival people, are the masters at utilizing portable venues that must be set, torn down and transported on a weekly basis. Surely there are some lessons to be learned there. So the concept of mobile trailer style haunted house was born.

What are some of the issues you will need to address to decide if this concept will work for you?

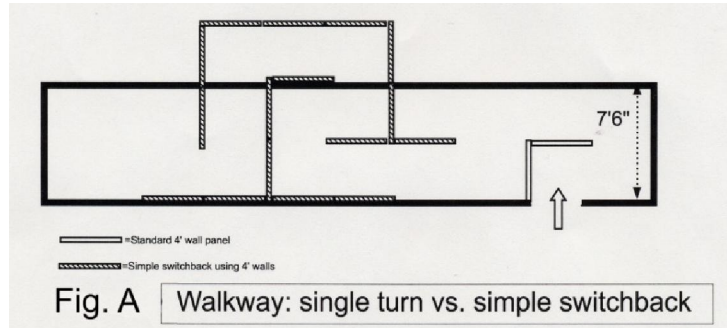
**LOCATION:** The biggest issue that a Trailer Concept addresses is location. Do you have readily accessible cheap commercial space available? If so, utilize it. Why build a Trailer Haunt if you can get cheap permanent space? Unfortunately reasonably priced space is usually not available. The problem with commercial space is twofold. If you want inexpensive property you have a lousy location, if you want a good location you either do not have space available or it is cost prohibitive. Under these circumstances the Trailer Concept might work. We do not need the actual brick and mortar space, just the space in a parking lot. You may be able to find a better location that may not even have available space, but has a large enough parking lot to accommodate your attraction. You become a draw for the shopping center adding additional promotion and foot traffic. Most of your operating hours are also outside their normal business hour, which lessens the impact allowing attraction and businesses to co-exist for their mutual benefit.

**MANPOWER:** Another issue a Trailer Concept addresses is man power. Do you have a huge crew to assemble and disassemble your attraction? If not then this Concept can work for you. We actually build out the courtyard of the attraction which increases our set up time 4 to 6 fold, yet I set up both attractions within 10 days. Tear down was accomplished in 5 days! Our competitor does not utilize the courtyard so their set up for each attraction is a matter of HOURS! If you are paying for your manpower for set up and tear down this is a HUGE savings.

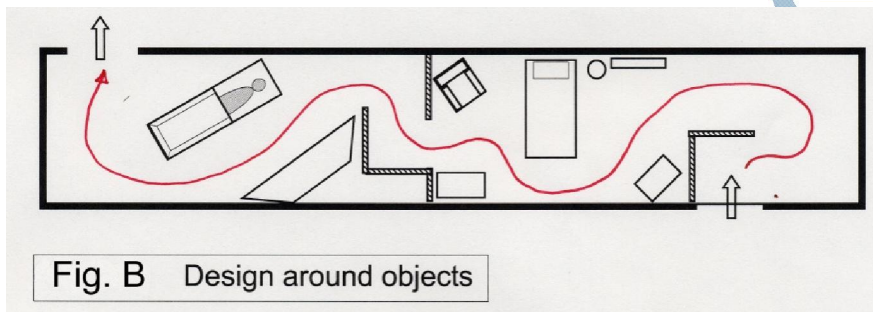
Manpower also translates into the off season. With the Trailer Haunt Concept you have the advantage of the permanent haunt. Everything you put in....STAYS! So instead of a huge crew needed to build out in a short time frame, you have a very small crew over a long time frame. Face it; our haunts spend more time in storage than in operation. It is this concept that allowed me to go full time in the business back in 2003. I became the year round one man crew! I am able to do most tasks myself, save time and money because each year I do not have to re-install all the electrical drops, emergency systems, pneumatic lines, animations, lighting, etc. It is already installed! I can now focus on new effects, area

remodels or the adding of detail. It is this level of detail that allows you to transcend the boundaries imposed by the confined spaces.

SPACE: The biggest issue we face with this concept is space. There are things you just cannot do within these constraints. Switch backs are one. The trailers are only 8 feet wide! Remember that is usually the *outside* dimensions! So you only have around 7' 6" (90 inches) to work within. With a 42 inch walkway and the width of the inner wall you could only put two aisles within the trailer space, not three that are necessary for a simple switchback.



In (Fig. A) notice the single turn at the entrance compared to amount of room necessary for a simple switchback that is superimposed over the trailer outline. Varying walls at angles can be an effective alternative that utilizes more linear space similar to the Tri-angular Grid Method.

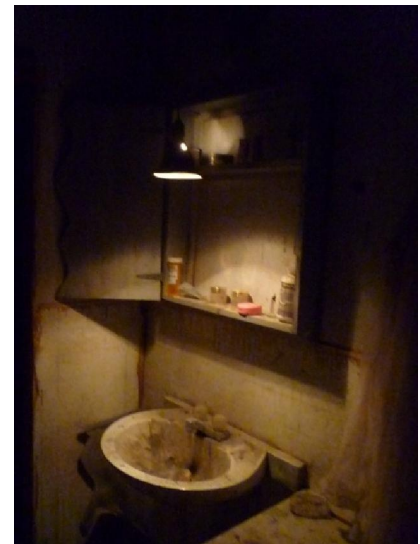


I prefer to design around the actual physical objects in the room. (Fig. B) You have more leeway than with a solid wall. Because the objects are moveable you can have them as close at 28 inches instead of a 42 inch wall separation.

You must also think in terms of reality. There are real rooms that are only 8 x10 or 8x 12, small yes, but real rooms. In a temporary setting we forget about the reality aspect. I went through a temporary haunt last season that had a bathroom scene probably 20 feet x 24 feet!! One huge wall had just a lonely tub against it; you had to walk 15 feet from the toilet to the sink! When people see objects in this type of setting it destroys, instead of reinforcing reality.

Ceilings are another culprit. In the temporary setting if you look above the 8 foot wall you see up to the top the real interior ceiling or to the top of the tent. In the trailer you see a ceiling, again reality reinforced.

So space is a major concern. There are certain props or effects you just cannot utilize in the smaller environment. This is something to consider if you already own several large pieces. Can they be incorporated in the new space; can they be used outside in a courtyard? Can they be sold and replaced with space saving pieces??? In the vein of dealing within a confined space we must also consider numbers. Patrons we put through the attraction or throughput.



**THROUGHPUT:** You cannot get a huge throughput in a Trailer Concept. In a building, you can build hallways to accommodate groups of 10-20 people. In a trailer, you scale down to 4-6. In a large haunt you try and get people through as quickly as possible, in the trailer concept you actually slow your audience down to fully utilize the space. We accomplish this through the use of doors, curtains and black connecting hallways. All have a tendency to slow the audience down through the use of anticipation, which is a good thing as it heightens their experience. If you merely walk from room to room to room, people tend to pick up the pace. In a temporary setting with fewer details this is good thing. In a tight trailer concept the space puts your audience right IN the attraction. Any lack of detail will be amplified at this distance.

**DETAIL:** In a temporary attraction we can work on props, animations, set pieces and the like, in the off -season. The only time they all come together is when we assemble them on location. While you try to add as much detail as possible, how many times have you said, "...if I just had a couple more weeks!" You are caught in a viscous circle. You try to add as much as possible, but about half way through your install you start to realize that everything you put in....you have to take out!! You find yourself "settling". Not putting in as much as you really wanted because of the time and manpower constraints.

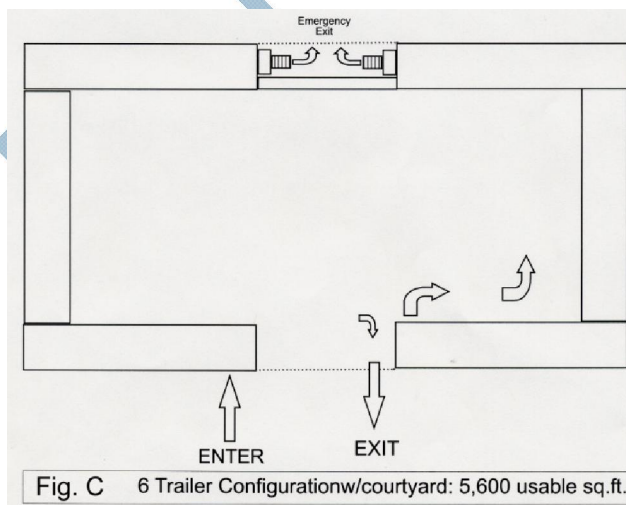


The Trailer Concept avoids those pitfalls. As stated in Manpower, everything you put in a Trailer Haunt STAYS in the haunt. This allows you to add those layers of details only the permanent attractions can have. You do not have to "settle" but are able to build on your previous levels of detail. The deeper the level of detail you add the more a sense of reality is achieved. Immersing your audience in that altered reality allows you a better chance of heightening the scares. In a real bathroom you would not expect the medicine cabinet to contain a hidden attacker. In the non-reality of that 20x24 bathroom you expect something to happen!

**SIZE:** You may be asking, "didn't you cover this in the Space section?" I define space as the area contained within the attraction; size is the amount of space the attraction encompasses. Size is

important for several reasons. It impacts choice of location, fire ordinances, storage costs, transportation, staff requirements, even admission charge. We have found that a six trailer configuration is a good size to deal with. It gives you a good footprint, utilizes a reasonable staff size and allows you to charge in the \$10-\$15 price structure.

A well designed six trailer configuration (Fig.C) will yield you a 10-12 minute show, 15-18 depending upon whether you utilize the courtyard. This



allows for the setting of the price structure. Your audience can actually justify a conceived value as they can see the entire attraction. I have gone into store front style attractions not knowing if I was going through 10,000 square feet or 1,000 square feet.

Knowing your outside dimensions and the configuration sets the type of parking lots or areas that you can set up the attraction in. It would be smart to look at the general sites available in your area then build your attraction accordingly. We once moved into a family fun center's lot that was long but narrow. We thought we would be there for an extended term so I actually reconfigured the attraction to be long and narrow. We only stayed one season as it was not as good a location as thought. Now I have to look for wide narrow locations!

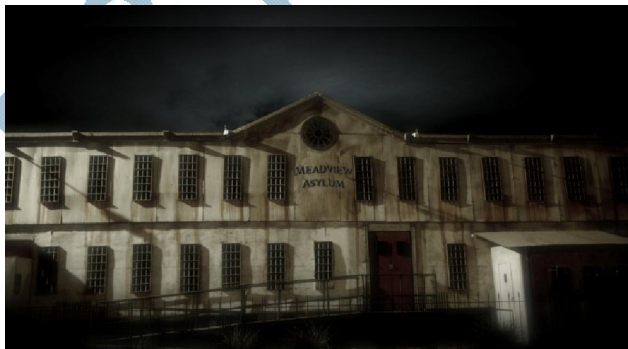
**MARKETING IMPACT:** The Trailer Concept creates its own marketing impact. It is in essence a HUGE billboard. Depending upon location, sometimes you may be able to actually drive around the complete structure. You need to make sure the exterior is a complete finished package. Not just a cool façade with the rest looking like parked trailers. We paint and decorate the entire structure. It looks like a building from all sides.

We also utilize the space to promote ourselves. We use a volunteer staff. On the back side of the attraction there is a sign incorporated into the design that states "Volunteer Actors Wanted" with "LasVegasHaunts.com" under it. Another side features the name and web site. The casinos are now actually doing the same thing on the sides of their buildings promoting shows and entertainers.

We actually set up earlier than necessary just to get the "billboard" up! Every day the structure is visible, my message is visible. It also adds to the mystique of the attraction. One day it is just an empty lot, a couple days later a building mysteriously appears! So starts the buzz!

**MULTIPLE ATTRACTIONS:** While there are several successful "long haunts" out there, the trend is now to create shorter multiple attractions in a large space. The concept is valid if not done to an extreme. There are some small to medium haunts that have tried to divide themselves into several multiple attractions. It is an insult to the audience and the haunt community! If the attraction is 15 minutes long there is no need to split it up! You must give your audience a value.

If you feel that one Trailer Haunt is not a big enough attraction in your market consider adding



additional attractions to create your total event. We have an overall connected story line that explains how the Asylum ties into a local hotel which through circumstances surrounding the Asylum became transformed from Hotel Fearay into *Hotel Fear*! People can experience either attraction individually or combine both to experience the entire story (selling point).

The Trailer Concept is also good as an add-on attraction. If you have an indoor location but want a bigger impact try adding a Trailer Show in your own parking lot. You not only have a secondary income stream, but a heck of a marketing tool. The space also lends itself well to a 3D concept.

IS THE TRAILER HAUNT RIGHT FOR YOU? So again we return to the same question. Even after all the information provided the answer is still one only you can answer. Are there issues to be concerned with when you utilize a Trailer Haunt? Absolutely! Just as there are issues with any other style of attraction. As I have stated many times, the trick in design is always to minimize the disadvantages and maximize the advantages. Hopefully if you couple this with all the previous articles I have written on the concept you will have enough to make the right decision.

Already I can hear you complaining, "... but I didn't read all the other articles!!!" Simple, just go back over the previous issues of Hauntworld. "...but I don't have every issue and some are out of print." Not to worry. Hauntworld has several of my articles in archive. To see all of the articles you can also go to my haunt's site: [www.LasVegasHaunts.com](http://www.LasVegasHaunts.com) . I am adding all the articles there so you can get access to them. Click on the tab "Haunt Articles" and you can download pdf's of the articles. I will also try to post all of the other articles I have written.

So once you have read everything, you need to look at all the scenarios we have discussed here and how they pertain within your local area. Look at the availability of space, location of space, and cost of space. Weigh that against the cost of trailers, transportation and storage. Go see the different styles, indoor, tent and trailer.

What no trailer show in your area? Well my friend you go to TransWorld, March 2012 in St. Louis and you get to tour Larry's Ravens Manor. Then after touring and seeing everything up close and personal, if you still have any questions, I will be right there to answer them!

Make plans to go to TransWorld and tour Ravens Manor. Bring your questions with or formulate new ones during the tour. With the information provided and tour available you should be able to have your answer once and for all. Even if you are not considering a Trailer Haunt right now, you should attend this event. If your space situation changes in the future, you will at least have an option.

See you in St. Louis!

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