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Thinking Outside the Dot (Room)

by Deanna Roberts-Morton

How many times have you said you'd never do something as lame as a dot room? It is so cliché! Well, I can tell you that no other room in our haunt is more loved by patrons than our dot room! When asked in exit polling which room was their favorite, a surprisingly large majority told us the Dot Room. The one-year we didn't include a Dot Room in our attraction, every other person asked us where it went. Dot rooms can entertain without being overly scary to young patrons. They can add a great startle effect, as well as a visual illusion to your haunt. It's also one of the cheapest rooms to create.

The Effect

Patrons enter a dark room with glowing fluorescent dots on the walls. As the group moves through the room, suddenly the walls come alive and start to move. The effect is created by putting an actor in a head to toe blackout costume with the same pattern of dots as is on the walls. Once the actor moves the effect is over. The startle is when the patron realizes that the wall is not as solid as they thought and it's coming right for them!

The Room

Black, Black, Black! Cover the walls with flat black, matte finish fabric (such as cotton, muslin or canvas). Don't use black plastic, as it is too reflective and ruins the effect. Plastic may also be flammable and unsafe to use in a haunt. Make sure the floor of the room black as well, or it may give away the position of the actor. Paint the floor black or use black carpet to increase the effect, (You can paint carpet black). It is a good idea to add a niche or curtained off area in the room to allow your actor to get out of site of the patrons. The costume is the hardest thing to create, so start there and make the walls with the same technique. The trick to a great Dot Room is to make sure the pattern on the costume matches the pattern on the walls as closely as possible!

The Costume

Make sure the actors wear black gloves on their hands and black socks or coverings over their shoes. Purchasing a “black out” hood with mesh over the face allows the actor to see out, but hides their face from the public. When washing the costume, do not use any whitening cleaners or fabric softeners. These can make the garment glow under a black light. Wash the costume by itself to avoid any white fuzz balls from other clothes that would glow and give the actor away.

Paint or hot glue dot pattern pieces onto the costume and the wall in the same way. If you are painting your dots, basecoat the pattern with white Gesso or fabric paint. The basecoat keeps the cloth from absorbing as much of the more expensive UV or glow paint, and the white will make the colored paint show up better. When painting on fabrics be sure to put plastic or newspaper down first. Paint will soak through most fabrics and stain the work surface. Any fluorescent spray paint or craft acrylics, UV reactive or Glow-in-the-Dark paints can be used for your pattern. Almost any shape will work including, stickers, stamps, splatters or stripes!

Ultraviolet Lights

When using blacklights. (UV Light), use the fluorescent tube type fixture, not the screw in type bulb which is little more than a purple light bulb for putting off UV and tends to burn very hot. A room as large as 10' x 10' would best be served by a 4' blacklight fixture. When painting the dots, turn the blacklight on intermittently, so you can see the effect.

Variations

There are many ways to spice up a Dot Room to make it fit your haunt theme and keep it from looking completely out of place. Some of the best “Dot Rooms” I’ve been in haven’t had any dots at all. Variations for a haunted house could be a nursery using alphabet blocks, or a child’s nightmare using stuffed animals or toys to create the illusion. Other themes like a circus with glowing clowns, dots, cotton candy (cob webs) or even popcorn would work great. In a lab scene formulas can be written on the walls with Glow or UV paint or markers and UV reactive wire. Use Great Stuff expandable foam sealant painted with green UV paint for icky drippy alien slime or alien masks on the walls in Area 51. Anything that is UV reactive or glows in-the-dark can be used in as an alternative to dots. Skulls and skeletons would fit a cemetery theme. Glow hockey masks are perfect for that “serial killer” theme. Bugs, UV reactive wire, eyeballs, spiders and cob webs are all viable options. When using a lightweight item instead of dots, hot glue is your best friend! You can even attach the item by using the UV reactive hot glue sticks, or use the glue to create your own pattern.

A dot room is perfect for catching patrons still off balance from the spinning tunnel. Use music to fit the theme or the pattern and scents or smells to add to the ambience. For that added shock value, give the actor a rattle can, (tin can with washers or un-popped corn cernels), to shake in the face of your patrons. With a little imagination and very little investment, you can create a fantastic Dot Room for your attraction, that fits your theme and storyline that is not cliché at all! Before long your patrons will be raving about your Dot Room and telling everyone, "You gotta check this out!"

Deanna Roberts-Morton AKA – Witchypoo, and her husband Dustin own Bronson Boneyard Haunted Manor; a Home Haunt in Bronson, Michigan. Deanna is on the board of directors one the IAHA and is the present Secretary of the association.

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