My Show Commander© Workflow

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I have used Show Commander software to manage poultry and pigeon shows since 2013. I have personally used it to input entries for 12 shows and over 20,000 entries, and I was either the overall show secretary or was the entry secretary working with the show secretary.

Although there are many ways to complete the task of inputting entries and managing a show, the following is an overview of the workflow I use.

Confirm the Show Settings

1. Before inputting the first entry I confirm that the show settings are correct. These settings can be reached from the Tools page. If something is not setup correctly, changing it now will ensure that the proper features are enabled when inputting entries.

2. The definitions of Divisions are one area that sometimes present a challenge to set up, particularly for pigeon shows. I make sure that any specialty divisions are properly defined in, particularly if they require a non-standard showroom order or judging sheet order.

   Most poultry shows are straightforward, having a standard showroom order and well-defined divisions (e.g., Open and Junior).

3. Many shows have special awards or non-standard award structures. I look through the show catalog looking for these special awards and set them up in Show Commander. This ensures that the award will be available on the judging sheets.

   This can be done at any point before the show status is changed to "Finalized," but I like to do it as soon as possible.

4. If I have 1 or more volunteers that can help with the inputting of entries, I make sure that they are defined to Show Commander and have a sign-in ID and password.

   There is an experimental feature available that allows entry forms to be scanned in and put into a queue for remote users to view and input into Show Commander. I've used this on a few occasions, and though it's a little "quirky," it can be useful in some situations. It does require access to a scanner that can handle multi-page documents.

Preparing the Entries for Inputting

1. As I look through the day's mailed-in entries, I slice off the end of the envelope with scissors and carefully extract its contents.

Helpful Hint

I open the envelopes carefully as I hold onto the envelopes until I verify that I can actually read the exhibitor's name and address on their entry form. I have seen some pretty poor handwriting, and often the envelope's address is much easier to read.

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2. I stamp the paper entry form with the Date Received, and make note of the Postmark Date (if the show has a postmark deadline), payment type, amount, and reference number (check #), and verify that any required extras

(e.g., pullorum test results, etc.) are enclosed. I make these notations directly on the paper form in a visible ink (e.g., red).

Note: If the payment is meant to cover more than one entry (e.g., for a family), I make a note of that on one of the forms, listing the names of the exhibitors that this payment covers.

3. After making my initial read through of the entry documents, I separate the payment out into a large manilla envelope. The entry form is placed into a pile on my desk waiting for further processing. I generally keep the test papers paper-clipped with the entry for the entire process.

   At the end of this step I have a pile of the day's entry forms, with the payments in an envelope, and any additional information needed to correctly input the entry noted on the face of the entry form.

Helpful Hint

Some days I only receive 1 entry in the day's mail, other days I may receive over 50. Generally, the higher numbers occur 1 to 3 postal days after the postmark deadline date. Rarely do I receive qualifying entries more than 4 postal days after the postmark deadline.

Deadlines

1. Processing an unending stream of entries makes completing the work required to create show materials a nearly impossible task. As a result, I usually insist that any show I am inputting entries for have an enforceable entry deadline in the form of a firm postmark date. Should I receive an entry that has a date after the deadline, I scan or take a photo of the face of the envelope and return the envelope to the exhibitor unopened.

Inputting the Entries

1. I like to process all the entries in that day's mail in one session. If I have helpful volunteers, I distribute entries to them as well. Since we are all using the same system on the internet, the workload can be shared among as many volunteers as are available.

2. Before inputting a lot of entries, I generally sort Show Commander's entry list in reverse order by exhibitor number. This helps me to easily see the list of entries I completed, as the newly input entries appear at the top of the list.

3. As I am inputting entries, I pay close attention to the Amount Due and the Amount Paid fields. If there is a discrepancy, it often is me overlooking a swap cage reservation or bad math on the exhibitor's part.

4. As each entry is input, it is assigned an exhibitor/entry number. I write this number at the upper right of the paper entry form, circling it to make it obvious. This makes it easier to find the paper copy after all the entry forms have been placed into the 3-ring binder.

   I also use a scanner to scan in all the paper entry forms and health papers, upload them, and attach each to its entry in Show Commander. This allows me to bring up the original entry form by clicking on the link found on the entry record. This is completely optional—many shows do not do this.

5. If I encounter something that needs me to contact the exhibitor for clarification, I send an email directly from Show Commander. Many of the most common issues have an email template that I can use to quickly send it.

   When the email is sent, a note is automatically attached to the entry, so I know exactly what the issue is. I also leave the entry marked as "Incomplete" so that I can come back to it after the issue has been resolved. Generally, I keep these incomplete entries in a separate pile on my desk.

If the exhibitor did not supply an email address, or if they have not responded to my email within a couple of days, I call them. I attach a note to the entry for each phone call made and how the issue was resolved.

I also mark up the paper entry form with the issues, although this is optional. If I have properly annotated the entry in Show Commander, all this information can be found in the notes attached to the entry.

Once the issue is resolved, I add a note to the entry describing the resolution. I often cut and paste the return email body and paste into the note's extended text.

6. Once an entry is completely input, and there are no outstanding issues, I mark the entry status as “Complete.” Using the “Done and Add” button saves the entry and brings up a blank page to begin inputting the next one.

Helpful Hint

At any point during the inputting of an entry I could click the “Save” button to save the entry, or the “Done” button” to save the entry and return to the Entries page.
I could also skip directly to the “Add-ons & Fees” page by clicking that button.

Staying on Top of Incomplete Entries

1. Many exhibitors seem to ignore urgent requests for clarification regarding their entry. Each day I spend some time working through the incomplete entries. The entries page can be filtered to just show incomplete entries by using the special “:i” search term.

   Unless I am up against an imminent deadline (e.g., I need to finalize the show today), I will contact exhibitors every other day until I get a resolution. Show Commander makes it easy to send exhibitor emails using email body template text for common issues.

2. I like to make attach notes to the input entry for each contact, and Show Commander makes this easy. That way if I don't ever receive a response and I must make a decision, I can point to the number of times I tried to get the exhibitor's attention.

Issuing Receipts

1. Once all the entries for the day have been input, I issue receipts for entries marked “Complete” using the Bulk Actions feature of Show Commander. This works best if the entry supplied an email address, otherwise, I print out and use postal mail to issue the receipt. Most shows do not want to incur this postage cost, but if needed, Show Commander can create self-mailers ready to mail.

2. Alternatively, I can also print or email individual receipts right from the View Entry page. This works well if you are just inputting a few entries and want to immediately issue the receipt. I will also use this method if an individual entry's issues have been corrected and is marked “Complete.”

3. Occasionally an exhibitor will find an error after reviewing their receipt. I then edit the entry in Show Commander and re-issue the receipt with the updated information.

Helpful Hint

The generated Receipts, as well as the generated Awards Reports and uploaded forms (if used), are stored with the entry. You can view them either from the View Entry page (click on the exhibitor's name to access the link), or on the Uploaded Forms page.

Verifying

1. Periodically during this process, I like to scan the list on the Entries page and make sure that entries are looking as I expect. I also like to click on the "Summaries" link on the Fast Access Bar and check the Breed and Class summary pages for anything unusual.

2. I also periodically check the Amounts Due report to see if I missed something that the exhibitor paid for but I did not input correctly (showing up as an overpayment), or if they did not pay for something that I said they did (shows up as an underpayment).

3. After all entries have been input, I go back through the paper entry forms, and make sure that I have correctly input the following items on each entry:

    a. Age Group—is the entry in the correct age group?

    b. Publish—did the exhibitor want their information published in the Exhibitors List?

    c. Showmanship—did the exhibitor want to enter showmanship?

Finalizing the Show

1. Once all receipts have been issued, all data looks good, and the entry deadline has passed (allowing for postal mail delays), I change the show's status to "Finalized." I only do this when I am 99% confident that everything is ready, as setting the status to "Finalized" performs the following actions:

    a. Generates all the Exhibit numbers for the show

    b. Generates all the standard Awards required for the show

   This action takes a few minutes, as it is very resource intensive. It is not intended to be reversed, particularly if coop cards or labels have already been printed, or the judging sheets have been produced.

Creating Coop Cards or Labels

1. The next step is to create the coop tag labels or the coop cards themselves. I like to print directly to coop cards whenever possible, as I think it looks more professional, and avoid the laborious job of peeling labels and sticking them on cards. But some shows prefer labels.

2. Trios have 4 labels/cards printed. The first label/card is for the trio as a whole. The next 3 are for the male and the 2 females. The exhibit numbers for the 3 birds of a trio are all the same, except that they have an "a," "b" or "c" suffix. I hang the trio coop card and the card for the male on the first coop, which will end up having 2 cards.

3. I can generally print off the labels on my printer at the office. Setting up the alignment of the labels varies by printer, and even by the paper tray used on the printer. To verify alignment, I print off the first page of the PDF file and hold it up to strong light with a sheet of blank labels in front of it. If they don't line up from top to bottom or left to right, I use the "Nudge" settings to move the print to a better position, regenerate the PDF, and repeat the alignment checking process.

Helpful Hint

Each "Nudge" represents 1/72 of an inch, either right/down (positive) or left/up (negative).
These nudge settings can vary between printers and even by which tray you feed the labels from.

Once the alignment is correct, I start the label printing process. Printers often struggle with printing labels, so I keep a close watch for jams.

Once all labels are printed, the process of sticking the labels on the coop cards can begin. I generally count on doing 5 per minute, so a large show can take a few hours. I keep the cards in the order printed (which corresponds to the showroom order), and bundle any classes together using rubber bands.

Helpful Hint

If your show places the Junior Division entries among the Open Division entries, the Junior Division coop tag labels will have the same Exhibit Number as the Open Division coop tag label and will be printed adjacent to each other.

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4. When I print directly to coop cards (i.e., avoiding labels), I generally create the PDF file and take the file on a USB drive to the local print shop (e.g., Kinkos, The UPS Store). They have the equipment that can print on cardstock and cut up the sheets into coop cards.

   The advantage of this is that the tedious job of affixing labels to cards is avoided. However, in most cases the cards will need to be sorted after they come back from the print shop. This take time, but it is far less tedious than the label sticking process.

Creating Other Materials

1. Immediately after finalizing the show I create the Inventory reports to give to these responsible for setting up the showroom. I email the PDF directly to them, but also bring a couple of printed copies along with me on show setup day.

2. I create and send the Judge Assignments worksheet to the person responsible for assigning the judges. Generally, this is the show secretary.

3. I then print out a master copy of the Exhibitor's List for copying at the local print shop or on my office printer. For a big show I will opt for sending it out for printing, as it tends to take a toll on my printers. I make at least as many copies as there are exhibitors, but that requirement varies by show.

4. Printing the Judging Sheets is next. I like to provide clerks with "fold-back" binders for holding these, so I generally use pre-punched 3-hole paper in my office printer, saving the work of hole-punching the 300+ pages generated. Since there are so many pages, it may make more sense to take the generated PDF file to the print shop, but at mine there is a hefty upcharge for using 3-hole paper.

5. I then print out the Check-In Report, Swap Report, Amounts Due Report, and Exhibitor Entry List reports.

Saving Show Material

1. The paper entry forms, and their related test papers, are filed in a large 3-ring binder. Our state requires keeping these for 3 years. For poultry shows I order these by exhibitor number; pigeon shows usually like them sorted by the exhibitor's last name.

This binder of entry forms is kept handy on show day to resolve any lingering questions.

I do like to scan and upload the paper entry forms and test papers and attach them to each entry in Show Commander. It's optional, but makes for nicely archived, quickly available records.

2. I give the file folder of payments (checks, cash, money orders) to the club's treasurer on show setup day, or sooner if possible. I enclose a copy of the Payments Register report with those to help with the deposit process.

Show Setup Day

1. I bring all the coop cards, separated into their divisions and classes, with me to setup day. I like to attend show setup day so that any issues can be resolved on the spot.

   Ideally, someone experienced with setting up a showroom will be responsible for placing the coop cards, with special attention paid to "XL" (aka, "Double") coops. The last thing anyone wants to do is re-place coop cards because an XL coop requirement was missed.

Show Day Activities

1. At the check-in desk I like to hand out the Exhibitor Entry List to each exhibitor as they check in. Also, a quick glance at the Amounts Due report helps resolve any lingering payment discrepancy issues.

2. It is helpful for the show clerks to have a short 15-minute meeting before the show judging begins. I usually run through my expectations, and demonstrate how I want the judging sheets to be filled in.

   Generally, I will hand each clerk a complete class of judging sheets, contained in a fold-back 3-ring binder. As the judging of the class completes, I load another binder with sheets for the next class and they are good to go.

3. I fill-in the higher-level awards on the Judging Sheets as classes are completed.

   If you have an internet connection at the show, some shows like to input the results into Show Commander as the clerk brings back the judging sheets, but it is easy to get distracted and find yourself getting behind. It's easier to do after the show, if it's needed at all.

After the Show

1. Inputting results into Show Commander is entirely optional and is not completely supported by the software. I have only used it for 2 shows, and the shows have not continued its use.

   It was developed to be able to send individual Awards Reports to the exhibitors, which they appreciate, and to make filling out the APA/ABA/Breed Club reports a bit easier.

2. The last step is to close the show. Doing prevents someone from accidentally changing things after the fact. If necessary, the status can, at any point, be changed back to "Finalized" without concern.