



THE WORLD'S BEST HANDCRAFTED MASCOT COSTUMES

# THE MASCOT MANUAL



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# Welcome to the Alinco Mascot Manual<sup>©</sup>

## **INTRODUCTION**

It's not a job that you'll see listed in the classified ads. Finding a mascot performer is not that easy. They are a unique breed of entertainer with a wide variety of skills and abilities. The best successfully combine elements of cheerleader, actor, clown, acrobat, and stunt person all in one. They are willing to subject themselves to all sorts of humiliation and abuse (most of it self-inflicted), with nothing more than a bit of foam and fabric to protect them. Most perform for only a few bucks and a strange type of fame that stops the moment they step out of costume. Yet there is something special -- almost magical -- about these characters. Children will flock to them. Teenagers will give them high-fives. Men admire their athleticism. Women want to hug them. Their appeal crosses generations. Mascots have an uncanny ability to bring people together. The popularity of mascots is on the rise. In marketing and promotion, especially in the sports industry, many mascots are replacing celebrities and athletes, particularly on a local level.

In a world where loyalties are often short-lived and athletes are traded, a mascot provides an enduring image and an accessible, huggable ambassador to the community. If you look in the dictionary, it might define "mascot" like this: a person, animal, or object that brings good luck. But, if you ask a mascot performer, he'll tell you differently. He'll tell you there isn't much luck to it. Mostly, it's just a lot of hard work and creativity. But the effort is worth it. A successful mascot enriches teams and organizations. It connects businesses with consumers. It makes people smile.

The best mascot programs are built on the understanding of four main points: (1) the mascot design, (2) the mascot costume, (3) the mascot performer, and (4) mascot management.

In this manual, we'll take a look at each point, although some sections will become available at a later date.

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## **THE MASCOT DESIGN**

A great amount of thought should be put into the design of your mascot character. This initial concept will shape the development of the costume, the selection of a performer, and the way in which your program is managed.

Words of Advice: Keep a note pad and pencil handy as you read the following paragraphs. Make notes and answer questions. In the process you will begin to discover your mascot, its personality, and the foundation of your mascot program.

At this point, you don't need to worry about the costume design. Simply focus on the development of the character.

## **LOGOS AND CHARACTER ART**

Do you already have an established logo or image that will influence the look of your mascot? If so, it's almost always a good idea to stay with your brand image. However, you may want to allow yourself some flexibility. For instance, if your logo depicts a truck, you may want to develop an amusing truck driver. A bear wearing a company uniform is a lot more huggable and approachable than something as oversized and stiff as a vehicle.

## **TARGET AUDIENCE**

What is your target audience? Whether your mascot is intended for 12 year olds or adults, it will impact the development of your character. A cute and cuddly kitten probably won't appeal to a stadium full of raucous football fans. And a ferocious Irishman most likely won't be invited to a 7-year-old girl's birthday party. Decide on the age, gender, and "personality" of your target audience.

### **TIPS FROM THE PROS**

*"Create a mission statement for your character. Write a short biography."*  
-Seattle Supersonics

What kind of personality should your mascot have? Is he mischievous? Is he clumsy? Or is he heroic and sure-footed? The more you know about your mascot, the better you will be able to direct the development of the costume, the actions of the performer, and the direction of the mascot plan.

## **COMMUNITY**

Does your mascot reflect the principles of your organization and community? A mascot should not be offensive to individuals or groups in your community. For instance, if your mascot represents a team named after a Native American tribe, then it is a good idea to involve tribe representatives in the design of the costume. A mascot can and should unify people in a common cause.

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## **APPEARANCE**

Some might consider appearance to be the first and foremost point of mascot design. But, as you've probably noticed, I placed it down the list a bit. While appearance is important, it is easier to develop your mascot once you have established other key points, such as your audience and your mascot's personality. The mascot's appearance should reflect these prior decisions.

So, what do you think your mascot should look like? Remember, certain types of characters are much more appealing and easier to approach. Generally, these are furry animals that are easily recognized, such as a bear, cat, or dog. Think of the most successful plush toys and you'll be headed in the right direction with your mascot. However, some team names and audiences require something other than an oversized teddy bear. You're team might be called the Vipers or something non-objective, such as the Blaze. While challenging, you can still create successful mascots for almost anything.

Another type of successful mascot is the "Fantasy Character." Characters such as Sesame Street's "Cookie Monster" and the "Philly Phanatic" have popularized these types of mascots.

Some organizations may require a human character. Designing a human mascot can be a great challenge, but don't be discouraged. Many of the most popular mascots are human designs. You just need to understand a few issues before designing a human mascot:

1. **Race.** What color skin tone should you select? Your target audience may have some bearing on this. Some organizations choose to use non-racial colors for their human mascots, choosing instead to give the character a skin color such as blue or purple.
2. **Ethnicity.** If your mascot is based on an ethnic group, the utmost respect and care should be used in designing the character. Many universities, seek feedback when developing logos and mascot depictions, for example the University of Utah, gained feedback from the Ute tribe, and selected a mascot that would be acceptable to them.
3. **Children.** While this applies more to the actual costume, it is important to keep in mind that children are naturally afraid of strangers. And no matter how friendly he looks, a human mascot has a tendency to scare little children more than most mascots. However, this can be overcome through consistent and positive branding of the mascot. For instance, the Dallas Mavericks' mascot, the Mavs Man, is a human, super-hero character. Through the use of public appearances and comic books, the Mavericks have created a large fan base for the mascot.

Another type of mascot is an inanimate object, such as a cell phone or a food item. While these have a place in advertising and promotion, they lack the approachability and appeal needed for an interactive mascot. You may want to consider adapting an animal, fantasy character, or human to your fit your needs.

## **COPYRIGHT AND TRADEMARK**

Do you own the copyright or trademark associated with your mascot? Have you registered the image with the US Copyright office? To protect the likeness of your mascot, you should at least register it with the US Copyright Office ([www.copyright.gov](http://www.copyright.gov)). You should consider registering a drawing or color rendering of the character instead of the costume. This will protect the character's appearance, just as Mickey Mouse and Bugs Bunny are protected from reproduction in any form, such as toys or other costumes.

You should also consult an attorney specializing in intellectual property. In the end the cost is worth the protection.

It is important to make sure the public sees your character regularly. Print it on logos, merchandise, and other printed materials. The more it is associated with your organization, the greater protection you'll receive.

## **THE MASCOT COSTUME PART 1: DESIGNING A COSTUME**

Your mascot costume needs to reflect the design and direction of your mascot program. It should appeal to your target audience and convey the personality you have developed for your character. It should also meet the needs of your performer and allow him to use all of his abilities to the fullest.

### ***WORDS OF ADVICE***

An advertising or marketing agency can be very helpful in designing a mascot. However, an agency may not understand the practicalities of a costume. If you choose to work with an agency, it is a good idea to contact a costume company early for input.

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## **FINDING A COSTUME COMPANY**

At this point, you should at least have a rough idea of your mascot's likeness and personality. Now you face the challenge of bringing your concept to life. The most effective way is to create a mascot costume. Most likely you won't be sewing up the costume yourself—although many have tried—so you will want to find an expert to assist you. There are a handful of exceptional companies that can help. You can find them on the Internet by using a web search engine, such as Google, and typing in the term "mascot costumes."

As you research mascot companies you will find a wide range of quality and services. Some companies offer better warranties than others. Make sure you understand to what degree each company is willing to back their costumes. Some even offer a satisfaction guarantee.

Some companies also fill certain niches better than others. One may produce a superb sport mascot, while another's specialty might be an oversized character for an amusement park. Make sure the costume and the company are compatible with your mascot design and objectives.

### **When selecting a costume company, ask the following:**

1. Does the company have a "portfolio" of quality costumes either on the Internet or in print?
2. Who are some of the clients the company has worked with in the past?
3. Can the company create a costume that meets my performance expectations? Some companies are great at oversized characters. Others specialize in athletic costumes.
4. What kind of warranty does the company offer?
5. Does the company provide design services? Many companies offer free design assistance.
6. Does the company store patterns, molds, and fabric samples for later orders? If so, how long?
7. Are there discounts for additional costumes or costumes purchased at a later date? Costumes wear out. Make sure you will be able to replace it.

#### **NOTES:**

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## **WORDS OF ADVICE**

Don't skimp on your mascot. Buy the best mascot costume and hire the best performer that your budget will allow.

## **BUDGET**

What is your budget? How much are you willing to invest in your mascot program? Do you expect your mascot to produce monetary profits or do you hope to see returns in the form of publicity and promotion?

The best advice is to purchase the best mascot you possibly can. A quality mascot costume should last 3 or 5 years, depending on the use (or abuse). A \$3,000 - \$5,000 investment in a custom costume should be well worth the publicity generated by an effective mascot program.

## **CATALOG COSTUMES VS. CUSTOM COSTUMES**

Some mascot companies offer a full catalog of pre-existing costumes. If you have a limited budget or need a quick delivery, these may be your best option. In many cases, you can find several versions of the most common mascots. Many mascot companies offer a printed catalog, but for an even wider selection of costumes you should visit each company's website. It's most likely that a catalog costume won't exactly match your mascot design, but it may come close. And if you don't see one that resembles your design, it's always a good idea to call the company and ask. Often they have costumes that are not pictured in the catalog.

Okay, so you've looked at the catalogs and visited the websites, but they just don't offer anything that remotely resembles your design for the Parley High School Prunes. Your best option is to create a custom mascot costume. Custom costumes can cost 3 to 4 times more than a catalog costume, but you also get more for your money. First, you will own the rights to the costume and character (make sure the mascot company offers this). Your costume will be unique, so a duplicate costume won't turn up with your cross-town rival. A custom costume will normally provide better vision and mobility. Custom costumes will be based on your original mascot design; therefore, they more effectively fulfill the objectives of your mascot program.

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## **REQUESTING COSTUME DESIGNS AND PRICING**

Many mascot companies offer complimentary design services. In other words, you can get a design for free. But remember, it is most likely that the company will retain the rights to the artwork and design until you actually buy the costume. But that shouldn't stop you from getting a few price quotes and designs. Find the best costume you can within your budget range. Always weigh the design and pricing against your initial program objectives. Ask the company questions about vision, ventilation, mobility, cleaning, and storage.

## **PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS**

What are the performance expectations for your mascot? Do you want the costume to draw attention by big actions or a big performance? An oversized costume generally limits mobility, but may be necessary to reproduce the look of an existing character. A more streamlined costume will appear more "human-like" in shape, but will provide the ability to run, dance, and perform certain acrobatics. You should also consider the size and design of your venue. Will your mascot need to run up the stairs at your venue? Will it need to attract attention in a large stadium? Do your fans want to see a show or just get a photo and a hug? As a general rule, the smaller the costume, the bigger the performance needs to be.

## **PRODUCTION TIME**

So now you've ordered a costume. If you ordered a catalog costume, it should arrive in 1 to 4 weeks, depending on the company and costume. A custom costume will normally take longer, usually 6 to 8 weeks.

## **THE MASCOT COSTUME, PART 2: WEARING A COSTUME**

When you receive your costume, the first thing you should do is take it out and look it over. Make sure the quality and the appearance are what you expected. Be certain all the parts are there. Most basic mascot costumes will include a head, body suit, shoes, and gloves. Others may also include items such as a tail, wings, clothing, or other accessories. If an item is missing and an explanation hasn't been provided, contact the mascot company as soon as possible.

## **GET TO KNOW YOUR COSTUME**

It will take some time to become accustomed to your costume. Obviously, running and jumping with oversized shoes and a head the size of a small planet takes some adjustment. Start out slow. You may want to try the head on first, without the body or other parts. Be sure to breathe normal. You may feel a bit claustrophobic, but this should pass. Get a feel for the vision, ventilation, and weight.

Next, try on the feet. Waddle around. Jump a bit. You'll learn to walk with a slightly wider stride.

Finally, try on the body. You'll quickly realize that it gets warm inside the suit.

After you become acquainted with the separate parts, try them all on together. Walk around and wave your arms. Keep your movements simple, for now. Later, with the help of a **handler** or **spotter**, you can begin to tackle stairs and other more complex actions.

A full-length mirror is a great source for feedback. Learn where the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth of the costume are located. When performing, you will need to touch them as if they are your own.

## **GETTING INTO COSTUME**

Each costume varies to some degree, but most follow the same basic dressing sequence. Remember, it's always good to have a helper close by to help with those tricky zippers and snaps.

1. Put on the inner padding, such as a round belly or shoulder pads, if applicable.
2. Pull on the body suit.
3. Put on any costume clothing, such as shirts, shorts, jackets, etc.
4. Sometimes these items are already integrated into the body suit, which makes this step easy.
5. Put on the costume feet. Some feet have sneakers or sandals already attached inside. Others are designed to accommodate your shoe.
6. Put on the head. Fasten the chinstrap. Be sure the head fits securely, without too much "wobble room." Some helmets, such as hockey helmets, are adjustable.

**If you have any problems or concerns, contact your costume manufacturer.**

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## MASCOT TERMS

### **Game Operations**

*The division of a sports team that is responsible for game-time entertainment and promotions. Most mascot programs are part of Game Operations*

### **Handler**

*A person who assists the performer while in costume. This person helps the mascot performer navigate difficult environments. He or she also assists with dressing, props, crowd control, etc. A handler is also known as a Spotter.*

### **Spotter**

*A person who assists the performer while in costume. This person helps the mascot performer navigate difficult environments. He or she also assists with dressing, props, crowd control, etc. A spotter is also known as a Handler.*

We hope you have enjoyed this so far. More to come!



## CONTACT US

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