



Making Your Event an Experience

How to engage hackers in an unforgettable Hackathon :)

Dylan Vidal

President of Knight Hacks @ UCF
3rd Year Computer Science Student
GitHub Campus Expert 
MLH Top 50 2025 



Knight Hacks VI

My first Hackathon! And where I really learned what an “experience” was to my community.

- A strong sense of collaboration and community
- Dungeons and Dragons!
- Heavy Investment into Decorations
- Quick-time events
- Heavy emphasis on socials
- AWESOME MERCH!



Level Design

01

Build the Moment

A Hackathon isn't all about Hacking.
Invest in socials, and friendly events.

02

Consider Immersion

Find ways to get hackers involved
during the event in impactful ways.

03

Make it Memorable

Find ways to leave a long lasting
impression on hackers.

Important Topic Areas

01

Narrative

What is the theme of your event,
what role does the Hacker play?

02

Merchandise

Let Hackers take their experiences
home with them forever.

03

Logistics

Bake your narrative into every facet
of your event.

Building a Narrative



Theming

IDENTIFY AN ENGAGING THEME

- Something Hackers will remember.
- Know your target audience.
- Easily integrates into Hackathon Logistics.
- Rebrand your organization for Hack Season!

Past KH Themes: Fantasy (D&D), Pirates (One Piece),
Gundam/Kaiju (Godzilla / Pacific Rim).

Mascots

USING THE FACE OF YOUR ORG

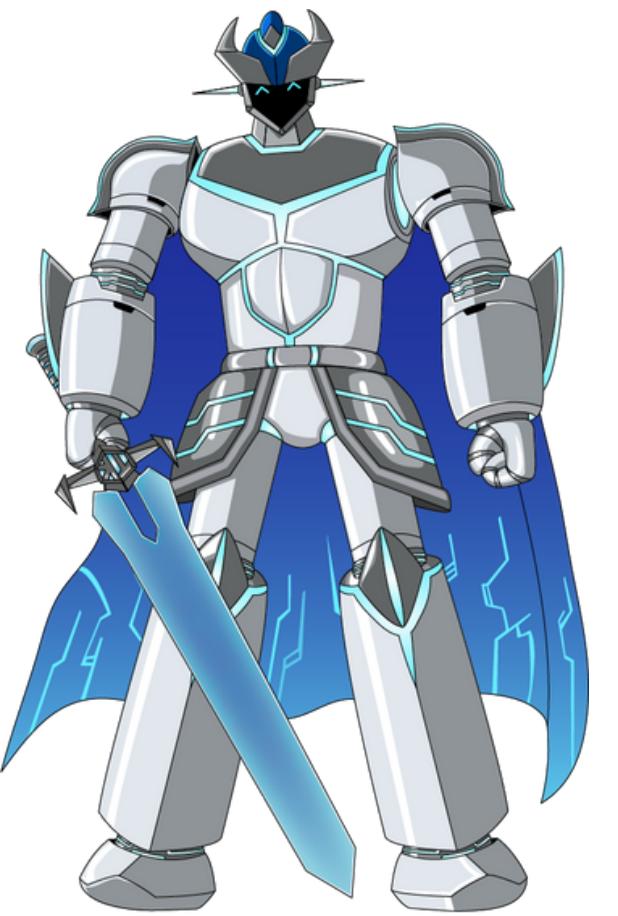
- Seasonal “in-theme” branding of your org’s mascot.
- Create an example of what this theme looks like.
- Mascots are memorable, and help make your event an experience that is easy to remember.
- Use the mascot to tell a story and create your narrative.

Meet T.K!

T.K Base



KH 6



KH 7



KH 8



Rebranding

KH Base



KH 6



KH 7



KH 8



Merchandise!

There are three main goals when designing merchandise:

1. Keep it in theme - think Disney merch!
2. Find ways to build mindshare (usability is key).
3. Include a per-event exclusive specialty item.

Specialty Merchandise

Find a really cool, in-theme item for each event. This will generate novelty, and exclusivity. Leave Hackers curious for what is next?

- KH 6 - Dice Set
- KH 7 - Deck of Playing Cards
- KH 8 - Funko-style T.K Figures



Logistics

Incorporate your theme and narrative into even the smallest components of your event. This will help keep immersion as a part of your “amusement park”

- Rename common areas or workshop rooms.
- Distribute Hacker classes, and turn it into a friendly competition.
- Theme announcements before and during the event.



Why Bother?

01

Instill Passion

Hackers will associate tech with the great experiences they've had.

02

Build a Positive Brand

People will relate your organization with positive memories.

03

Inspire Organizers

Running a truly impactful event will inspire people to run it next year.



Connect with me!

Portfolio
dvidal.dev

LinkedIn, Instagram
[@dylanvidall205](https://www.instagram.com/@dylanvidall205)

Knight Hacks
club.knighthacks.org