



HOW TO PLAN FOR YOUR EVENT



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► Event Marketing 101: How to Plan for Your Event

The primary reason to hold an event is to differentiate yourself from your competition. That competition, especially in popular industries, approaches your shared customers with the same promises and stunts day after day and year after year. Savvy consumers are inured to such advertising and sloganeering. But an event can be much more than a sales opportunity; it's about engagement.

Properly organized and executed events are exciting, different, alluring and memorable: all significant positives in the process of engaging customers and turning them into your group or business' enthusiasts, advocates and evangelists. Holding an event allows you to stand out in the perception of your customers and reinforce your reputation as an innovative business that really goes the extra mile to connect with their customers and their needs. A touch of fun and entertainment certainly doesn't hurt either.

The desired result at the end of any business event is to ensure that the greatest possible number of customers have had a great time and have been exposed to your branding message, so it certainly helps for marketers of all types to adopt the attitude that their goal during an event is to entertain as much as it is to make money.

► The Essence of Any Event Is the Fun

There are as many different business related events as there are people who produce them. You can organize a massive industry trade show that fills the convention center of a large city, or you can attract a few extra customers to your brick and mortar storefront on a Saturday morning with free hot dogs and balloons for the kids... and everything in between. You can spend pocket money to produce an event or throw millions of dollars at it, therefore there are no hard and fast rules as to what you should budget or what kind of return you can expect.

Your chief motivations for organizing a marketing-focused business event can be broken down into four main categories:

1. **Customer acquisition** – Event organization can be a marvelous strategy for attracting new customers to your fold who ordinarily might never have noticed your brand in your conventional marketing approaches.
2. **Greater customer engagement & sales** – Capturing the attention of your current customers through an event can be a powerful force to win their ongoing loyalty and to boost sales.
3. **Introduce & showcase products** - Events can be optimal for showcasing your most relevant products and introducing a new range. By creating an aura of “gala premiere night” you can impress your customers while making them feel that they are witnessing a very special launch.
4. **Showing appreciation** – As a society we are getting out of the Victorian habit of ensuring that we thank each other enough, and nowhere is this more evident than in modern marketing where the focus is on securing the sale, not engaging in pleasantries. A properly organized event can portray your appreciation to your customers and make them feel welcome.

Not all events are set up for strictly marketing reasons as some may be purely informative, educational or even enlightening in nature. Your brand may want to draw specific attention to a technological development or invention by providing a forum for the exchange of detailed information, or you may want to allow your customers to attend lectures, seminars and symposia from sought-after luminaries in your industry sector.

Politics is a stereotypical field for event organization, with candidates seemingly ceaselessly running from rally to debate to photo op to town hall meeting during a frantic election campaign. There are even countless personal and family reasons to hold an event as in the cases of birthdays, weddings, anniversaries and holiday parties. It could be a small get-together for friends and relatives up at the lake, or it could be a massive wedding for a thousand people complete with full gourmet catering and a name band to entertain.



No matter what the reason or the scale of an event it is imperative to have a clearly delineated set of goals that you are trying to achieve. Most commercial events have extremely specific financial goals to ensure that the event creates a net profit whether in covering its own costs or translating to greater associated sales. Some non-profit charitable events may measure success in the number of attendees who have been exposed to their advocacy message, while others both in the enterprise and charitable arena may evaluate their events based on how successfully they were able to boost their image and reputation through the event.

One goal that all events have in common is that they should be set up to leave the attendee with a positive and memorable experience that reflects well on the organizers and leaves them looking forward to attending the next event. If your event includes a number of sponsors or exhibitors, your concern for the attendees must be extended and expanded upon to ensure that these critical parties are completely pleased with their participation.

► Avoiding the Common Pratfalls

There is a universal complaint among first time event organizers, and that is that they had absolutely no idea that it would be as complex, detailed and time-consuming as the event actually turned out to be. It's easy to just stroll into a convention center and see hundreds of booths arrayed across the space and take for granted the massive amount of organization required to bring the event into fruition. In many trade shows even the smallest display booth is the result of hundreds of man hours of planning, logistics and sheer effort by not only the exhibitor but by the organizers as well. Even the smaller events can demand overwhelming amounts of time and work that are generally unexpected by the novice event organizer and cause crippling problems when things start falling apart at the event itself due to understaffing or insufficient planning.

Tyro event organizers also seem to have a great deal of trouble correlating their event schedules to the reality of the clock. They will merrily book six presenters into a two hour block fully ignoring that each will want at least half an hour to speak and most will take an additional ten minutes to set up their displays or demonstrations. When the last scheduled speakers find that they have been bumped due to time, the repercussions can devastate the prospects of producing your next event.

Another enormous problem for newbie event organizers is catering to the needs of the attendees. Each individual attending an event requires consideration and appropriate allocation of space and materials in parking, transportation, ticketing, scheduling, information provision, refreshments, washrooms... the list goes on and on. Events that are open to the public also bring with them an entirely additional set of challenges as the organizers will never know just how many attendees will be present until they show up. An event intended for 500 people can be an embarrassing bust if only 50 show up - and a chaotic disaster if 2,500 attend.

If you're thinking that you can host your event at a major sporting arena, get J.Lo to entertain, and close the day with a

half hour fireworks show on anything less than several million dollars, three months of planning and a staff of hundreds, you're falling into the very common trap of over-ambitious planning. Budget and personnel constraints are the primary restrictors of over-reaching ambitions by event planners. You can only tackle what you can afford to pay for and what you can delegate the personnel to achieve. Ignore those two critical aspects and your event is on the fast track to a crash and burn.

▶ Booking the Right Venue at the Right Time

Unless you're intending to hold your event in Chile's Atacama Desert, which goes for several years at a time without seeing a drop of rain, any outdoor production is at risk of being handicapped or outright cancelled due to the vagaries of the weather. Even fully indoor events can be decimated by the weather in the case of widespread flooding, major storms or white-out blizzards. Since you can't do anything about the weather other than buy event insurance and hope for the best, the choice of venue and the timing are decisive in giving your event the best possible chance of success.

It goes without saying that your venue should match the scope and scale of your event. Small scale events and those involving a limited number of friends and family can easily be set outdoors in a park or field, or indoors at a community center or church hall. However, if your brand is presenting a concert by the aforesaid J.Lo you had better book the biggest sports arena in your state or even consider holding a massive outdoor Woodstock/Live Aid type of show. Timing is just as exigent of insightful planning as the venue: Your snowmobile event is going to be a fiasco in June and your Farmer's Market will be a catastrophe in February.

There are many other make it or break it factors to consider when booking a venue and one of the most important is to match your venue with your audience. If your attendees are primarily the well-heeled, then holding the conference in a cheap chain motel's meeting room is a major faux pas. Similarly, holding an event that is intended for young families in a five-star resort hotel will have their minivans fleeing your \$25 Valet Parking in droves.

Once you have a good "feel" for the type of venue, then your next step is to conduct an online survey of what is available in your area and to contact all of them to determine what their schedules and costs are. You will find that there is a striking difference in pricing between fairly similar venues, so the time spent in comparison shopping is well worth the effort. Don't be afraid to haggle, as most venues are essentially very flexible in their pricing structures (though you may have to do some strong-arming in order to get them to admit it). If you think that negotiating with the venue is an overall effort beyond your skill set, it is a fairly simple process to locate a professional event planner to handle this aspect for you. There is a very real need for a caveat emptor on planners, so make sure that their references are impeccable and check each one of them fully before hiring them.

▶ The Intricacies of Marketing the Event

Whether you're inviting a handful of colleagues to a Sunday barbecue or you're faced with the prospect of filling the Las Vegas Convention Center for a week, engaging your prospects through an effective series of marketing channels is an indispensable imperative. The primary forms of marketing include:

Traditional marketing – Even though the world has gone digital, there is still ample place in the marketing of any event for some measure of conventional, good ol' fashioned approaches. If your event is fairly contained, you can distribute or post flyers, purchase advertising spots on a local radio station, obtain ads and subsequent coverage in the town newspaper, or even conduct a limited postal mailing. Larger events can benefit from television advertising and coverage, strategically placed billboards and even signage on the sides of buses and taxis.

General online marketing – The crux of general [online marketing](#) remains banner ads and search engine marketing. These forms of digital marketing can turn out to be quite expensive as the premium website ad positions and top search terms for your market segment can require an investment that might be beyond your budget, but there is no denying that they can be remarkably effective in attracting attendees and general attention to your event.

Social marketing – What was essentially unheard of a decade ago has now become one of the primary vectors for event marketing. [Social media](#) has taken over the planet and many event organizers can measure their efficiency through their engagement metrics on their social networking presences. Contrary to popular belief, social marketing is neither free nor easy - as to promote an event properly through social channels requires a considerable investment of both time and staff resources over an extended period of time.



Email marketing – Many event organizers have found that relying on [email marketing](#) is a wise choice no matter what the scale or type of event they are producing. Email marketing's astoundingly high Return On Investment (nearly \$40 for each \$1 invested, according to the Direct Marketing Association) proves that it integrates an elemental efficiency and facilitates bilateral conversation, which should be extensively harnessed in every form of event promotion and organization.

Community engagement can be fundamental to the success of any event. For the very smallest events you can benefit considerably from incentivizing a word of mouth campaign by promising discounts and vouchers, while the larger events can be boosted by a thorough saturation of their market. If you're promoting a pizza eating competition, your posters and dollars-off admission tickets had better be prominently visible and available at every pizzeria within a hundred miles of the event or you're failing in your task of properly promoting your event to your most relevant vertical segments.

A reality of current event promotions is that your potential attendees are now fully mobile and thus can be reached anywhere and at any time via their ubiquitous smartphones. Structuring your online marketing and response mechanisms to suit mobile devices is strictly mandatory, as no event organizer can afford to irritate or alienate [mobile users](#). Your attendees will be relying on their mobile devices to provide them everything from registration to directions to the event and there is no reasonable alternative to making the full breadth of that information available to all mobile devices. Each aspect of your digital marketing strategy must reflect mobile facilitation at every step, and if that requires you to hire a programmer to develop an app or a designer to overhaul your website to render it mobile-friendly, then it is a wise investment.

When faced with the plethora of complexities and myriad of details inherent in any event's digital marketing, organizers can benefit considerably from a centralized facility to assist them in their planning, streamline admission sales and distribution, and promote the event across the social networking sphere. All of these intricate and involved aspects of event promotion and production have been shrewdly integrated into a single coherent interface by Benchmark Events, a platform that facilitates the event organizer in:

- Creating an online registration page
- Accepting and processing credit card and PayPal purchases
- Comprehensively "pushing" events to the full range of social media
- Establishing an inclusionary two-way communication paradigm with attendees
- Coordinating a series of detailed reports on all of these critical aspects

Benchmark Events establishes a high water mark in the field of event organization and production. It represents a tool that no event organizer can afford to ignore as it can readily facilitate some of the most vexing and time consuming aspects of any event's planning and execution, not only saving time and effort but ensuring that your event will be an overall success.

▶ **Thorough Checklists & Preparation Defuse Inevitable X Factors**

It is not possible to underestimate the power of the checklist. Indeed, it can be said that an event is only as good as the checklist used to organize it as leaving the most minute detail to the fallible human memory is an invitation to... er...

what was that again? Even the most limited event can have a checklist of well over a hundred items and a massive event's checklist can reach into the thousands. There is literally no limit to what items your checklist should include from staffing assignments to equipment rentals and deliveries. Taking a single aspect for granted under the guise of "oh, I'll remember that" virtually guarantees that in the "fog of war" it will be neglected and then end up biting you right when you least expect it.

What you should expect is some measure of chaos as unpredictable X factors pop up during the course of your event. The only way to accurately forecast the future is with a crystal ball and those seem to be in short supply among most event organizers. The only way to assure that these situations can be handled before they derail the entire program is to have ample staff on hand that have been meticulously trained and are equipped with an efficient communications capability so that they can provide feedback "up the chain of command" and then swiftly receive instructions. These situations can range from the relatively small such as a speaker spilling a drink on their shirt prior to their presentation all the way to a major exhibitor losing electrical power to their main displays.

When you become an event organizer you'll understand why the motto of the Boy Scouts is "be prepared." Dedicate yourself to going far beyond all expectations of proper preparation and you will have discovered the fundamental key to successful event organization. One of the most significant aids to planning and preparing for any event large or small is the thorough leveraging of the remarkable facilities to be found within Benchmark Events. The integral and powerful facilities to create a customized, professional event webpage with a comprehensive set of seamless payment options; coherently promote your event by tapping into social media; and benefit from the full suite of event entry management capabilities and reports, make Benchmark Events a prerequisite to supercharging your entire event's profile and realization.

► **Maintaining a Consistent Post-Event Communications Flow**

Failing to follow up on the responses and feedback that is provided by the attendees can be the biggest failing of most event organizers. If you're producing a sales-oriented event you have to understand from Day One that the majority of the sales that will be generated by your event will not be consummated during the event but can come weeks or even months later. Just because you've been able to pull off a successful event does not equate to your work being over when you close the doors. In the cases of many marketing-focused events, the bulk of the work begins when the event ends.

First and foremost, all promises made and expectations created during the event must be fulfilled quickly. If your attendees have been told that they will receive a particular voucher or discount coupon via email after the event, that message had better be sent to all and with priority-level haste, lest the interest that you worked so hard to generate in the offer fade away.



Surveys, polls and extensive social media engagement are obligatory elements of post-event communications in order to maintain and build upon the interest created by the event. Although you should always stop short of pestering your attendees, many event organizers err in the opposite direction and drop off the radar until it's time to promote the next upcoming event. Your social media strategies must be honed to a fine art in order to ensure that your attendees remain "in the loop" with your branding and reputation, and look forward to attending your next event. If they have provided you with formal permission to receive your [email newsletters](#), concentrating on the success of the event and the solicitation of their input to make the next one more relevant to their needs should become a central focus of your newsletter content.

Smoothing out your post-event communications strategies to eliminate the peaks and troughs inherent in most event outreaches will certainly help you achieve the goals that motivated you to hold the event in the first place. You can rely on the exquisitely adept organizational and reporting facilitations integrated into Benchmark Events to form the backbone of your attendee management system, ensuring that the experience of attending your event is one marked by professionalism, expertise and flawless implementation while creating an admirable aura that will persist in the mind of the attendee until your next successful event.

► Benchmark Events Is the Hub of Any Successful Event

With the inauguration of the trend-setting Benchmark Events platform, organizers of all types and sizes of events now have the ability to access and benefit from a state of the art, fully integrated event promotion and entry management suite of services that puts them on an even playing field with the largest and most established promoters in the country. If you're expecting ten or ten thousand attendees, Benchmark Events can turn the arduous, complex and time-consuming tasks of creating an event webpage, promoting your event and managing every aspect of attendance into a streamlined process for both you and your attendees. Benchmark Events is the new gold standard in event promotion and organization and is a key element in the success of any event and the resultant boost in the positive reputation of your association or business.

Visit [Benchmark Events](#) today and begin your journey to event marketing success!

CONTACT US

► Contact Benchmark Events

We welcome your feedback and would love to talk with you about your event marketing needs. Please contact us at the addresses below.

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