Secrets to Successful Event Marketing and Management

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Introduction

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Secret Number 1
Effective and Economical Invitations

The first element of a successful event is effective promotion through email invitations, automated online event registration and additional integrated marketing efforts such as direct mail, outbound phone calls and an informative event web site. Meeting Planners International has reported that close integration with other marketing disciplines was identified as the primary means to event success by over 80% of event planners in the 2005 Event Review '05 trend analysis study.
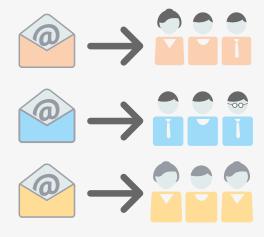
Email invitations are the most economical event marketing method and undoubtedly drive more attendance for planners than any other marketing medium. Email invitations should have a professional appearance, with eye catching graphics, an effective subject line and relevant content. Properly bundling emailed event invitations with an online event registration and payment-processing system will dramatically increase attendance numbers, reduce manual data entry and simplify attendee tracking tasks. Post event data analysis on over 75,000 events shows that planners can achieve up to three times the standard response rate after implementing integrated email marketing, direct mail, and outbound calling campaigns.

Secret Number 2
Custom Communications Reach the Response

The second secret key to successful events is to support your event marketing efforts with targeted and personalized emails to invitees. Each group of invitees should receive specific messaging tailored to their interests. Response rates for a one size fits all invitation can be 50% less than invitations for specific groups of attendees such as VIP clients, prospects, different levels of association members etc. Furthermore, it is essential to send invitations that are personalized. "To Whom It May Concern" and "Dear Client" should be replaced with key fields like first name, title and company that are mail merged into the invitation.

The mail merge will make the invitation seem less like a blanket invite and more like a personal offer. Our research has shown that targeted messaging and personalizing emails can be the difference between a successful event and an event that is cancelled for lack of response. Email is the premier medium for targeted and personalized invitations. Personalization and targeted messaging are examples of fundamental marketing practices that can make or break an event.

Secret Number 3
Comprehensive Campaign Management

The third secret of great events is effective campaign management. Planners need to track the number and status of their invitations to successfully monitor the campaign launch and projected success. Invitation open rates and the number of undelivered invitations or "bounce rates" offer valuable insight for campaign effectiveness. Email invitations provide the sole solution to properly oversee campaigns and real time invitation status. Email invitations allow visibility for these important response rates with real time analysis. Planners can instantly take action with additional marketing campaigns to boost response.

The status of invitations from a mailing list could have a high undeliverable rate. It is much better to know the status of your invitations sooner rather than later in order to reach your projected response. A good event marketing tool not only helps planners manage their event promotion campaigns but also helps track response rates with real time reporting, recognizes and notifies you of bad contact data and provides the ability to cleanse the bounced emails from your address book.

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Secret Number 4
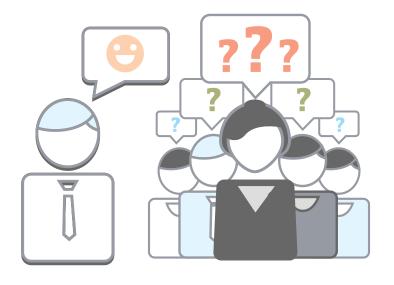## Leverage the Event Web Site

Creating a compelling event web site is the fourth key to successful event marketing. It is critical for an event web site to allow attendees to register and pay for an event online (if fees apply for the event). There are various website oriented marketing initiatives that can be used to promote registration and attendance, such as early bird discounts, group rates, and promotion codes. Offering online event registration via the event web site is key because it allows planners to measure if they will have the right amount of space, food, seats, and materials at the event. Without a solid online registration solution and the capability to track these metrics, planners often overbook a venue or undersell the space they have bought. A quality event web site should present attendees with an event agenda and streamline the registration process for all parties.

Online registration systems can offer much more than simple web forms that collect data through email or excel. These systems can pre populate attendee data into registration forms and provide a simple three click registration process proven to dramatically increase response rates. No one likes to fill out long forms. Planners can utilize system features to allow attendees to register only for the event sessions they find relevant. In addition, planners can take segmented registration a step further by presenting various registration paths on the web sites for different types of attendees. For example, VIP attendees would be invited to participate in an exclusive networking outing while others would only see the educational sessions during the registration process.

Secret Number 5
Let Attendees Do the Planning

The fifth key to planning successful events is to qualify your attendees with pre-event surveying via the event website. It is important to understand the event objectives and determine from your attendees how these goals can best be achieved. It is also crucial to discover why an invitee has decided not to be an event attendee. We call that "monetizing the "no." Planners need to understand the reasons affecting event attendance. Invitees could have scheduling conflicts, lack of interest in the education topics or location issues. Following up with the RSVPs could change future event strategy and prevent future revenue generators from slipping through the cracks.

More importantly, assessing attendee expectations provides customized information necessary to execute a top quality event. Planners can ask attendees key questions about their organization, what topics they would like the keynote speaker to discuss, what they would like to gain from the event, what food allergies they have, etc. Customization in every facet of event planning is a proven secret to attendee satisfaction and overall success.

Secret Number 6
Avoid the Payment Headaches with Automation

Logistical headaches often stem from undertaking the task of manual event payment processing. Whether you practice payments onsite or prior to the event, a substantial amount of time and energy will be invested in manual fee collection. The ideal solution is simple: automation. Attendees can pay event fees securely during the online registration process and the funds are automatically deposited into the designated bank account. With automation, planners do not have to handle credit cards, verify payment receipts, manually enter attendee information or deal with sensitive issues like unavailable funds. Attendees and planners alike can track their finances instantly. It is also important to have a system in place that can issue refunds without a hassle. All refund policies should be clearly outlined in the registration process so attendees have the necessary information up front. A smooth payment and refund process is essential for a successful event. \

Secret Number 7
Embrace Technology

The seventh key to event success is automation of all administrative tasks. Data entry, stuffing envelops, manual payment processing, creating reports manually, completing telephone registrations, telephone surveying and other tasks consume a tremendous amount of time and resources. Again, software systems can automate all of these tedious functions and enable one planner to execute more events, improve the quality of events, focus on higher-level responsibilities, make informed decisions and leave the office at a reasonable time every day. Event campaigns will become more strategic and automation can yield cost savings up to ninety two percent. In today's fast paced business environment, it is time for event planners to embrace 21st century technology tools and use them to their full advantage for maximum return on investment.

Secret Number 8
Secure the Details

The eighth key to successful events is to expertly manage event logistics. The planner's organization and attention to detail will speak volumes about the quality of the event. Planners should begin by storing all event information and data in one place. If people are traveling to your event, provide them with ample transportation options, reserve room blocks for your group to ensure the best rates available, provide detailed driving directions and parking instructions. Event details can be provided in event confirmation letters, which are best sent via email.

Store travel and housing related information in an event management system to track attendee arrivals and departures, arrange modes of transportation, assess additional needs in real time, manage hotel room blocks, communicate with hoteliers and transportation vendors and provide complete event agendas and itineraries for every event attendee. An all encompassing travel and agenda management plan will ensure your event stays on budget and the customized treatment will leave a fantastic impression on all stakeholders.

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