

# How To Launch a Successful Event

Events are a way of life for the professional world. They serve as a great conduit for gathering community, raising awareness, distributing information, and building movements. After 20 years of experience with event coordination and event management of all sizes, following are some of the basic pillars I recommend when producing a successful event.

## THE MOST IMPORTANT THING FIRST

There is one, core, fundamental principle to keep in mind as you consider hosting an event of any size: *people*. People are the most important element to any event. They matter and they need to feel that they matter when they leave your gathering.

If you value people, it will show in every aspect of your planning and coordination and this element of excellence will raise the standard, adding the extra component to your event that will make people want to come back for more. On the other hand, disregard people at any stage of the planning and you will cause vendors to not want to work with you, hosts to not be part of the operations, volunteers to ignore your plea for assistance, and attendees will eventually find something else to do with their time.

Whether your budget is \$100 or \$100,000 dollars, keep in mind: that there are some basics to running a good event and the first is making sure you value people.

## PLANNING FOR A SUCCESSFUL EVENT

**DETERMINE THE PURPOSE, GOAL AND MISSION OF THE EVENT.** Go out of your way to garner a clear understanding from the leadership for the purpose, goal, and mission of the event. Oftentimes it can be helpful to write out the core purpose so that everyone is on the same page.

Seek to determine the answers to these fundamental questions:

- What is the purpose of this event? Broad purpose? Specific purpose?
- What is the ideal takeaway for event attendees? (I.e. after the event takes place, and as people leave, what is it they hope they will do?)
- Who is the ideal audience as sponsors and/or as attendees?
- What measurement is needed by leadership to consider the outcome a success? Ask the CEO or board: *“How will you define this event as a success?”*
- What is the theme, brand, or vibe of the event you are tasked with planning?

**BUILD THE STRUCTURE OF THE EVENT.** After you have the vision of the event defined, the next important piece is solidifying the structure of the event. You are not coordinating all the details at this point but simply putting the legs of the tent in place. Another way of saying it is: *you are laying the necessary foundation so that as you build out the event and more people get involved you are setting your team up for success.*

Gather the answers to the questions:

- Who is supposed to be part of the planning/decision making?
- What is our budget for this event?
- Who is to be invited to this event?
- Who will be helping promote the event?
- Who are the vendors we are required to use?
- Who is our target market, and how will we reach them, for promotion?
- What is the theme and purpose of the event?
- What kind of event is this going to be? (i.e. is it a dinner, or cocktails, or brunch meeting)
- When is the event to take place (ie. a company Christmas party)?
- Where is the event going to take place? (Town? Venue? Region of the city?)
- Is there a special speaker, or speakers? And what program do we need to make allowances for?
- Why is this event important?

Also, explore if this event has ever been previously produced. If this is a regular event for this family or company or industry, there are some standards that previous attendees may expect to be replicated. Or if this is an event that happened eons ago and did not go well, in your attempt to rebrand and revive a standard of excellence you may need to be prepared to tell repeat participants “I know it did not go well before but we have new management and we are changing things. We are confident you will be thrilled with the gathering this year! Please come!”

### **BE READY TO ANSWER THE BASICS.**

Make sure you can readily answer the *Who? What? When? Where? And Why?* And always remember to ask the How: *How will we make this a success?*

- What is the Budget for this event?
- Who are the decision makers or stakeholders you need to keep informed?
- Who is the support team?
- Are there any special requirements we need to keep in mind?
- What timeline are we following?
- How often do we need to touch base with the leadership for measurement and status reports?

As you are planning the official event you have to determine:

**Venue:** as you identify the ideal location make sure you are gathering all the details before signing the contract. You must think through all elements for the best - and worst - case scenarios. *What if you have a larger than expected audience - will there be room to expand? Or what if very few people show, will you be able to resize the room so it does not feel so empty with only a few in attendance?*

For your venue, you are exploring everything from *size of venue, cost, parking, aesthetics, needs for technology, ease to locate, convenience for promotion, and what is the cancellation fee?*

**Date:** As you nail down the date, oftentimes it is helpful to have a couple options when presenting to final decision makers (or vice versa to venues).

**Time:** What time is the event to officially start? When will the doors open? Is there a time for a pre-event reception? When can you get into the venue to set up? When is the absolute last moment you have to be out of the venue?

**Cost:** The per person cost of the event is oftentimes not seen by the attendee, as in the case of a “complimentary reception.” In this case, the coordinator or host will be the sole responsible member for the cost. But at times, attendees do have a fee. Make sure things are clearly defined and communicated to all involved. And always (always!) over-deliver what was promised to your guests. Regardless of what they paid you want them to walk away feeling like they have had a quality experience.

**Invite:** Once you have all the details you must then get an invite put together that works on different platforms. Produce an invite in several different formats. You will need something for snail-mail, a nice piece for advertising in newspapers, copy to use in a press release, copy to be shared via email, and graphics that are convenient for posting to social media or conveying through texting.

## **FINAL STEP BEFORE PROMOTION**

Before you publicize your event, do one final review of all the details:

- **Registration Mechanism:** whether it is through Eventbrite, or a special email address or through the website be prepared for people to start registering their attendance. Have a way that people can let you know if they plan to attend. Remember to have a RSVP deadline which should be determined for those who are providing food; always leave extra room for additional additions at the end.
- **Do a final review with leadership:** make sure nothing is missing
- **Always read through your material** *once more* and test published electronic links

Now, start promoting and inviting people!

## **PROMOTION**

For this phase you will want varying options of invitations. Make sure to get the basic information to the Internal Key Leaders (board members, CEO, those who will oversee phone calls etc). After they are aware, also let immediate investors know, your staff, key influencers and other significant interested parties.

Then begin the broad promotion. Give yourself anywhere from 6-12 weeks to get this information out. Start with follow up around the 3 week mark. Be prepared to do repeat promotion. Just because you sent an email out once does not mean that everyone will see it or that that is enough to “convince” them to attend. You will want to remind people, and promote different elements of your event, and with appropriately timed messages encourage potential attendees this is something they will miss out on if they do not come.

For promotion you can

- Send out the invites via electronic means and snail mail
- Distribute information online through websites, and social media platforms
- Share information through text message
- And never forget the one on one phone calls.

Another form of promotion is to

- Share with friends in applicable industries
- Utilize paid advertisement
- Share with local media via press releases and request radio interviews
- Talk about it via online platforms, in newsletters, and announce at other events

Get creative with your distribution of the information. Do follow up. And use appropriate headlines that will grab people's attention to learn more.

## **CONCLUSION**

There are so many more details before you can close the book on a successful, completed event but this will lay a good foundation to start you out on the right track. Enjoy the process and embrace meeting new people and exploring innovative ideas that you have never tried for previous events. Allow yourself to embrace every event as a new adventure.

Enjoy every moment, learn from the mistakes and get ready to do another one! Event production is an art, a dance, a fabulous opportunity for personal growth - and a worthwhile investment. A successful event can bring life changing results for your cause, your industry, and your community!

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