

Keeping attendance levels at your event

6 key steps to successfully market your event

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Many associations and corporate companies, in these current uncertain economic times, are faced with the difficulty of keeping attendance figures up for their meetings, conferences and events. Developing a clear marketing strategy will be your key to success in 2009. Researching and understanding your delegates will enable you to be more creative and flexible. It will also allow you to stretch your budget further as you will only be using the best channels to communicate to your target audience. But how do you do this efficiently? Below the 6 key steps to successfully market your event:

Step 1: Get to know your audience

It is essential to familiarise yourself with your delegates and find out why they attend your event. This information will help establish your unique selling points (USP's). Some questions you will need to ask are;

- Who are your target audience?
- Where is your audience located? Local vs. International
- Who are your main competitors and what are they doing?

To answer these questions you can use tools such as a SWOT analysis as well as looking at past trends and attendance numbers. It is also important to talk to the industry, it is easier to work in collaboration with other associations and key stakeholders, than to try and work alone- remember, everyone is in the same situation.

Step 2: Set clear objectives

Once it is clear who your delegates are and what your event offers, it is essential to set clear tangible targets. This allows you to focus on the most important information and will give you clarity as to who you want to target and how. Your objectives should detail how many attendees you want and what the mix of industry, country and other attendee demographic information should be.

By being very specific about your objectives, you can evaluate if your key messages are correct and if your selected communication channels are worthwhile. An example of this step is detailed below, the demographics are from an event organised on "Global Reporting" held in the Netherlands for a world wide audience.

Preferred target audience

Country	Target Number of Attendees	% of mix
Brazil	50	5%
Japan	100	10%
Spain	150	14%
Netherlands (maximum)	150	14%
Rest of Europe	200	19%
USA/Canada	250	24%
India and South Asia	50	5%
South Africa	50	5%
Australia and New Zealand	50	5%
Targeted TOTAL	1050	100%

Target Attendee Profiles

Category	Segments	Brand Recognition	% of Attendees	# of Attendees
Business	Reporting practitioners	High	40	400
	Leadership	Low-Mid	5	50
	Small enterprises	Low	1	10
Civil Society	Reporting specialists	High	5	50
	General campaigners	Low	1	10
Labour	Appointed GRI liaisons	High	1	10
Mediating Institutions	Investors, specialty	High	10	100
	Investors, mainstream	Low	1	10
	Accountants	High	10	100
	Assurance providers	High	10	100
	Software providers, specialty	High	5	50
	Academia & students	High	5	50
	Government, reporting	High	2	20
	Government, policymakers	Mid	2	20
	Media, specialty	High	2	20
	Media, mainstream	Low	1	10
Other	Low	-	40	

Step 3: Determine your communication message

There are hundreds of ways to get your message across, but only a few will be effective for your event. First you will need to determine what you want to communicate. It is easy to get distracted by all the features of your event, however you need to be focused on your USP's: What does your delegate want from your event? Some examples could include:

- Programme content: delegates can be focused on the learning outcomes from your event. Well known key note speakers can help draw a lot of attention and encourage people to attend.
- Networking: events and conferences are key times for people to get together and discuss future collaborations and business, so make sure you also emphasise the networking opportunities available.
- Incentives: By offering special deals and discounts to register early you can get a better idea of your attendance numbers which can save you money.

Another aspect you need to consider is how your message will look. The design should fit in with your message and be used consistency through all your marketing activities. The look and feel of your messages can increase the brand recognition of your event.

Step 4: Get your message across: determining the marketing mix

The success of getting your messages across to the right audience lies in the repetition factor. It is essential to repeat your key messages via different channels, so you will need to consider the quantity, frequency and type of media. Options you can utilise include:

- Email: this is an inexpensive way to create customised messages. However, be careful of spam filters and data protection laws.
- Direct Mail: This can be an expensive, but effective tool. Its usefulness will depend on the quality of your database.
- Social media: Use social media such as Linked In. They are a cheap and very effective way of communicating directly with your target group.
- Website calendars and links: an inexpensive and effective way of promoting your event through publishing your details on other websites that your delegates visit.
- Advertising: It will target people who are not on your database and can boost your event's credibility. You can even try and barter to save money.
- Other exhibitions and conferences: Very effective way of reaching your target audience through attending or exhibiting at relevant events and conferences.

Step 5: Execution of Marketing Activities

Once you have figured out your messages and how you will get them across, it is time for the actual work to start. Coordinating the execution of all the marketing activities can be complicated, particularly if your event is international. Your planning should be logical and easy to understand. Make sure you detail all the activities, deadlines and the person responsible for each task. Remember to communicate the list to all parties involved and ensure everyone understands who is responsible for each specific element. This avoids any confusion over the tasks in the long run.

Step 6: Lessons Learned!

Don't forget to evaluate your event to find out who your participants were and how they found out about your event. This will let you know which marketing tools were effective and which were not, potentially saving you time and money the next time around. It is also wise to find out what they thought of the event, what they liked and what did they disliked. This all is crucial information for your next campaign.

And remember, although 2010 will be challenging, it is worth investing time in creating a marketing plan to ensure you know who will be attending now and also in the future. ...good luck!



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About Congrex

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Clients' success is what drives Congrex. We believe the best part of our work is the close relationship we establish with our clients, which allows us to address their challenges and deliver exciting projects.

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