

## The Event Doctor! Column

### How to select the right event to meet your marketing goals

As someone responsible for conference and tradeshow selection in your company, how do you select the right events for your company? Until very recently, tradeshow management has been more of an art than a science, given the few formal options for learning the 'event business'.

I'll start off with items that may seem like 'motherhood' in order to be complete. This also assumes that you have not pre-selected events from years past, not the perfect scenario probably, but you can use this as a guide. Since the obvious start is to know who you want as future customers, let's get cracking!

#### **1) Confirm Your Target Market**

Until you know your direction, it will be hard to be successful, so let's get started with the hardest step, aligning your corporate marketing goals with your event selection strategy. Here are the questions that you need to answer:

- What size company are you targeting and in which location( local, regional, national, international)?
- How much revenue must the company make and what budget must they have for your products and services?
- Why should your target customer buy your products and services?
- What are the titles of people in the company who usually decide to purchase your products and services?

Knowing the answers to the questions above will determine which shows you will select. This part of the process deserves the most attention of the six steps and your job may depend upon you knowing the right answer(no pressure!).

OK, so you have done your homework and figured out the above. What's next?

#### **2) Decide Your Event Goal**

Obviously you may have different event goals for each event, and this may depend upon your priorities, time of year, product launches and so on. Usually a person responsible for driving the tradeshow strategy has to prove the return on investment(ROI) of their participation in an event, so many times a company's participation in an event is determined by the number of sales leads they receive. I don't recommend this primary goal without serious internal discussion, but leads (linked to future sales) is the easiest one to quantify so most often chosen Other goals are:

- Reinforce Existing Relationships
- Launch a New Product or Marketing Message
- General Branding

Since determining results of a successful event can't be quantifiably measured, some companies measure the Return on Objective(ROO) which helps the non-leads based goals be measured by more qualitative methods.

Select your primary and secondary goals as this will also determine what kind of event you select. The more leads you need, the more likely you are to choose a trade show over a conference or smaller event. The 'closer' you want to get to your targets, the more likely a more likely that a more 'intimate' opportunity might be chosen, such as a small conference.

Now you know your target audience and your event goal(s) for each event, we'll continue to push forward and match what's available to what you need:

### **3) Determine The Best Type of Event for Your Goal: Conference or Trade Show**

A tradeshow is easier to operate a standard 'one size fits all' strategy, a conference or smaller event is harder. Why? Because you have fewer ways to reach your targeted audience. Usually a conference has most of the action in the educational sessions with a smaller (but maybe a more exclusive and valuable) audience and only dedicated time in the product showcase or sponsor areas, so your strategy might be to get speakers for your company or users to speak, rather than putting all your effort into the showcase. In addition, you may choose a smaller show so that your participation is not lost in a sea of other sponsors and exhibitors. Product launches and new marketing messages are usually communicated at the main industry events (ie tradeshow), so make sure you will get the biggest bang for your buck if you select a specific event for this reason.

Here are the questions you need to answer to continue the matching process:

- Do you want a local/regional/national or international audience?
- Do you want to attend a Horizontal event (like healthcare, sports, financial services) or Vertical event (customer service, food service technology, etc)?

Next you need to research your event options. Here are a number of resources to help you find candidates for selection:

- Online show databases (such as tsnn.com, aem.com)
- Internet search engines

- Industry associations(in your targeted vertical and horizontal markets)
- Your customers
- Your competitors
- Consultants(like The Event Doctor! or industry experts)

#### **4) Determine Your Event Budget**

It is assumed that you have an annual tradeshow budget, and that you have decided you have a certain amount of money to spend on each event. You should ascertain the amount of money you have to spend on:

- Booth Fee
- Sponsorship Cost
- Installation and Dismantle Costs
- Booth Build Cost
- Freight Forwarding
- Electricity, Booth Furnishing Costs
- Staff Travel and Entertainment Costs
- Other

Once you have these figures, you can start to decide how many events you can afford to choose and now that you have the list of potential events you might select, you can now engage the event companies to see if you have a match in terms of audience demographics, cost and location.

#### **5) Engage Your Sales Representative**

A critical connector that is frequently ignored until there are problems is how the sales representative at the event company works with you. You need to know the answers to the following questions:

- How responsive is she(he) to you? How long did it take for you to receive all of the information you need to make your decision?
- How does she(he) sell you? Is it pressured( 'buy a booth now!') or consultative('tell me about your goals and targets'...)?
- Does she(he) know your business?
- Does she(he) know your show goals?
- Does she(he) make a non 'cookie-cutter' offer to you? Depending on your needs this could be positive or negative
- Do the demographics match your target market data? The demographics from past events are the most important data you can get about an event. It pays to note whether the data is audited by a third party such as BPA/Exhibit Surveys.

- Do you have access to a senior executive at the event company (ie how much does the event company care about your business)?
- Will they give you references from past exhibitors to see what their experience at past events has been?
- Can you attend the event as a guest before making your decision?

Based on all this exhausting work, you should have a short list of options. Now you need to:

## **6) Choose From Your Targeted Options**

At this point, you should rank the events in priority of how well the events meet your goals and match your target requirements. You may have a full list of options that meet your needs or only a partial one, depending on your goals, the available options and your budget. If you are not happy with your selected results, go through the checklist again, and perhaps change some of your variables or assumptions. In future columns, I'll let you know about alternate options.

Congratulations, you're off to a great start!

*Warwick Davies is the Principal of The Event Doctor!, a consulting company which helps event organizers turn unprofitable events into profitable events. His clients include organizers in the information technology, healthcare, biotechnology and executive events markets. Previously, Warwick was responsible for internationally recognizable event brands such as Macworld Conference and Expo, LinuxWorld Conference and Expo, and the Customer Relationship Management Conference and Exposition worldwide. He can be contacted at [Warwick@theeventdoctor.net](mailto:Warwick@theeventdoctor.net)*