

How to Manage a Runaway Success

One of the people I have really looked forward to speaking with is the current Chairman of SISO is Carl Pugh, who also runs his own company, Radius Events. The reason being? We were old competitors in my DCI days, where we had an event called Internet Expo which was raking in the cash until a little event called Internet World passed us at speed in the fast lane...The subject of bygone years drew us to the theme of how to maximize a massive success when it happens. I am also happy to have spoken to Carl since after our conversation, he sent me such copious notes I could say this article almost 'wrote itself', but I won't since that will make me look lazy...

So what does Carl advise?

- **Make sure you have a top-notch staff.** Paying "too much" for really good people is always a bargain in the long-run. For example the difference between the \$60k caliber marketing pro and the \$90k one is very quickly recouped on a \$2m show if the latter can do better by just 10%. Ditto for sales execs.
- **That said, always be careful not to increase your overhead too quickly.** What feels like a barn-burner one year can just as quickly slow to a crawl the next year.
- **You must retain your "new and exciting" feel.** This is comparatively easy on a brand new event because you are new. But in subsequent years you have to work hard to maintain that feel. Consider how to make your event an 'experience'.
- **Never rest on your laurels.** You are only as good as your last show! Every event must be dynamic and valuable to all of your customers, whether attendees, visitors, sponsor, exhibitors and stakeholders.
- **Don't grow too fast.** In some rapidly expanding markets it is much easier to sell exhibit space than it is to attract sufficient audience to support the burgeoning square feet. Better to have moderate hall growth that is in synch with your audience size than to do damage by decreasing traffic density through over-expansion. This is not easy when corporate is pressing for maximum short-term profits and your bonus is tied to the bottom line!
- **Make certain you choose venues that do not impede your growth.** You may choose not to sell all the space but you don't want that decision forced on you because the venue is simply too small. And make sure you have a hold on the space you anticipating needing in future years. This is especially important for really large events because the choice of venues that can hold them are limited.

- **Make smart decisions that are good for the long-term health of the show, not just for next year's increased profits.** Better to make a few less millions for many years than more millions for a brief exhilarating stint.
- **Be certain to document your success through show photos, videos and participant testimonials.** Let them sell the show for you!
- **Spread the emotional and financial wealth!** Make sure your staff reaps the benefits of the team's shared success through bonuses and clearly expressed accolades. Failing to do so will breed resentment, especially when they are asked to work extra-hard.
- **Invest in technology.** One of the best ways to increase the efficiency of a rapidly growing show is through technology. Make sure you are taking full advantage of the latest in CRM systems, floor plan management applications, project management software and communication tools.
- **Never allow success to make you or your staff arrogant.** When you have a long waiting list of exhibitors it is easy to become impatient with a small one that complains about everything. Many feel such arrogance contributed to the demise of COMDEX. To succeed in the long-run you **MUST** win the hearts and minds of every exhibitor, attendee, speaker, even your vendors. You want them all cheering for your success not hoping for your demise.
- **Reevaluate your organization's structure.** What makes sense for the management of a small show may not be ideal for larger events.
- **Don't be afraid to admit you or members of your staff are in over your head.** Running mega-events requires a whole different skill set than those required for small ones. Bring in outside help (such as The Event Doctor!) as you or your staff need it.
- **Scrutinize the rest of your portfolio.** Shows that once just eked out enough profit to justify the staff effort may no longer be good use of their time.
- **Never stop looking for expansion opportunities – even if you feel like you already hit the jackpot.** Vertical bolt-ons or spin-offs, a second event at opposite ends of the calendar and country, international expansion, etc.
- **Reinvest some of your new-found profits back into the show.** Hire bigger name speakers or entertainers, add a reception, upgrade your website and expand your marketing effort.
- **Make sure your marketing program conveys the magnitude of your success.** Run spread ads where you once ran singles. Add pages to your printed brochure. Hire a better designer. Make sure the world knows

just how successful the event was and make certain it is reflected in the professionalism of your message and marketing pieces.

- **Leverage your success by forming alliances with industry associations, magazines, etc what may previously not have even returned your calls.** Get the entire market on board while you have the “juice” to do so.
- **Always remember you don’t actually own the show.** You are simply its caretaker for as long as the market allows. When you no longer bring value to the market your stakeholders and customers will play elsewhere. And because it is the industry’s event, open it to all comers: even competitive magazines and associations. Your show cannot truly represent the entire industry unless you let the entire industry participate.

Especially in these harder times, ‘home runs’ like events that Carl has run are harder to find, and their ‘place in the sun’ may be shorter due to competition and other competitive media. All the more reason to know how to ramp up when you have a hit, so keep swinging for the fences!

Warwick Davies is the Principal of The Event Doctor!, a consulting company which helps event organizers realize greater revenues and profits by fixing ‘broken’ events and launch new ones both in United States and internationally . His clients include event organizers in the information technology, healthcare, biotechnology construction and design engineering and executive event 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. For more information on The Event Doctor! and past SISO The Event Doctor! columns please visit <http://www.theeventdoctor.net/resources.html> . He can be reached at Warwick@theeventdoctor.net or at 781 354 0119.