

How to be successful at a small events company part two

Russell Flagg(of Flagg Management) is a gentleman who has seemed to 'shadow' me during my career: by having a sales and marketing show while I was at DCI running the Customer Relationship Management Conference and Exposition, and again when I was running LinuxWorld for IDG. It's been a friendly competition, and I am happy to see Russell still thriving in New York City. While I have been in larger corporate worlds in my career, Russell has always worked in a small company environment, so he is better placed to share with me what makes a small company success.

Here's what he feels are the main elements :

1) Be more focused on results for each event

The difference between smaller companies and larger ones is that smaller ones need more of their events to be successful proportionately than larger companies do. A ten percent profit increase for Macworld, for instance, can cover a whole lot of failed launches, whereas each of Flagg's events is much more essential to the success of Russell's company.

2) Don't run general shows, focus on boutique events

All of Flagg's shows are in niche markets(Linux for financial services, for instance), as opposed to 'catch all' events. I think this mirrors the trend in the events business in general, the secret is to find a niche wide enough to make money.

3) Pare down to essentials

Russell's tradeshow are all pipe and drape, with a focus on the content and networking, rather than the 'frills'. Perhaps this eliminates the accoutrements of an 'experience' event, but many of his brands have continued to thrive over the years, so it's clear that his customers like what Flagg Management is doing.

4) Make easy as possible to get there

Most of Russell's shows are in New York City, for the New York market. Almost all of his hotels are easily accessible in Manhattan, thus making his events easy to find and experience.

5) Work with your sponsors

Flagg Management is very interested in customizing the offerings for sponsors and pay extra attention to how they might give extra value to them, similar to what Lew Shomer said earlier in my last article. In addition they work with sponsors closely to develop new events, including jointly developing content and marketing strategies.

6) Be in front but not too far in front of the market

Russell and his team find experts that know the markets they serve but also know when the right time to start an event in that market is, not too early, not after other events have already appeared.

7) Be concerned about risk

Russell because of the first point above is very conservative in launching new events because of the effect of a failure would have on his business. He therefore focuses on very detailed due diligence before launching and careful monitoring of the financial progress of the event.

8) Be smart about how you use your time

In a smaller company, you have fewer resources and have to wear more hats to be successful. There is no time to burn, so be very goal oriented and measurement centric!

9) Stay out of the way of major competition

Russell, in developing new events and updating existing ones, makes a conscious effort to avoid running events around the dates of larger companies competitive events. He feels that there is enough space in the markets that Flagg inhabit, so he won't needlessly turn the bigger guns on his smaller shows!

A lot of hard work clearly is what is needed, but if you can find and take advantage of market niches (and know when to launch the relevant events) with a large dose of luck, you should have the basis for a successful business. I wish you in joining Russell on the list of successful small events companies.

May I also take the time to wish all of my readers a happy holiday season and a happy and prosperous 2008 and look forward to meeting you at a SISO event soon!

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 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 reached at Warwick@theeventdoctor.net or at 781 354 0119.