

How to harness market input for your event

I don't know anyone who has ever met Sean Guerre, the President of the Tradefair Group(part of Access Intelligence) who doesn't like him. Besides being my mentor for the CEO Summit in April, he has been very helpful to me so far in my SISO career, and a friendly guy to boot. I figured it was time to take advantage of his experience in running events and speak with him for this column.

For me, one of the key resources to have on hand in developing successful conference programs is an active advisory board. Why? From the conception of the event idea(see my past column on this: <http://www.siso.org/updates/060908.html#E>), having organized guidance from the market is key to making sure your offering meets the market need..

If you agree with us on this, the next question is probably how do you go about creating(or revitalizing) an advisory board?

1) Recruit your chair

Make sure the chairperson of your event is a dynamic doer, not a figurehead. Share with him or her your goals for the board, and get his/her support and ideas on creating the board.

2) Create an ideal mix of buyers and sellers

When Sean created the board for an event in the nuclear industry, he decided to have 50% buyers and 50% sellers. Props to him, as figuring how to keep buyers interested to attending board meetings and keeping active is a hard task. Of the vendors he included, he split up the participants evenly among engineering, regulatory and government agencies and associations and press. What interested me in this board is that his board actively represents the 'world' that is the event, and therefore he will be able to encompass relevant input into his event because it's coming right from the market.

3) Make it an exclusive opportunity

As I mentioned above, you need a hook to entice valuable people to the board. Part of the secret to doing this is to pitch it as an exclusive opportunity to represent the market as part of your event. You also need to package various benefits in addition to this(passes to the event, marketing on the website or marketing materials for the members, etc.).

4) Have a strong staff person manage the board

Where I have seen advisory boards become inert is when the event organizer assigns an lower level employee who becomes in effect a note taker. We would advise that you assign a member of staff who is knowledgeable about the market and has the ability to provide direction for the board and resolve differences.

5) Make the vision relative to improving the market, not just the event

When you are working with your chair, you'll want to impress upon him that you are looking to improve communication and commerce for the market, not only to improve the success of the event. Doing this has multiple benefits, including the ease you'll have in recruiting members of the board, and positioning your event as THE key event for the market.

6) Meet and communicate often

When I worked with boards in the past, I liked to meet four times a year, and have additional conference calls as necessary. Since the event happened twice a year, we had meetings at the event and then conducted two other meetings and mutually convenient times and locations.

Ultimately the success of your advisory board will be dependent on how much you put into it and your own vision. The effort put into it is well worth it, as your results will speak for themselves, and you may find yourself with THE market leading event!

Warwick Davies is the Principal of The Event Mechanic! 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 Mechanic! and past SISO The Event Doctor! columns please visit <http://www.theeventmechanic.com/resources.html> He can be reached at Warwick@theeventmechanic.com or at 781 354 0119.