

How to attract user group and association business

Although most of the members of SISO mainly run for-profit events only, there are times when we are looking to bid on getting user group or association events to increase revenues and get access new markets. When I was with DCI in the 1990's we were constantly pitching for developer or user group events so I thought since times are tight for many of us, getting tips on how to increase our revenues might be in order. I recently spoke with Kris Herlitz of the The Herlitz Company, Inc. about what his strategy for getting this type of business.

His recommendations?

- 1) **Offer an 'a la carte' menu of options as part of your offering.** In other words, not all associations or user groups will want the same services. Some will want general management and a 'full' option. Others will want specific help in marketing or sales(attendee and sponsor) support? Some will only want operations help. Carefully decide which functions you are willing to provide, then be prepared to offer them as a "soup to nuts" or as modules.
- 2) **If you are trying to get the business, use referrals.** Like most business, sometimes who you know is as important as what you know. Your current exhibitors and sponsors in your current events are a good start for leads on their own user or developer events(or for help in creating a brand new event). For associations, you may want a staff person to start to look for leads as part of his/her duties in your company.
- 3) **Join associations to get association business, such as the American Society of Association Executives.** If you are interested in a specific market segment, join an association in that area for potential user group leads.
- 4) **Once you have the attention of the decision maker at the sponsor or association, make sure their goals and your capabilities are a match.** Can you offer the services they need? Frequently the needs of the association/user are different than the for-profit organizer. An association's primary motive usually is serving members, and a company hosting a user group usually serving their customers, rather than profits, so a suitable business arrangement can be found in many cases.

Once the parameters of what vendor/association needs and what you have to offer are understood the negotiation begins. Many models exist from a management fee, equity, commission and bonus plans for certain revenue or profit targets. How to structure the deal will be a topic for another article.

In the meantime, happy hunting!

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.