

Tips on being successful with consumer events

Except for running Macworld and helping build the Cosmetic Surgery Expo, most of my experience has been with B2B events. Be able to run and especially market consumer events has always commanded great respect from me, and it was with that respect that I spoke with Patrick Buchan, the CEO of Adjuvant Expos, who runs a number of beauty and health events in the Dallas area.

As we got into the heart of the conversation, Patrick mentioned that the lines between B2B and B2C expos are blurring all the time (like with Macworld) and therefore what works in B2C events could work for B2B events, especially in the marketing realm.

Given this, what does Patrick advise to be successful with a consumer event?

1) Partner with broadcast media

Since Patrick does many events in the same geographic area, he partners with major broadcasters in the area, expanding his marketing reach and go beyond what his event budgets can afford. He piggybacks with his partner tv/radio stations on advertising for his events, since everyone gets a benefit for attendance at the event. In addition to spots on tv and radio, they partner on billboard signs and kiosks in local malls for maximum event exposure.

2) Collect email addresses in unorthodox ways

Since a consumer event is less likely to have as complete customer/prospect data as a B2B event, Patrick mentioned that you must have a way of collecting emails prior to the event from those who have never attended in the past.

His recommendation is to offer a giveaway which is relevant to the show (like a hand cream sample for a beauty event) in order to build up your database, giving you that extra marketing breadth.

3) Take a direct mail approach

Although expensive, make sure past attendees get frequent reminders by mail that your event is coming to save the date. Don't forget to give a value add in the messaging (such as how to apply anti wrinkle cream in the beauty care event example) so your reader pays attention to the mailer when it arrives.

4) Keep the pricing even with the marketplace

When you make attendees pay even a nominal fee, they now have 'skin in the game' which will help your 'show rate' (the percentage of the pre-registered attendees who actually attend). Make sure that for the value of your show is much higher than the amount you charge. If you give free seminars that are content driven, you can afford to charge more than if you are just offering exhibits.

5) Take demographics of your attendees and prospects

When attendees register, make sure you find out basic questions such as:

- how did you hear about us
- will you come back
- income level
- age
- where do you live
- how much do you spend on the products available at the event

If you don't have this kind of information, consider doing some marketing research prior to the event, and hopefully prior to setting up your marketing plan. The information you collect should help you on deciding on the marketing lists to use in promoting your event. If you don't collect this information in the registration process, plan to at least capture elementary information.

6) Note the law of diminishing returns with advertising

With a consumer event, you will need to do some advertising as you have a broader market to cover than you would than with a B2B event. Don't put all your eggs in the advertising basket, as there may be a limited market for your event, and after some saturation coverage of the market, the benefit of the advertising will decrease. Hopefully you've already partnered with the broadcast media(as mentioned above), so your costs here are minimal in any case.

7) Offer space to non-profits for publicity and marketing

Making 'good neighbors' with non-profit organizations in the market space of your event can do wonders for your event's reputation and word of mouth marketing. When I ran LinuxWorld we offered turnkey booths for open source projects at the event(called the .org pavilion). The goodwill and free assistance we got from the 20 or so exhibitors we got from this effort was immeasurable and hugely valuable.

8) Harness the trends of manufacturers going direct to consumers

In many cases, manufacturers of many consumer products are going directly to consumers or supplementing their other channels by doing so. Find out who these players are in your marketplace and give them a chance to extend their marketing through your event.

Patrick has found the tips above have greatly improved the performance of Adjuvant's events, and he enjoyed a number of 'healthy' events because of them. Many of the ideas can also be directly applicable to B2B events, so good luck trying a few of them!

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.