



A Good Promotional Plan: The Key to Your Event's Success

By Jocelyn Murray

Companies are investing a great deal of time and money in events as marketing tools in order to generate news sales leads, launch public relations programs or to maintain their customer base. Whether you're planning a seminar, trade show, meeting or a special event, with proper promotion, you can easily increase attendance and improve your chances of executing a successful business function. The success of your upcoming event greatly depends on the depth and breadth of your marketing program and will have a direct correlation with your event's attendance factor. Consistent communication with your targeted audience is critical. Depending on the type of meeting or event you're planning, a combination of marketing techniques will be necessary to make your promotional plan complete.

Promoting a corporate business function involves more than simply sending a single invitation. By marketing an event well in advance via a combination of mediums, such as direct mail, telemarketing and the web, companies can more effectively communicate their function's unique offerings or highlights, making people eager to attend. "The more vehicles you can use to promote your event, the better off you are," says Denise Correia-Cyr, an event planner who most recently worked for a Fairfield County-based software company, planning user conferences and trade shows.

Your event's direct marketing activities (i.e.: direct mail, email, fax) may very well make up the bulk of your promotional plan because they typically allow you to reach your audience in a relatively inexpensive way. The success of any direct marketing effort relies upon the accuracy of your database of prospect names. It is important to determine exactly who the target audience for your event is and be sure of the correctness and completeness of the list of names that you compile. Joel Dunkel, Group Show Manager for Advanstar Communications Inc. in Milford, works with prominent publications when obtaining names for his conference and expo marketing. "You need to know your target market inside out," says Dunkel. "When purchasing targeted prospect names, I barter lists from industry magazines in exchange for exhibit space or I buy lists from reputable brokers."

Once you're sure that you'll be reaching your targeted audience, you must establish key messages that you want to communicate about your event (i.e.: unique selling proposition, meeting goals or purpose, special highlights, benefits of attending, etc.). This meaningful message must grab the



attention of your prospects by addressing their wants and needs and how your event will satisfy them.

Deciding which communication components (advertising, promotion, public relations) to include in your promotional program should be based on budget and the best ways to market to your event's audience. Depending on the type of function you're planning, along with the profile of your audience, you can narrow down the available choices and build a program that makes sense.

Of all the options available, the Internet has quickly become one of the best ways to communicate information about your meeting or event. Use your public Web site to convey event details such as its date, location and content or even use it to register attendees. "The Internet is the cheapest vehicle to register people in comparison to phone or mail because there's no paperwork to handle," says Dunkel. "Plus all the attendee's registration information can be easily downloaded from the Web directly into a database."

If you have permission from your recipients, periodic e-mail message drops are a sure attention-getter. Use e-mails to complement your direct mail efforts. It's also a more aggressive way to prompt your audience to register for your event. "In our promotional e-mails, we hot link directly to the show's Web site or specifically to the online registration form so there's no confusion for the prospect," says Dunkel.

For a recent software company's annual user conference, Correia-Cyr got the organization's sales force heavily involved in recruiting attendees. By providing them with all the conference facts and incentive to sell, they served as another spoke in her promotional program's wheel. "Getting the sales force involved to do the face to face selling reinforced all the other elements of our marketing program to get our customers to come to the conference," says Correia-Cyr.

By using a combination of tools, companies can create a practical marketing plan for each upcoming event. This plan should have continuity and take into account the most effective ways to get the attention of its audience. Decide what your promotional budget will be, as well as the best ways to market to your particular audience. A solid promotional plan will be the key to effectively communicating to your targeted audience and making your corporate meeting or event a great success.