

Promoting Events

Successful event planning starts long before the event and includes a lot more than getting a good events manager—paid or volunteered—to plan and oversee the actual event. Good event planning must include marketing and promotion, and these efforts must be made weeks or months prior to the event. Even before marketing and promotion, the organization's leadership needs to have a clear idea of the desired outcomes and a good understanding of the resources available to support and promote the event. In fact, all organizations have three resources: money, manpower and time. Understanding these resources and how to mix them to promote an event is the single greatest tool for increasing the number of people who attend.

Money: Let's start with the resource of which everyone is aware: money. Financial resources are foremost in the thoughts of so many people that often it is the only resource they examine when planning. Here are the keys for assessing your financial resources.

Almost all events—outside of recognition events—are designed to generate money. To do that you have to have a clear understanding of what the expenses will be. For instance, when you are determining costs of a facility, the rental fee is often fairly inexpensive. However, in the fine print of the contract, there will often be required personnel for services such as sound and light, security and ushering. There may also be additional equipment costs for lighting and audiovisuals.

It is quite common that such secondary costs are many times more expensive than the stated facility rental fee. Another area where less than obvious costs can be expected is when you are going to have a featured speaker or entertainer. Not only will you have their fee to consider but usually there will be significant travel, housing, food and other related expenses that you will be required to absorb.

Once the anticipated expenses have been determined, income streams must be identified. If the budget is tight, a large contingency fund will need to be set aside as there are always hidden expenses, and there may also be other factors which will reduce or impair your revenue.

Unfortunately, most event planning stops at this point without considering other resources available to support the event. If the organization would only consider its other two resources, limited dollars could be spent much more effectively and the organization could avoid paying more money than needed in the promotion and logistics of the event.

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Manpower: The second resource is manpower. Probably the oldest method for using manpower in promotion is having people put flyers on cars. More recently businesses and organizations have seriously begun to explore other ways of utilizing their manpower in needed promotion. There seems to be an increasing number of businesses that are making good use of employees outside of their buildings with signs or costumes to encourage people to use their services. While this may seem hokey to some, in reality this can be an effective way of using manpower to promote businesses.

Likewise nonprofits can effectively utilize volunteers as a manpower resource. For example, think of all the girls involved in selling and distributing cookies to support the Girl Scouts—not to mention the volunteer leaders who oversee this huge undertaking each year! The Girl Scouts' abundance of volunteers negates the need for large investments of money to make money. Good training is key to volunteers' being effective resources.



DIFFERENCE
MARKETING

Time: The third and most commonly over-looked resource in promotion is time. The number of stories I have heard about what people have been able to have donated or acquired at very low prices for promotional efforts is phenomenal—all because people planned far in advance. This is especially true for advertising. You can get great discounts from sales reps when they do not have any revenue projected for the time your event requires. When the sales reps do not have any revenue projected for the time you need it, it becomes a win-win situation for your organization and the advertiser. You get the discount and the advertiser can tell their other clients that space for the month in question is already filling up. Time can also help in reducing expensive event items by providing time to seek cost-effective alternatives and, thus, allowing the savings to be used for the promotion of the event. You can do much more with a year of time and \$100,000 than you can with 40 days and \$200,000.

A great exercise for those who do not understand the importance of time in planning their events, is to have them outline how they would promote an event under three different circumstances: first, to promote an event with lots of money but little time and personnel; second, to promote it with a large staff but limited money and time; and, third, to have limited manpower and money but two years of preparation time. Some of the most creative ideas come from the third group!

In summary: does a large budget make some aspects of event staging and promotion easier? Absolutely! However, do not overlook your other two resources. If you take time to identify what you have available in all three resources—money, manpower and time—and mix them properly, you can increase the attendance at your event while saving a significant amount of money. Call us at Nehemiah Communications and we can do it for you.