

Have Event, Need Publicity

By Kimberly Schmitz

The most frequently asked question left on my machine and in my inbox is "How do I get publicity for my event?" This is always a fun question because I answer it with more questions. Once the inquisition is through, I'll usually have some sound advice and new ideas that organizers may not have considered.

First things first. As elementary as it sounds, before you start publicizing your event, you've must have your basics in place. Think of it as answering those familiar old questions: Who, what, where, when, and why. What is the event (it should have a nice catchy name)? Who do you want to come to your event? When and where is it? And finally, why will people want to attend? Once you've got these answered, you're all set to start planning. Yes, planning.



Budget for communication. It's important that you not only budget money for certain communication tactics, but you must budget time. Plan backwards from your event date and schedule dates for timely communication releases. I'm still a big fan of the save the date, invite, e-vite strategy. E-mail invitations have become an increasingly popular way to communicate and draw attendees to events but, if you've got the budget for it, invitations sent through the mail are still an extremely effective tool.

Place an advertisement in local publications. If you've got the resources to place advertisements in larger local and regional publications, go for it. If your budget is a little more restrictive, seek out more cost-effective alternatives. Contact publishers of newsletters, community publications, and websites that your audience reads.

Get out into the community. Offer to speak at community group functions about your organization and event. Don't hesitate to plug an event when introducing yourself at community meetings that you attend. Don't leave home without a few invitations in your pocket. You never know when you'll meet someone interested in attending or promoting your event!

Contact the media. Send an invitation to some of your contacts. This is a great way to get initial attention. Of course, a press release is always a great way to do the same thing. When presenting information to the media, include an interesting angle. Mention charitable organizations benefiting from the event or include a unique personal story attached to an attendee or presenter. We all love to hear the story of the school groups that rallied to raise money to send a representative to a national meeting. These stories are out there. It's up to you to find them and make sure the media is aware of them.

Be available to answer questions. If the media can't find you, they can't tell your story. The availability of a knowledgeable contact is as essential as the initial communication and the audience. Be sure to include an after-hours contact number in your communications. Have statistics related to your group or cause ready to go when the phone starts ringing. Good journalists and an interested public will always want the deeper story. Ensure they have access to it. If you are not the subject matter expert, you make sure one is available for comment, appearances, or interviews before or even at the event.

In essence, the answer to the question I so often receive is communicate, communicate, communicate. It's a tragedy to see good events lack in attendance because the word didn't get out. Finalize your details, invite your public, advertise if possible, drum up a good catchy story and get the word out there!

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