

A tale of two organizations and five best practices

To paraphrase the opening line of *A Tale of Two Cities*, it was the best of practices and the worst of practices. Let me explain.

In the past few weeks, I've attended two remarkably similar events put on by two different organizations. Both organizations are membership-based, advocacy/non-profits, and are local affiliates of a national organization. One organization clearly followed best practices, while the other appeared to have no idea how to make the most of a successful event.

Organization A

Event description: Luncheon featuring a *Washington Post* reporter discussing the challenges of covering the Trump Administration. Cost was \$35.

Sign up: On the organization's website, taken to an outside website (PayPal) for payment. Receipt sent from PayPal but no acknowledgment from organization. No information or email list sign up captured.

Reminder for the event: None.

Follow up after the event: None.

Organization B

Event: Cocktail reception followed by panel discussion, featuring three White House correspondents, about the challenges of covering the Trump Administration. Cost was \$36.

Sign up: Through Eventbrite, which allows for email capture, branding, and payment on one page. (There are other benefits

to using Eventbrite, including ability to sign in people, print labels, be listed on an events page, and others.) Tickets with event information sent from Eventbrite.

Reminder: Eventbrite sends a reminder two days ahead of the event.

Follow up: Personalized thank you email from the organization's development director, including a program survey, and encouraging involvement in the organization and attendance at future events.

Five best practices

1. Have a hook

Kudos to both these organizations for their choice of speakers. Both events were very informative, lively and interesting. **Hosting an interesting, topical event is a big draw for members and is attractive to non-members.**

2. Use the right online tools

There are lots of online tools available to organizations, at all different prices, for various functions (event management, surveys, time management). They offer functionality such as being able to generate reports, charge credit cards, build email lists, communicate with attendees, and so forth. **Using the right online tool will let you increase your organization's efficiency through automation and increased functionality.**

3. Build your email list

If you are a membership or donor-based organization it becomes extremely important to build and expand your email list. Having an event is a great way to attract new people, so it makes sense to get their email address so you can keep in touch. **Automatically adding people that have signed up for an**

event to your email list is easy and smart.

4. Follow up after the event

Presumably, by hosting an event, you have a goal for it. This goal could be to increase awareness, or increase your membership, or attract donations, etc. **Following up after the event, reminding people of what you do and how they can be involved will go a long way to achieving your goal.**

5. Survey your audience

If you want to continue to have successful programs, you'll need to know what attendees liked and didn't like. **Asking attendees to rate your program and give suggestions is a great way to improve your future events.**

It really was the best of times and the worst of times

Organization B was much more sophisticated and tech-savvy than Organization A. It used online tools to make things easier, and it seemed to be clearer on the outcomes it wanted. Even though both organizations advocate, only Organization B had the foresight to build their email list to make advocacy happen.

Organization A, in effect, has put the onus on me if I want to be more involved in the future. If I want to see what programs are coming up, I will have to visit their website. Organization B is making my involvement and support easier. Since I will be getting B's emails about advocacy and events, I will be able to involved if I choose, without having to take an extra step to do it.