

Events can be great marketing, or not

A couple of months ago, I found out that Kramerbooks, an independent bookstore in Washington, had started doing book events. After checking their events website, I saw an author I wanted to see (Derek Thompson, author of Hitmakers). I went to the Thompson event, which took place in Kramerbook's new and pretty tight "event" space, with enough seating for about 20 or so, and standing space for about 20 or so more. I thought Thompson was very interesting, and I actually went home and got his book from the library (and I will be sharing thoughts on it in a future blog post).

Based on my positive experience, I kept tabs on the Kramerbook's online event calendar. Soon, there was another event I wanted to attend. It was three journalists who cover the White House (and being a politics and news junkie, this was totally up my alley). So I put it in my calendar. In the back of my mind I thought this would be a very crowded event, this being DC and the space being so small. Well, I took the Metro from Rockville, and got there around 5:20. Even though the event wasn't scheduled to start until 6:30p.m., there was a line around the block. It was very hot, and based on the space constraints, I knew I wouldn't get in, so I decided not to stand in line for an hour in the sun and heat.

It costs \$6 to ride Metro from where I live to Dupont Circle, where Kramerbooks is. I basically wasted \$12 and well over an hour. I was not happy.

The next day, I noticed that Kramerbooks had tweeted about a livestream. I tweeted back that had I known I would have skipped going down there. I got back a reply that they tweeted it, and put it on Facebook and Instagram, and they were sorry (more like sorry, not sorry) that I hadn't seen it. I asked

why they hadn't included this information on their event page. And I got no response back.

Based on this experience, I may never attend try to attend an event at Kramerbooks again. Transportation is just too costly and time-consuming, and getting a seat is too much of a crapshoot. I also didn't care for their social media response. A much better response to empathize and then to send me a link to the recording of the event.

Events can be great marketing tools. In this case, Kramer's gets people in the door, and hopefully, checking out their book selection or eating at their restaurant. Events can also generate publicity. But when done poorly, events can have a negative effect.

There's another independent bookstore in Washington, Politics and Prose, which has been holding author events for years. They have an event nearly every single day, mostly free and in their bookstore (which has way more space than Kramerbooks). When they have a big author or an event likely to draw large crowds, they sell tickets and hold the events at Sixth and I (a synagogue and event space in D.C.), which can seat hundreds. This tactic has made Politics and Prose a leader in author and literary events, and probably also has generated considerable book sales.

The difference between these two bookstores and their event marketing strategies is stark. One has the experience to understand that some talks require larger spaces, and have partnered with another organization to address the need while also generating ticket and book sales. The other is still learning what to do with their space.

Have you ever attended an event that ended up being terrible? What made it so and what were the consequences for you? Let me know in the comments.

