How to be better at event marketing

Some event marketers are killing it. I have been impressed with Boston University Alumni Association's efforts. They are doing everything right: well-timed, well-designed event invitations, pre-event reminders, and always a post-event thank you email.

Not everyone is doing so well. Some event marketing, especially by small nonprofits, seems haphazard, with little planning and even smaller attention paid to details. And really, better event marketing pays attention to the details, the logistics, and the user experience.

First, plan good events

Marketing an event successfully starts with the event itself. Is it interesting or relevant to your audience? Is the date good, with few conflicts?

Photo by Karolina Grawbowska on Kaboompics.com

Entice and inform your audience

Once you have chosen the event, the date and the venue you are ready to market it to your audience. You will have to develop a description of the event that entices but also informs. Why would your audience want to come to this event? Who is speaking? Why are you hosting the event? What makes this event special or important? And you must provide all the important logistical information, such as: date, time, venue name and address, cost (including if free to attend), and ways to sign up.

Time the invitation properly

Think about how much time your audience needs to make a decision. If it is an event that requires travel and hotel reservations (e.g., annual conference, wedding), you will need to send it with a few months lead time. If the event is local, then you can market closer to the event time. However, don't

send out an invitation too far in advance because it will be forgotten, but don't do it too close to the event because your audience may already have made other commitments.

What to include in the actual invitation

Emails must have text and a link to sign up. *Do not* ever have an image/graphic-only email, since some email programs do not automatically open images and require them to be downloaded.

Again, make sure to include all the details your audience needs to decide whether to attend or not (look at the list above).

Signing up should be easy

You should have an easy way to sign up—do not make me jump through hoops such as making me scroll through multiple screens, and having to create accounts and passwords. You are not selling tickets for an international flight. Think about what information you absolutely need (e.g., name, contact info such as address and email, credit card information), and start with that. Other information (e.g., phone number, demographics, etc.) that might be good to have should be weighed carefully. Asking for too much information can be a huge turn-off.

Always acknowledge sign-ups

This should go without saying, but once people sign up for your event, they should get an email confirmation.

Calendar links!

Be sure that the software you are using has a universal calendar link both in the sign up screen and in the acknowledgment/confirmation email. Attendees should be able to download the event info to any major calendar (i.e., Apple, Outlook, Google).

Friendly reminders are welcome

Always send a reminder at least one day ahead. Include all important logistical information (i.e., start time, address, directions, public transportation/parking information, and any requirements (e.g., picture ID, cash on hand, laptop, etc.).

After the fact

Always send something after the event—it can be a simple "thank you for attending," or a survey/request for feedback, or sharing of information relevant to the event (e.g., contact information for speakers, handouts, bibliographies, etc.)

Would be nice if…

The software you use would be smart enough not to send event invites to people who have already registered. When I get another invitation to an event I have signed up for, I always think that I forgot to register or that my payment didn't go through.

Bottom line

Make your event marketing better: Always think about your audience and what they need in order to make a decision and attend your event.

Please mind the details

If you've been to London and ridden the Underground, you are familiar with the phrase "please mind the gap." It's a repeated warning for people to watch their step getting on and

off the trains as there is a space between the train and the platform. It is posted everywhere inside the stations because people need to be reminded and London's transportation authority certainly doesn't want accidents.

Mind the Gap by nikoretro
on Flickr

I wish we had a similar reminder for communications managers, especially those who deal with event publicity and marketing. Instead of "mind the gap" it would say "mind the details." Because it's all about the details: the where, when, how, who, why and how much.

Common mistakes, which I have seen just these past few days:

Sending an email blast announcing an event and neglecting to include the date and time (or location).

Announcing an event and getting the dates mixed up (saying it is Tuesday, February 12 instead of Wednesday, February 12).

Website page about an event including a "more information" button for an event, but not providing any information about what the cost will be.

Details matter and they matter more when you are doing any type of event planning. Please mind the details. Double check them. Have somebody else check them. Don't assume that people

will figure things out.

Finally, realize that if you don't provide the proper details or you provide the wrong details you are making it very hard for people to attend your event.