

7 actions that will give your event more mileage

Having attended a couple of professional development events in the last few weeks, I noticed that the organizers did little to guarantee people would a) enjoy the event and b) talk about the event (and by extension, the organizing group).

Event planning is a skill, and it is not easy. Too many volunteers and committee members think all they need to do is choose a date, book the space, order food and drink, and publicize the event. But those are the basics. To get more mileage from an event both for the attendees and for the presenting organization, you need to do more.

Here are seven actions that will help you get more mileage from your next event.

1. Designate volunteers to be organizational ambassadors/greeters. You will need more than the person greeting attendees at the door. These volunteers, who should be good representatives of your organization, will welcome people to the event and make sure they know where everything is located (food, restrooms, seats, etc.). But more so, ambassadors should introduce attendees to each other.

Why this gives you more mileage: Your attendees will feel welcomed. They will meet at least one person (the ambassador). This makes your organization look welcoming and more enticing to non-members.

2. Prep your speaker(s) and/or presenter(s). Make sure everybody knows what to say so there is no pointless repetition. Divide up introductions appropriately. Make sure announcements and other information will be shared.

Why this gives you more mileage: Messaging is important and

gives attendees useful information. By prepping your speakers, you are ensuring your organization looks professional.

3. Use social media. Invite your attendees to tweet about the event (and give them a hashtag) or post summaries to their blogs and other social media.

Why this gives you more mileage: Social media amplifies. Enough said.

4. Have someone monitor social media during and after the event. Make sure to respond to any questions or comments (especially if there is a problem—maybe the AC is not working or the Wi-Fi is spotty). Retweet and publicize your attendees posts.

Why this gives you more mileage: Again, it amplifies, but it also shows your organization is responsive and embraces social media.

5. Be sure to incorporate time for Q&A, and make it organized. Q&A shouldn't be an afterthought, and it shouldn't be a free for all. Organizers should make sure to designate a time for questions. Whether you decide to have a microphone for the audience or take questions via social media, you should make it easy for people to interact with your presenters.

Why this gives you more mileage: Your audience will get more clarity on issues and, again, it makes your organization look responsive.

6. Create a recap of the event and post it to your blog/website and your social media networks. The recap of the event could include a summary of the presentation, contact information for the presenters, and photos of the event (and if you post photos on Facebook, people could tag themselves).

Why this gives you more mileage: Your recap is now shareable content for your website, blog and/or newsletter. Attendees

will have something to reference if they want to talk about the event.

7. Email all attendees a thank you and evaluation survey shortly after the event. You may also include a link to your recap (see above).

Why this gives you more mileage: You will have yet another opportunity to interact with your attendees while getting useful feedback. You could even have an offer for new members or discounts to future events.

What would you add? What has been your experience when attending professional development events?

Invest in event planning not just event marketing

Many organizations, especially nonprofits and associations, focus on having one annual event that is meant to be a fundraiser or a idea-raiser. Events are a great way to publicize an organization, get people together, and provide value to attendees. Except when the events don't go well. And that is a big exception.

Unfortunately, many events have better publicity than planning, and that is guaranteed to backfire. What I mean is that event organizers spend inordinate amounts of time and money to make sure that people know and attend a conference, and spend much less time and money on the logistics of the event.

This past Saturday, I attended a "women's conference." It had

a very nice website, and was going to deal with some intriguing subject matter (women and politics, women in developing countries, etc.) I believed the hype and bought my ticket (also, I had a very nice discount from a friend involved with the group).

First indication of a problem was the disparity of information between the ticket and the website. One said the program started at 8:30, the other that registration started then, and the program at 9:45. Neither was right.

Lesson: Make sure the details are correct, and that everyone has the same information.

The people who were involved with greeting and registering were doing neither when I arrived at 8:50. Badges were still being put out. No one handed me a program. It was disorganized.

The program did not start until 10:15. From there, everything ran late. No one thought to tell people where the breakout sessions would be, and one was on a different floor (the session I was signed up for).

Lesson: Timing matters.

The “panelists” for the session I attended were sitting and chatting amongst themselves for 25 minutes, ignoring the fact that 40 people were sitting and waiting for them to start.

Lesson: Explain expectations to presenters.

And then there was the issue of lunch. It was supposed to be “grab and go.” I am vegetarian and guess what, there was not a single vegetarian option to be found.

Lesson: If you are going to offer food (and there is no other food available on site) then you have to consider dietary restrictions.

The bottom line is that the event organizers did not pay attention to the organization aspect of running an event. While I am sure that some people got some value from this particular event, these lapses in logistics wasted my time (and my money).

Event planners pay attention to every last detail from food choice and availability to coat checks to bathroom locations. Event marketers, on the other hand, are focused on getting registrations. Both are EQUALLY important. **If you sacrifice planning for publicity, you will have a disorganized event. If you sacrifice publicity for planning, you will have a poorly attended event.** Either scenario will create PR headaches for you later on.

In my case, I will probably never attend this particular women's conference again. My perception of the event and its organizers is that they were more focused on the bottom line than on making sure everything went smoothly for the attendees.

If you are organizing an event, be sure you spend as much time planning it as you do publicizing it. And PS, event planning is a skill. Get qualified/experienced people to help plan your event. It does pay off.

Are you hosting an event?

When you host an event, you want people to attend, right? If you don't think so, just ignore this post.

So, how do you get people to attend your event? It may seem self evident, but many organizations do not follow these promotional tips:

0) Before you start, be sure to have all the following info for inclusion: title and purpose of event, date of event, hours of event, exact location and directions to event, cost, contact information, whether you need to RSVP or not (and who the RSVP contact is). You would be surprised at how many invitations miss some of this critical data.

1) Invite people. Be sure to send out an invitation to all members, interested parties, people who have attended your events in the past, etc.

2) Post the event on your website or blog or both. Ask a third party to check and see if you have included all necessary information.

3) Send a calendar item listing to your local newspaper, event aggregator, tv station.

4) Include in your newsletter. If it is an annual event, add to your signature line on email and include on all communications, internal and external.

5) Remind people. There are many events competing for people's attendance, so be sure to send reminders. This is where social media like Twitter could be useful.

6) Create an event page on Facebook or other social media sites.

7) To be really efficient, you may want to use an electronic event management database to help you to keep track of attendees, send out invites and take RSVPs. Two that come to mind are Cvent and EventBrite.

A note about timing: You want to give people enough time to plan to attend, but not too much time so that they may forget

about the event. Perhaps you can invite three to four weeks in advance, and remind people two weeks and one week before the event.

Again, the most important thing about publicizing an event is to provide all the information somebody would need to attend the event. Don't take this for granted. I can't tell you how many events I have seen listed that lack basic info such as DATE!

If I have overlooked anything, please remind me in the comments!

