

**..... and thanks for coming.....**

## ***20 ways to improve Attendance at Your Events***



**The benefits of attending events are numerous, and can pay dividends in terms of investment to the visitor and delegate. However, all organisers suffer from the “drop-out” effect; potential visitors who register or commit to an event, yet fail to show.**

There are many reasons why this happens; however, it can be a costly and embarrassing episode for the organisers, whether professional event company or

commercial or charitable organisation. Aside from the visual impact of a half empty room, and a programme where staff can outnumber visitors, there is the wasted effort – as well as the finances – involved in creating events for people who don't get to see them.

Drop-out rates can vary from 5-99% of the expected audience; UK trade exhibitions have an average no-show figure of 45%. A variety of factors can affect attendance outside the organiser's control; bad weather or transport difficulties can play havoc with a conference or seminar.

Maximising attendance – whilst maintaining audience quality – must be an essential part of any organiser's marketing plan. And it should be done strategically; whilst there are a variety of activities which can be undertaken that quickly consume the promotional budget, thinking smarter can make the budget go much further. Constant analysis is also always essential; you need to know which techniques are the ones which bring in the responses, and concentrate your efforts here; the old adage “if you can't measure it, you can't manage it” has never been truer.

In this paper we've identified some of the ideas that we've seen used with such a devastatingly powerful effect, and we're delighted to share them with you. Not all of them will work in every situation, but we would encourage you to consider them all and see if – with some tweaking – you can find some way to apply the ideas to you organisation.

**We wish you every success – and packed-out events!**

## Direct Marketing

1. The average executive receives between 12-20 pieces of direct mail each day, and much of the initial sorting is done with a glance at the envelope. Choose the wrapping with care; letters with stamps, unusually-shaped letters, hand-written envelopes are all designed to get more impact.
2. A message on the outside of the envelope can also add an impact. Techniques include stating "Here is the information you requested" (it helps if this is true!). Or, try "this is NOT a circular", a technique used successfully by utility companies. Anything which will get them to open the envelope is vital; why not try a "your free report is included in this envelope" approach.
3. There is also a wealth of direct marketing techniques which your supplier can demonstrate. Multi-coloured mailings; items from envelope A which only become visible when you place them into envelope B; sticky labels with options; the choice is endless. However, one worthwhile technique is to spend time looking at direct marketing material which passes your desk, and see what it is which grabs your attention. But do remember that mailings do not to be kept fresh and up to date – make sure you look for new techniques.
4. We can learn (steal?) techniques from other sources; for example, many charities have discovered that including a cheap pen greatly increases envelope-opening responses; add on the event details and a web address, and you may be on the way to something!
5. For busy executives, try providing them with as many choices as possible. For example, allow them to tick boxes, rather than handwrite details. Even if you do get a "no thanks, I don't want to know" response, at least you can save money by deleting them from your database.
6. Make sure each mailing encourages distribution to other members of the target organization. Research has proven that this technique can increase response by 10-20%. A simple pre-printed checklist can help, e.g. "please pass to Sales Director, Managing Director, Marketing Director" can work wonders; people will often follow simple instructions.
7. Create deadlines, to ensure your mechanism doesn't languish on desks. Offer 10% off, 2 for 1, "early bird discount"; whatever it takes to gain that critical momentum. Create a competition where people enter just by returning a coupon. If nothing else, it will ensure that your database is kept fresh.
8. Don't forget the "add on" box. Charities use this to great effect; as you rummage in your pocket for loose change, they ask you to select your donation; these start at £10 and go up to £250, and encourages generous givers to opt for higher figures. You can also ask for people to make other selections:

- Please sign me up as a VIP visitor
- Please contact me by e-mail; my address is \_\_\_\_\_
- Please add the following e-mails to your database \_\_\_\_\_

9. There is a wealth of techniques used to improve the impact of letters. Firstly, don't be frightened to use someone's name on a number of occasions, not just in the first line. It's an effect used by such luminaries as "Readers Digest" - although we recommend the type face should match throughout!

10. The use of a P.S. is one used often; the principle is that the reader wants to know who sent the letter and therefore scans the bottom of the paper, where another sales message is waiting.

11. Testimonials are one of the most powerful methods of generating interest. What's more, many people are delighted to provide them; if delegates say nice things about your company, their details might then be sent to thousands of potential clients

12. Other techniques include using an apparently handwritten post-it note. This has been used by diet companies who used the technique effectively.

13. Customer loyalty is the lifeblood of any industry. Those who attended previous events are hot prospects to come back. Remind them how much you value them, not just with special offers, but with something which clearly identifies this group as "favoured guest". It works for industries as diverse as airlines and supermarkets and it can work for you. In a similar way, it can help to categorize and update your database. For example, one holiday company saved a fortune by mailing a postcard to its database, asking them if they would like to receive that years Italia villa brochure, and also advising them of the availability of a French and Caribbean edition. The response was terrific; many chose to inform the company of new contact details, and were happy to provide additional information – such a „phone or e-mail details – and request information on the new products. Now, how could you use this technique with your events?

14. You may also like to think about items such as chequebooks, and membership cards which need to be activated in some way. This then allows you to build an ongoing relationship with your clients – and makes them feel special.

15. Make it easy for people to contact you; freephone numbers are most effective. Whatever number you quote – make sure that there is someone there to answer the call!

16. You may also want to think about a permanent reminder for your prospects. Ideas here have included wall planners, calendars and even stickers to go in the diary.

## **E-Additives**

Love 'em or loathe 'em, there's no escaping the computer lurking on most Executive's desks (and now in the briefcase – or even embedded in their mobile phones).

17. Firstly, make sure you have as much information as you can; the secret is to ask for it, and explain why (for example, on your forms, you may want to explain; "on the day, a host of additional benefits – including free refreshment information – can be sent to suitable „phones – put your number here if you'd like to take advantage of this scheme". The secret is to maximize the "opt out" option (i.e. "tick here if you don't want to receive specially sourced information") although legislation is moving towards the "opt in" (i.e. "tick here only if you want to receive relevant information". Going the latter route will have a negative impact on your databases

18. Take a moment to consider how many external e-mails your organization sends out, and the wealth of extraneous information that most carry as a legal requirement as a suffix. For example, a 100-person organization sending out 10 e-mails each per day is an opportunity to reach 20 000 additional contacts every month by including a standard "advert" on the e- mail "blurb".

19. Now be proactive; whenever people log on to you website, make sure they get a reminder about your event. And make the web site interesting enough that they want to – or have to – bookmark the page, or give you an address so that you can contact them when you have some new news to share!

20. As an organizer, remember you are the event expert. To help your clients make the most of their participation at this event, why not give them guidance; if they are coming to a new City, provide them with "21 unmissable sites" and some free vouchers; most Destination Bureau are more than happy to help.

*With thanks to Richard John*

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[contact@rjagb.com](mailto:contact@rjagb.com)