

The Top 5 Things Organizers Get Wrong At Check-In

by Cassie Steele

I had the privilege of being part of a check-in process for a local event this past weekend. It was successful, but I also realized that there was room for improvement. In fact, a lot of organizers have an inefficient check-in process. The problems associated with a poor check-in experience can escalate into unhappy attendees. Unhappy attendees might not enjoy the event, or they will go into it with a bad attitude and cause additional issues. It all stems from the first impression. If you give a bad first impression, you can also see a decrease in sales year over year from people who were fed up with the poor organization on your part. Don't be that organizer! Anyway, I assembled the top 5 things I have noticed from events that have a poor organization on their check-in.

No Signage (Or Poor Signage)

Attendees can't read your mind, they're not sure what line to get in - if there even is one! I have found that when events don't tell attendees exactly where to go, they sometimes get their own ideas. They might even skip right past check-in to go into the event, without having gotten their wristband or ticket. Then, security sends them back, and they are frustrated because they didn't know. And yes, I know you're thinking, "it should be obvious with everyone else in line checking in, not my fault!". You're right, they made the mistake, not you. But ultimately the attendee's experience is derived from what you have designed, and so it ends up being your problem.

If your event is 21 and over, you can save a ton of time on check-in by having signs above each check-in station saying to have IDs out and ready. You can save anywhere from 5 to 10 seconds a person if they have all necessary items ready. It might not sound like a lot, but if you have 100 people waiting in line, that's about 8 minutes (500 seconds) saved.

Paper Check In

Let's say that you have 500 attendees coming to your event. Generally speaking, you can expect about 50% of those people will show up within +/- 15 minutes of the event beginning. With all of the noise and action going on, you will not be able to adequately get everyone moving through the queue in a timely fashion. This leads to angry guests going into the event. That is not a good first impression at all, and you might find that you do not get as many return attendees next year. The scanning technology from most ticket vendors these days is super fast - it takes a second or 2, at most. Instead of having to manually go through pages and pages to check off attendees, save time (and sanity) by going paperless.

Not Enough Lines Or Staff Present

Going back to my example above, you have 500 attendees who have bought tickets to your event. Personally, I believe that you should have 2 check-in booths to start if you have more than 100 people coming to your event. Then, for every 400 after, consider adding an additional booth. You should aim to have people going from the back of the line to the front in about 10 minutes. This is especially important if you are running an outside event and there is going to be very hot or cold weather.

One thing I learned is that there should be one senior staff member at check-in who stays behind the lines to take care of any important needs, performers, or other volunteer personnel. They should be mobile and be able to handle problems as they happen.

Poorly Trained Volunteers

Even if you have enough volunteers, it might not be enough. Volunteers are not a fire-and-forget solution. You need to properly train them in how to resolve attendee disputes. If you have scanners and point of sale solutions, you need to train them on how to use them. They must also be told how to fix any problems with the technology that you are using.

Just as importantly, they must be a good fit for your event and with your organization's culture. You cannot afford to have a volunteer at check-in talking back to a customer. They must be able to turn problems into solutions. This might sound like a lot of work for just a volunteer who will never be back, but you cannot just be thinking about the short term. These volunteers could go on to work with you long term if they prove to be a strong fit for your event team. Always think long term, and it will always benefit you. That much, I can guarantee.

Lack of Communication With Guests

Are VIPs supposed to show up early? Are there certain areas that attendees with general admission tickets cannot enter? Fail to properly educate your attendees, and it will come back to haunt you, guaranteed. As the event organizer, you have to realize that any bad experience an attendee has will reflect on you and your event. It does not matter if the bad experience was not your fault in any way, it will still be marked on that attendee's brain that "X bad thing happened at that event!". You must work hard to make it a seamless experience for all of your guests.

In conclusion, there is a lot that can go wrong at check-in. As you might have discovered, a lot of it comes down to organization and communication. You need to communicate with guests about checking in, about what time they should check in, the way they should check in, and you need to make sure you have enough well-trained staff.