BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

DIGITAL TACTICS FOR SUCCESSFUL EVENT MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING



B2B Marketing

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Introduction

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Whatever you feel about events as a marketing tool, they're not going anywhere any time soon. In-person events remain one of the most widely used marketing tactics in B2B, and are in fact one of the most effective.

As a delegate, there's nothing worse than a dull or badly organised event. The feeling of trying to stay awake during a yawn-inducing presentation, coupled with the knowledge that you're taking valuable time out of the office to be there, do not make for a happy mix.

On the other hand, well-run, exciting events can be highly effective in engaging your existing customers, building relationships with key prospects and increasing brand awareness and authority. And there is one key way you can achieve this; digital.

Using digital to enhance your events can, admittedly, be pricey/costly. But there are also a number of simple, cost-effective ways you can use digital to enhance the event experience, before, during and after the big day.

This guide provides a plethora of ideas for using digital to transform your events, whether you're looking to do more to entice attendees, provide a seamless experience on the day or accurately measure ROI afterwards. You should come away with some fresh ideas for using digital to improve the event experience for attendees, increase future sponsorship opportunities and demonstrate that all-important ROI.



I. Before

Megan Collins

Head of marketing
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If your event needs public promotion to encourage guests to register, sign up and attend, there is a multitude of channels you can deploy, both free and paid for, which will help.

Maximise your reach with search engine optimisation (SEO)

The vast majority of people begin their search on Google, so it's the best place to start. If you have no budget to promote your event, but do have a website you can put to use, the sooner you start an SEO strategy the better. Make sure you have a dedicated landing page for the event, including as much information as possible. Think about the keywords potential attendees may use to find your event and ensure these are covered in the back-end. Ensure you put your title tag and meta description on the page and check your URL includes keywords. For more detailed advice on SEO, you can download this best practice guide.

After completing your on-page SEO, you can continue to improve your Google ranking by driving promotion via social media and publishing other content relevant to the event, and linking back to the landing page (but make sure you keep it up-to-date). SEO can be a slow process, so if you do need to get traction more quickly, it's worth investing in pay-per-click (PPC) advertising.

Accelerate your reach with pay-per-click (PPC)

PPC will help drive traffic to your site when you're not able to get immediate results with SEO. PPC ads show up at the top of Google search for keywords that you bid on. Google AdWords is probably the easiest place to start: set up your AdWords account, choose your keywords, write your ad copy and set up the links. You then bid on keywords each day. If you don't know the specific keywords you need, you can put a phrase on 'broad match'. This means if you input 'marketing conference London', your page could appear at the top of search results if any of those individual words are searched. It's generally more expensive to 'broad match' so if you bid on 'exact match' phrases or words it will bring the cost down.

It's also worth forming partnerships with other relevant sites visited by your audience. Approach these sites and request to put up a banner ad. For most this will be at a cost, but some may be willing to enter into a partnership if there is a mutual benefit. You can also advertise on relevant sites through PPC on the Google display network. Again, this is run through AdWords and will place your ads in relevant places.

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The invitation

Invitations once used to be a printer's nightmare. Physical invitations have to be designed and printed days – if not weeks or months – prior to the event, causing a logistical nightmare if the information changes. Now it's acceptable to provide digital information, with 73 per cent of guests preferring it to a physical invite (Paragon Survey 2015) as they are less likely to lose it. Some systems also incorporate an RSVP and dietary requirements system which are incredibly useful in collating information – take a look at Paperless Post or Eventbrite for examples of these.

Another option is to invite your guests through video. If you have any 'celebrity' attendees, ask them to record a short video that you can then edit and merge together to send out. This has that wow factor and builds excitement prior to the event.

Remember, this is also the key time to start introducing your social media accounts.

Social media

Don't underestimate the power of social media, whether you're looking to reach existing customers or prospects. It's extremely important to make sure you use social media to present your audience with information about the event, as well as related topics that will engage them. It's no secret that posts with images receive higher engagement, but ensure your links are tracked to measure the effectiveness of your posts. Bitly and goal tracking in Google Analytics will allow you to do this.

Encourage guests to tweet or post about the event prior to the big day. Give them reasons to do this: it can be as easy as 'Post a selfie with your invite to let others know you will be joining us with the hashtag #event123', providing a competition or just making the social media sites a fantastic source of information. For example, 'Follow us on Twitter for up-to-date travel news on the day and the latest speaker information'. However you introduce it, give people a reason to take a look, interact and follow you prior to the event.

Apps

The invitation is also the best opportunity to encourage attendees to download an event app. An app can be a big investment, with costs ranging from £2000 to £15,000 for individual apps, so you'll have to make sure it's worth the cost. Having said this, they can really drive engagement, efficiency and measurement, and you can build it into a sponsorship package or ticket cost to ensure it's paid for. Make sure the sign-up is as simple as possible, and think carefully about how the delegate will use the app, so that downloading it is worth their while. For example, does it give them a chance to pre-register for seminars, update their contact information for suppliers, register for drinks receptions and provide dietary requirements?

II. During

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The big day has arrived, so how can you integrate digital during your event to both wow guests and measure its success in order to potentially entice a sponsor or attract more guests the following year? If you are going to take on digital at your event, **the first challenge is your internet and wifi signal** – if this cannot be guaranteed, look into purchasing event-scale internet dongles that provide 4G internet for a fraction of the cost.

Here are a few options for integrating digital during the day:

- Digital registration
- Screens presenting information
- Digital surveys
- Social media
- Digital streaming
- Virtual reality.

Registration

One of the best ways to engage delegates as soon as they arrive is using a fun and interactive way to register them on arrival. For example, consider using systems through which delegates' profiles can be brought up on a screen when they scan their e-ticket, and enable them to check information, choose a 'preferred name' and even take a selfie which is then printed on their badge. Although this may sound gimmicky, it actually provides an interactive and fun start to the day. It's also a great conversation starter, and it's a good moment to encourage people to use the event hashtag and raise further awareness of the app.

Self-service digital registration is incredibly easy to configure and will improve your check-in time and efficiency tenfold, reducing unwanted queues at the start of the day. Other options could be check-in photo booths or giant iTab screens offering a game on arrival.

Surveys

Digital surveys are a fantastic way to not only measure the success of your event at a time when delegates are most engaged, but also a wonderful way to generate meaningful content. There are a few ways to do this:

- Put tablets/screens around the event and encourage participation, especially on exit
- Put tablets/screens at key queuing points
- Send a push notification onto the app to encourage participation
- Hand out tablets or consoles to guests during seminars and ask questions throughout (this is better for content generation rather than feedback).

» Content creation at an event is the key to ensuring it has a lasting impact «

Interactive screens

The easiest way to integrate digital into your event – and one of the most rewarding – is using screens or giant browsers (such as Giant iTabs). These can not only relay important information to attendees, including the hashtag, timetables and travel information, but also allow you to stream live video and Twitter feeds, therefore promoting online interaction. You can encourage online discussion/ forums outside the event that widen it beyond the attendees that are physically there to those who could not be there in person. Content creation at an event is the key to ensuring it has a lasting impact.

Virtual reality

Many events are now jumping into gamification and virtual reality, which provide a real wow factor. CrowdCompass is a great source of interactive games that really give your attendees something to engage with, while also providing a focus for the event. Virtual reality is still cost prohibitive, but worth considering as something a bit different. Consider using it to offer attendees a deeper and more memorable look into your service or product.

III. After

The content you create during the event is a key way of extending the event's impact, both in time and reach. Of course you can tweet, post and send emails to attendees to your heart's content, but if they are not engaging, the event will be forgotten about. Here are some good, doable ways to create engaging content from the event:

- Hire a professional photographer and create an online image gallery.
- Create a press release (with images) and send it out to relevant press to cover the event online or offline – better yet, ask members of the press to attend and do a piece on the event (you could host a VIP press drinks party to encourage them to be part of the programme).
- Create thought leadership pieces/blogs based on every (or the best) seminars/talks. Better still, ask speakers to create these on their speciality subjects.
- Create a video, or a series of shorter videos, from the event – this will be particularly useful in promoting future events.
- The survey you carried out as part of the event may provide some thought-provoking insight that you can turn into content – for example, if you find out that 80 per cent of your attendees don't think they're effectively able to track where their leads come from, you can then look to create a piece to address that challenge.

Extend the reach of your content

- App: if you used an app, use push notifications to let people know about relevant content.
- Email: segment your audience according to the different seminars they attended or exhibitors they spoke to, and share content you have created around those topics.
- Make sure you share your content across as many channels as possible, including social media and blog-sharing sites such as Reddit, as well as with relevant press (especially if you have thought leaders on board or stat-based content).

III. Measuring success

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The go-to number for measuring the success of an event is usually attendance levels, but there are many tracking and analytics tools which can allow you to measure more strategically. Before the event, ensure you agree the key performance indicators (KPIs) and objectives with senior decision-makers. Is this event meant to be driving awareness, driving sales or improving your customer service score? If so, what are your target KPIs?

Sales are easier to measure, as long as your KPIs are clear. For example, if a KPI was 'driving sales across the business by 50 per cent on last year's figures, within six months of the event', measuring this should be relatively simple. If you're not doing this already, make sure you track new business enquiries through your website, either using your current CRM system or Google Analytics.

Measuring awareness and net promoter score (NPS) is more challenging, so make sure you have a specific target with time restraints to measure effectively. One of the easiest ways to gather this data is by using surveys during the event itself (see above). These can be extremely valuable as you are capturing the attendee while they are engaged; the downside is that they have not yet experienced the entire event.

Post-event surveys

Post-event surveys sent out the day after the event can be made very easily in SurveyMonkey (or equivalent tools) and should always include specific questions about each element of the event as well as specific brand-related questions such as: 'Can you identify our logo?' and 'Do you know who hosted the event?' You can then ask the NPS question: 'How likely are you to recommend [your brand]?' This is also your chance to ask questions about products you promoted during the event. You then have far more data to go by than attendance levels and sales.

You can push surveys out post-event in the following ways:

- A series of post-event emails to attendees.
- Post-event push notifications via the app, if you have used one.
- Mobile marketing to attendees.
- Remarketing ads to specific attendee email addresses.
- Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn advertising to specific accounts of attendees.
- Sales team telephone follow-up and personalised email to attendees.

Remember that providing an incentive, such as a competition and prize, can hugely increase participation.

CASE STUDY

A conference brought to life with technology

Cvent is a leading cloud-based enterprise event management company, with more than 15,800 customers worldwide. It offers software solutions to event planners for online event registration, venue selection, event management, mobile apps for events, email marketing and web surveys.

At 2015 Connect, its annual user conference, Cvent's goal was to deliver an incredible experience for attendees, as well as create an event that delivered true, measurable ROI. The extra challenge was that 2015 Connect was the most ambitious conference in Cvent's history.



An event on a different scale

In 2012, the company's inaugural conference hosted just over 240 corporate meeting and event planners, but over the next three years, the conference grew significantly and it launched a separate event dedicated to hoteliers in 2014. Due to growing demand, Cvent saw the opportunity to create a user conference that would bring the entire meetings and events industry together – planners and suppliers – for networking, collaboration, thought leadership and educational sessions.

The vision was a five-day conference that would bring everyone together in a single event, providing an opportunity for attendees to interact with one another, network and share best practices. The goal was 2000+ attendees.

The company's team of inhouse professional event planners, content specialists, creative designers and marketing personnel were dedicated to executing a perfect event. So, Cvent's marketing team faced the initial challenge of building and improving on an event for event planners – no small task – while ensuring it was a unique experience. On top of that, it decided to use the event to launch its new brand.

Planning and sourcing

Choosing the right venue was critical. The perception of a brand changes after events; 74 per cent of attendees have a more positive impression of an organisation, and events allow lead generation, customer and prospect engagement, and brand building. A badly run event, on the other hand, can be hugely damaging in terms of brand perception.

Using its own event management platform and supplier network, the Cvent team was able to secure a location, the MGM Grand Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas. With a venue





in place, it was time for logistics planning. Using housing tools, the team reserved room blocks for all attendees and staff, connecting data within the system in a matter of minutes.

Cvent's planning team then used its event management software to build the Cvent Connect website and create branded email invitations to begin registration. The team saved considerable planning time by using the tool, as it didn't have to rely on disparate systems.

In order to meet its 2000+ attendance goal, Cvent sent out a targeted series of email campaigns, providing the team with a robust engine to market, track and measure opens, clicks and registrations. After an integrated campaign that included social media, blogging and website promotions, the attendee goal was set. But the goals for Connect were far from complete.

The attendee experience

It's one thing to attract big numbers, it's another to deliver on the promises made. Seamless check-in is vital at a conference of any size, and a poor first impression can set a poor tone for an attendee.

Cvent used OnArrival, a self-service event check-in app, to enable planners to manage their attendees on site. Staff searched the list of their current registrants by quick alphabet navigation and/or scanning a barcode. The data then synced seamlessly and automatically with the Cvent's event management system, and check-in was complete.

When it was time for educational sessions, the planning team employed OnArrival's wireless laser scanners to help ease the flow of attendees trying to join sessions. This dropped barcode scanning times below one second, and eliminated long queues. This also gave planners the ability to track who attended which sessions.

Additionally, the company's mobile app helped guide attendees throughout their several-day stay, keeping them connected to updated information, aiding them when they wanted to change sessions or set appointments, and giving them a rundown of 'don't miss' moments throughout the conference.

The results

Cvent aimed to attract more than 2000 attendees at Connect 2015, and it surpassed that goal. The company was able to generate more than $1.8 million in revenue in less than six weeks. Additionally, Cvent had a 95 per cent download rate of its mobile app, with attendees driving the story throughout the entire conference. Social media metrics were also impressive, with 6400 social media posts and more than 600 new followers earned.

With 95 per cent of attendees indicating they would return the following year, 2016 brings high expectations, as Cvent has plans to host close to 3000 attendees at Cvent Connect, including clients, prospects, partners and employees.

Key takeaways

Using all of the digital tactics outlined here may not be completely realistic – or even necessary – but it's clear that using digital before, during and after your events in a few strategic, well-thought-out ways can really transform the experience for delegates and ensure your events reach their potential as powerful marketing tools.

Before

Ensure your SEO is as good as it can be through keyword research, social integration and relevant content creation.

- Consider PPC to boost awareness and drive traffic to your event website.
- Look at a partnerships with relevant brands/websites to boost traffic and engagement.
- Send targeted and personalised emails to your database.
- Employ a remarketing strategy.
- Enhance digital invitations through video, imagery and personalised messaging.
- Incorporate an RSVP and dietary requirements system into your invites for efficiency.
- Introduce your app early if you have one and make it useful and engaging.
- Introduce your social media channels early and encourage engagement from RSVP.

During

- Digital checkin – use photo booths or try a form of gamification on registration to generate excitement at the start of the day.
- Use your app and ensure it's integrated with as many other elements of the event as possible.
- Place screens around your event to ensure key messages, social media feeds, digital streaming and helpful information are always on show.
- Make the most out of attendees´ downtime by strategically placing survey iPads around the event.
- Use seminars and lectures to collect data that could drive thought leadership content after the event.
- Ensure you promote what's happening and make it engaging for non-attendees on social media.

After

The key is content. Create image galleries, videos and press releases and turn your findings from research at the event into thought leadership pieces which can be pushed out via email, social media, relevant partner sites and press.

Measuring success and ROI

- Ensure your objectives and SMART KPIs are in place prior to your event.
- Ensure tracking is set up to measure new enquiries through your website.
- Ensure you send out post-event surveys to gather data on your event, and measure general engagement with your brand.
- Digital tracking such as engagement on the app, sign-up speed and attendance levels in seminars can also be used to measure success.



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Megan has a plethora of experience working across global marketing strategies in the sport, events and entertainment industry. Currently working for hospitality and talent management agency Paragon and previously for leading hospitality agency Keith Prowse, Megan has worked alongside major brands, rights holders and international sports venues. Megan has been involved in some of the biggest events in the UK and overseas including Wimbledon, The Aegon Championships, BBC Children in Need An Evening with the Stars, The Royal Film Premiere and a wide range of sporting and charity dinners.

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About B2B Marketing



B2B Marketing

B2B Marketing is the comprehensive information resource for B2B marketers. Its mission is to provide practitioners with the information they need to perform better and achieve more, whatever sector of the B2B space they are operating in.

Launched in 2004 as *B2B Marketing* magazine, it has since evolved into a multi-faceted resource, delivering a broad range of content in a variety of different forms and formats.

Its key products are:

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For more information on any of these products or services go to b2bmarketing.net or call +44 (0)20 7014 4920

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