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Discover the Secrets of B2B Event Success

Fresh insight and best practice advice for planning, managing and delivering a high quality B2B event campaign

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Executive Summary



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B2B events are one of the oldest forms of marketing, yet remain one of the most powerful relationship building tools that we can use. Despite the digital age, there is still the innate human need for face-to-face interaction and the truth remains that people ultimately buy from people. Smart B2B marketers are increasingly recognising that, when planned and executed effectively, events are an excellent source of brand awareness and lead generation.

Marketing Options International (MOI) have taken over 23 years of audience generation and event management experience and developed 10 best practice tips to help to make your B2B events a success. Each tip will guide you through the key considerations for planning and delivering a high end event experience which creates memorable engagement for both the delegates and your organisation.

Introduction

Marketers and marketing departments are under increasing pressure to deliver high volume, quality sales leads through the most effective customer engagement channels. According to a survey* conducted in May 2010 by B2B Marketing Magazine and MOI, 70% of UK corporate event marketing decision-makers described B2B events as either 'critical' or 'very important' for their marketing strategy, with almost 40% spending at least a quarter of their total marketing budget on events. Additionally, over 92% stated that relationship building is best conducted in a face-to-face situation with events considered to be the ideal medium.



The survey results highlight that whilst digital marketing continues to evolve with ever increasing momentum, ultimately people still buy from people and B2B brands appear to be increasing their focus on, and investing in, face-to-face events rather than reducing it.

This informative guide has been developed to help B2B marketers strengthen levels of audience engagement and ensure they get the best possible return from their marketing investment. It contains a wealth of expert insight and best practice advice on areas such as audience generation, delegate management and on-site logistics, and includes both practical tips and key considerations for planning, managing and delivering a high quality end-to-end event campaign.

*http://www.b2bm.biz/survey-events

1. Know your audience – tailor your approach

"Spend time learning what your audience wants to hear and tailor your event accordingly rather than trying to make the audience conform to your event."

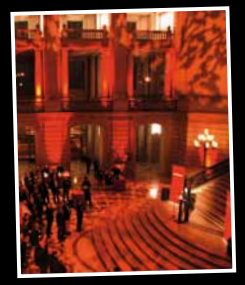
The first critical step when planning any event is to ensure that you clearly identify and understand your audience. You will need to determine and address key pertinent industry issues and use these to achieve a high level of interest from your audience. Avoid making assumptions about what they wish to learn or indeed assuming that they will only want to hear about your latest product release or sales pitch. Spend time learning what your audience wants to hear and tailor your event accordingly rather than trying to make the audience conform to your event. The balance needs to be right between engaging content, topical issues, future forecasts and your business content. Use of primary and secondary research techniques can provide great insight into pertinent topics, there is also great value in buzz monitoring and listening reports to identify the most current industry issues being discussed by your audience.

Consider the geographical location of your audience and the timing of your event. There is for example little point in holding an event in London if 90% of your audience is based in Glasgow. Take your event to your audience, it may be less convenient for you but more suitable for those you are targeting. Equally, is it a good time of year for them? For example it wouldn't be advisable to hold a Public Sector event just before a general election, but position your event shortly afterwards and cover any pertinent areas which have arisen, and the interest in your event will be increased.

Another important factor to think about is the firmographics of your audience alongside the format of your event. Consider what level you are trying to target and if your proposed format will work with your target audience? How will the event impact on their day? Will you have their full attention or will they want to 'rush off back to the office'?

You are unlikely to be the only marketer targeting your audience. Ensure that your event message is more interesting, topical and relevant and that the format, agenda and location are all appealing to the audience to stand out from the 'noise' from your competitors. Ask yourself at each stage of your planning, how will the audience benefit from this event, what is the state of the industry, what are the industry pain points that can be addressed and what will motivate the audience the most to attend – what is your USP?

It is during the 'get to know your audience' phase that you will begin to further develop your messaging for the event. It is here that you may find that you need to segment your audience, potentially into different message streams which you can use during the audience generation for your event, ensuring that the most relevant message to each segment is highly featured on each piece of communication. In fact, you may find that you will increase your ROI by holding a different style of event for different segments depending upon their firmographics.







2. Set clear objectives

"Whilst 'bums on seats' is of course an easy measurement tool, it doesn't give a true reflection on the ROI from the event. It is worth considering alongside the quantity, the quality of your registrations."

Once you have clearly identified and have a comprehensive understanding of your target audience, it is important to define objectives for the event.

In order to successfully evaluate the actual ROI from any event campaign, it is advisable to break down the overall desired outcome into a top level aim and then to further develop a set of event objectives. By identifying and setting out specific event goals you can use these to guide you through the event to clearly track your progress, ensuring that you don't deviate from what you initially set out to achieve. A complete set of objectives will also help you in your post-event evaluation and ROI.

When considering your objectives, be as specific as possible and ensure that the objectives are measurable. It is of course always necessary to define financial and attendance objectives, but equally due consideration should be paid to non-financial objectives such as building a strong project team.

Where possible delve further than just the quantity of registrations. Whilst 'bums on seats' is of course an easy measurement tool, it doesn't give a true reflection of the ROI from the event. It is worth considering alongside the quantity, the quality of your registrations.

For example, a UK B2B event with attendance of 10 C-level decision makers from FSTE 100 companies would see a significantly higher ROI than 100 student registrations from UK universities.

Alongside the short-term objectives it is important to also consider longer-term objectives. For any B2B event the direct leads and sales generated are always going to be a key objective. However, make sure all contacts and potential future leads from your event are nurtured. This won't necessarily produce any immediate results, but will create a solid foundation for a future relationship and therefore sales.

"Be as specific as possible and ensure that the objectives are measurable."







3.Plan ahead

"It is always best practice to plan your project effectively, listing each deliverable and identifying your key milestones from the outset."

As a benchmark it is recommended that marketers allow at least 8 to 12 weeks to formulate and execute an event, depending upon the size and scope. It is important to remember that you need to get into your delegates' diaries before anyone else. If you think about your own calendar – the more warning that you have for any sort of meeting, event or even social activity, the greater the chance of you being available to attend. Bear this in mind when you're thinking about your audience and when planning your time frames.

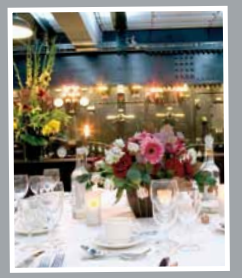
When looking at your time frames it is always best practice to plan your project effectively, listing each deliverable and identifying your key milestones from the outset. Use a project planning tool to schedule the whole project. Gantt charts are a great way to help you to view your milestones clearly and highlight from the outset any potential lead time issues with delivering your plan to schedule. Equally, ensure that you're realistic with your expectations and what you can achieve within the time frame. If you only have a short lead time, keep things simple and feasible. The more time you have, the more complex your event and planning can become as you can allow yourself more time to deliver each element.

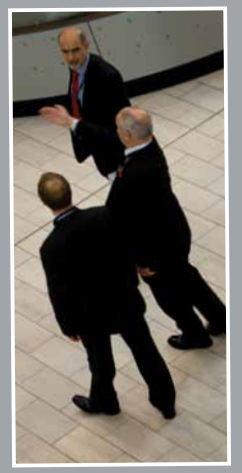
This same planning principle should also be applied to your budget planning. Ensure that you are thorough when considering your expenditure, as often it can be the small additional items that can add up and push marketers over budget. It's not just the venue, catering, AV and print costs that need to be factored, there are a whole host of smaller often 'hidden' costs such as travel, visas, gratuities and accommodation that should always be considered to allow accurate forecasting.

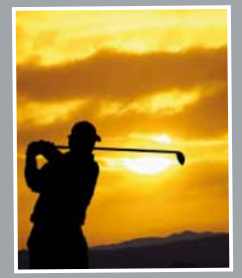
As much as we plan for an event, something always crops up at the last minute so make sure there is a contingency budget of 10%.

By planning ahead and monitoring your progress, you will be able to focus on executing the campaign to an exceptionally high standard.

"It's not just the venue, catering, AV and print costs that need to be factored, there are a whole host of smaller often 'hidden' costs such as travel, visas, gratuities and accommodation that should always be considered to allow accurate forecasting."







4. Integrate your communications

"A great way to remember the five touch rule is to think: Say it, say it again, say it differently, repeat it, share it."

To be successful, it is essential that any B2B event encompasses both off- as well as online activities.

Multi-channel marketing is the best way to engage your target audience. By using a multi-channel method, you can maximise the number that you reach. It is advised when marketing your event that you bear in mind the five touch rule. The concept is that your target audience must be 'touched' at least five times before they begin to recognise and recall your event. By integrating your communications, ensuring that your event 'brand' is consistent whilst also using a number of different communications methods, you have a significantly higher chance of your message breaking through all the other 'noise' that surrounds your invitation.

A great way to remember the five touch rule is to think: Say it, say it again, say it differently, repeat it, share it.

There are now so many different communication methods that it is vital to ensure that you select the channels that will have the highest impact on your audience, whether offline or online. You don't have to do everything. Select the channels that your research has highlighted as having particularly high usage by your audience or that obtains the highest ROI. For example Facebook is considered to be more of a 'social' environment than the likes of LinkedIn and Twitter, leaving the latter more relevant for a business message. Listening reports and buzz monitoring can also be used to identify topical audience issues and help you to plan your event invitation messaging and agenda content.

Within your target audience, remember that there are often industry specific forums and blogs which may also be worth considering. Be sure not to forget the power of internal communications, create a 'sales kit' including email footnotes and .oft files and equip your sales team with the tools that they need to promote the event to their contacts.

As you proceed with your communications, try altering the top level messaging to drip feed engaging material to the audience. By keeping the overall branding, look and feel and main content the same, you can apply the five touch rule, your brand identity is strengthened and your chance of engaging more of your audience is increased.

Lastly, remember that your communications should run throughout the audience generation phase, the on-site phase and through to post event. In short, keep the conversation going.

"Be sure not to forget the power of internal communications, create a 'sales kit' including email footnotes and .oft files and equip your sales team with the tools that they need to promote the event to their contacts."







5. Be different and stand out from the crowd

"Ultimately people buy from people, and if you can turn an often faceless corporation into something personal and engaging it can really help to maximise the potential sales from your event."

We've already acknowledged the 'noise' from competitors that surround your invitation which you need to break through, and the need to repeat your message via the five touch rule in order to provoke recognition within your target audience.

As important as these areas are, if the 'pull' of your event isn't strong, then the desire by your target audience to attend is equally going to be weak. It's worth remembering here the rule of AIDA, you've made them aware, you've got their interest and now to progress through AIDA you need to make the delegates want to attend your event. Consider your USP, what differentiates your event from other industry events? Ensure that your USP is entirely relevant to the audience with a pertinent message.

Don't be afraid to try something a little different. An inspirational speaker, a unique venue, ground-breaking, fresh, perhaps even controversial content, something that will grab your audience's attention and leave them wanting more!

You can use unique venues and influential speakers to reinforce your brand message, and in the case of unique venues really allow the delegates to live your brand experience, which when delivered successfully can only help to increase delegate engagement in both your event and your brand.

Ultimately people buy from people, and if you can turn an often faceless corporation into something personal and engaging it can really help to maximise the potential sales from your event.

"Use unique venues and influential speakers to reinforce your brand message."







6. Work as a team

"Treat your suppliers as part of your project team and they will display significantly more ownership for your event and ultimately ensure the successful delivery of the event."

No event planner can bring an event to fruition to a high standard on their own. Build a strong project team, by gathering people with specialist skills around you and allocating roles and responsibilities from the outset. You should all be heading in the same direction with clearly defined areas of responsibility.

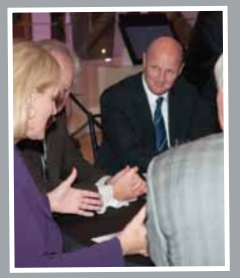
Your team should include all of your suppliers for the event and particularly your venue team, AV team and caterers. Treat your suppliers as part of your project team and they will display significantly more ownership for your event and ultimately ensure that it's delivered successfully.

It is important to also nominate a project lead or event manager who will see your event through from start to finish. Ensure that your project team are able to both execute and plan your event prior to the day itself and also deliver the event on-site to ensure consistency of delivery and of messaging and quality control. An event manager who will see the event from concept to delivery can ensure that all of the objectives and planning conversations that you had prior to the event are executed in the way that you really wanted on-site rather than a new person's interpretation of what you want.

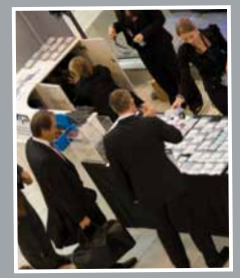
The event manager should also be responsible for ensuring that your project remains on track and that the key milestones that you set out during your initial planning stage are met by all of the project team. The event manager should guide the team through the process but equally take advice and guidance from the team relating to their specialist areas.

Communication is key. It is recommended that you set weekly event planning calls with your project team – including both your internal resource as well as the extended supplier resource to discuss all aspects of the event. By keeping everyone 'in the loop' with regard to the status of the event you can ensure that your event remains front of mind for your whole team. Ensure that your planning calls increase in frequency as the event date draws closer, with bi-weekly calls in the month prior to the event.

Always conduct a pre-meeting on-site with your team the day before your event is due to commence. Ensure that you 'walk through' the entire event with the team from start to finish and cover the deliverables from each area. This will allow any last minute queries or issues to be resolved in advance and ensure that each team member knows without prompting exactly what is expected of them during your event.







7. Make your delegates feel special

"Delegate management is a vital process in order to minimise your drop-out rate for events."

Delegate management is a vital process in order to minimise your drop-out rate for events, but is so often overlooked or not conducted in the most effective way, mainly due to time and r esource restraints.

It's worth remembering that without delegates you have no event and so it is critical to maintain their interest from the moment they register until the minute they walk through the door at your event.

At Marketing Options International we pride ourselves on our delegate management and refer to it as a personal concierge service. Over the last five years we have focused on how we can minimise drop-out rates to the events that we manage and we average a less than 20% drop-out rate. Our method is simple – succinct, regular, multi-channeled and, above all, professional delegate management through dedicated resource.

By communicating with the delegates via a range of different methods, which are strategically timed to ensure that the delegates are continually reminded of the event (without over-exposure and therefore, risk of being considered as 'spamming') you can ensure that your event remains at the forefront of the delegates' minds.

This communication could be anything from a reminder email, to a forum post announcing a new speaker, to a courtesy call enquiring about their dietary requirements, to a '24 hours to go' reminder text message. Communication needs to be planned and timed to act as a regular reminder to the delegates.

You should offer a range of different contact methods for your delegates. By allowing them the option to get in touch in the way they want to, they will be much more likely to respond to you. Equally, when a delegate does get in touch with a query, ensure that your delegate management resource acknowledges the query and respond as quickly as possible.

The aim is to make your delegates feel valued and that their attendance at the event is important to you. There are a whole host of different factors that can prevent your delegate from attending the event so increasing their ownership and engagement with a personal concierge service will ensure that your drop-out rate is minimised.

"The aim is to make your delegates feel valued and that their attendance at the event is important to you."







8. At the event remember the 3Cs – be cool, calm and collected

"Aim to hold a speaker rehearsal ahead of any event with a speaker briefing on-site to run through the specific function of all the equipment and how the 'call to stage' will work."

The day of your event has arrived and this is the time that all your pre-planning should ensure a seamless event delivery. The team that you have put together should already be putting into action the roles and responsibilities that you allocated ahead of time. Ensure here that your event manager can confidently walk through the event in detail, with every interaction mapped out.

A final and thorough run through with all stakeholders the day before the event is a great way to ensure that everyone understands their roles fully. Don't just cover the agenda here, make sure you cover everything – all set up aspects, all deliverables and existing milestones, the delegate experience, production, right through until break down. Your team should leave this meeting knowing exactly what they need to deliver throughout the event.

Make sure that you test all of your equipment and presentations ahead of time. Test before you arrive on-site and also once the equipment is in situ. Do this as early as possible to allow you enough time to troubleshoot should the need arise.

Aim to hold a speaker rehearsal ahead of any event with a speaker briefing on-site to run through the specific function of all the equipment and how the 'call to stage' will work. Where possible ensure that this is held in the exact room that the speaker will be presenting, to ensure that the speaker has a clear understanding of the space, equipment and audience size.

Even with military planning you are most likely to encounter issues, problems or otherwise unexpected incidences. If you have allocated the roles and responsibilities of your team effectively, then you should be free to troubleshoot anything that emerges – by ensuring that you reflect the 3Cs rule, you will be able to deal with these situations quickly, effectively and undetected.

Remember you are heading up a team and they will reflect your behaviour. Set a calm, professional atmosphere and your team will follow suit.







9. Engage your audience

"Tell me and I'll forget, show me and I may remember, involve me and I'll understand."
Chinese Proverb

The more that you can involve the delegate at every stage of your event, the greater the engagement will be and the greater the benefit that you will achieve from ROI and also that the delegate will receive from their experience at your event.

Engaging your audience on-site is of course equally as important as generating the pre-event engagement. Consider what your delegates are trying to achieve from their day – usually this is some form of learning and networking. Consider helping the delegates to better network with each other via facilitated discussions or special interest group sessions segmented by geography, industry or job function. There are also many networking devices now that can further enhance the networking ability for the delegates on-site.

Try to establish a two-way conversation between your delegates and your presenters. Allow delegates to submit questions or pain points prior to the event or create an event forum for delegates to discuss any industry 'buzz' topics from which you can draw material. It is also worth considering using Twitter or other forms of interactivity such as apps or voting systems on-site at your event, which can all assist you with gaining additional intelligence about your audience members.

With the advances in technology over the last few years, geography is no longer a boundary for business and therefore shouldn't be considered as a boundary for your events either. Consider using streaming technology to offer your event to a significantly wider audience via a live webcast.

"Try to establish a two-way conversation between your delegates and your presenters, allow delegates to submit questions or pain points prior to the event."







10. Nurture your leads – let the courtship begin

"Aim to speak to the delegates within 72 hours to gain their feedback, or follow up with a sales call using the intelligence that you gained on-site."

A critical success factor to any event is to ensure that the leads obtained at the event are nurtured.

Send a thank you email to all delegates within 24 hours of the event. If you can, post highlights and content from the event onto an event forum to allow the delegates to share your content and discuss their thoughts.

During your planning stage be sure to develop a post-event communications strategy which should plot further touch points with your audience. Aim to speak to the delegates within 72 hours to gain their feedback, or follow up with a sales call using the intelligence that you gained on-site. Use social media to keep the conversation going and, where possible, have your invitation to your next event ready.

Keep track of the intelligence you have gained during your event and use it to personalise your follow up with a relevant, targeted message.

To enable effective analysis of the event and identify the level of success it is important not to lose sight of the sales cycle. Make sure you regularly track the ROI from each lead and ultimately the ROI from your event.

"Use social media to keep the conversation going and, where possible, have your invitation to your next event ready."







Summary



B2B face-to-face events are most successful when executed within an integrated marketing strategy with clearly defined aims and objectives. To maximise the ROI from events marketers must maintain a dialogue with each of the delegates after the event to nurture relationships that have been developed.

Whilst events are a traditional marketing tool marketers need to embrace digital initiatives to ensure that they optimise audience engagement and event ROI.

It is those organisations that are able to design hybrid events that encompass both a physical as well as online marketing presence before, during and after an event that are likely to see the greatest levels of audience engagement – and ultimately convert the pipeline into actual sales.

About Marketing Options International

Marketing Options International (MOI) is a fully integrated B2B technology marketing agency. With offices in London, San Francisco, Singapore and Sydney, Marketing Options International combine global reach and local understanding to produce results-driven marketing campaigns that span evolving media, markets and territories. Marketing Options Live is a centre of excellence at Marketing Options International that provides a full range of event management services which enable valuable face-to-face communications between corporate clients and their business customers around the world.

To learn more about Marketing Options International, visit www.mointernational.com, call Lilah Walker, International Director of Events on + 44 (0)1932 233000 or email lilah.walker@mointernational.com