



## A Truly Memorable Event

**Events are an important marketing tool. Meeting customers and contacts face-to-face gives a prolonged opportunity for discussion which can provide wonderful cross selling opportunities as you get into areas off “the beaten track” of day-to-day work. It also gives you a rich opportunity to understand more about clients or prospects and where they and their businesses are going.**

Events can help achieve a number of tactical objectives and are particularly valuable for:

- Creating a big noise around a product or service launch
- Networking / generating future sales opportunities (but not selling)
- Motivating staff / sales people or potential introducers
- Thanking customers
- Platforming – showcasing your products / expertise

But in some industries they can also be an overused mechanic, driven more by the interests of the event organisers than their client or target. They can also be costly, immensely time consuming and easily forgotten.

So here are **Twelve Top Tips** for planning a successful event:

### 1. Set Objectives

Events can soak up a lot of time and money, so have clear objectives that will constitute an acceptable return. Plan the event with the objectives in mind and make sure feedback from guests and staff is captured (in the case of sales possibly several months afterwards) so that success can be evaluated.

### 2. Choose An Event That Matches The Objectives

A thank you to a very special customer will need something that's highly targeted to his or her interests, rather than an invite to a regular golf day. A seminar must deliver valuable content relevant to the audience, however good the venue is. A sales or networking event needs physical space and time for people to move around and mingle,

rather than sitting in a seat where you can only talk to your immediate neighbours.

### 3. Choose An Event That Matches The Audience

Think how you and your guests are going to interact. For larger groups, provide them with some common ground to break the ice. Events like horse racing, with short gaps in between a race everyone is betting on, make for easy conversations amongst strangers. A day fishing with a client you know well should be pleasant. A day fishing with a prospect you barely know could be a long day for both parties!

### 4. Theme

The most memorable and successful events have a clear theme that's relevant to the audience and reflects aspects of your brand / positioning. Whether a client seminar or hospitality, a theme that runs from the invitations to the event and on to the follow-up will create stand out.



### 5. Be Different – Avoid Event Fatigue

Sometimes getting acceptances can be a challenge and even the best events can quickly blur in the minds of attendees who receive many invitations. Choose the event or topic carefully, but equally plan how to run the event to make it memorable for

guests. If you can afford (and obtain) 12 tickets to the World Cup Final that's great. But arranging a chauffeured car that will collect a guest and deliver them home afterwards, freed of the worry of parking and drink driving, can make a less expensive event stand out for the recipient.

#### **6. Make The Effort**

If it's going to be special for your guests it has got to be special for you too. Avoid block booking events or seminars on consecutive days, or arranging important events on the same day as other attention or energy sapping activities.



#### **7. Prepare Well And In Advance**

Few important customers or contacts have empty diaries, so plan on the basis of having all the details arranged to be able to invite at least 6 weeks in advance. Monitor acceptances and follow up no-responses quickly so that they can be confirmed or struck off the list early enough for others to be invited.

In the week before the event find an excuse to re-confirm attendance (directions / parking / travel arrangements are always a fall back). This reminds guests and flushes out potential "no-shows" you may still be able to replace.

#### **8. Brief Your Team**

Make time to brief yourself and your team thoroughly on the guests that will be there, ideally the day before the event rather than 5 minutes before kick-off. Agree who is

looking after who; who needs to be introduced to who? Treat it as a campaign and you will get results. Leave it to chance and your investment will not get a return.

#### **9. Staff Up**

Ensure you have enough people at the event to care for guests and meet your objectives. If you have customers, their account or relationship manager will need to spend most of their time with them. So if prospects are there too, who will spend time with them? The same applies when running seminars. Existing customers will want to discuss the implications for them / their business with their key contact in your business, so who will be focussing on the prospects?

#### **10. When To Sell and When Not**

If it's a product launch, guests expect to be sold at, but if it's a client thank you turning the event into a sales pitch will look cynical and possibly worse. If you are targeting new prospects focus on starting a relationship, not pushing to close a sale on the day. You will generate far more business in the long run.

#### **11. Follow Up**

Plan how you are going to follow up before the event. Have the follow up material prepared in advance. Book time in diaries to ensure thank you or follow up letters go out while the event is still fresh in guests' minds.

#### **12. Keep It Fresh**

Once you repeat the same event two years running you set a precedence. For some this can be a strength. Associating their brand with a much larger event or topic can have advantages and become a stand out factor in the target audiences' mind. However, consider if you really do want to invite the same people every year? Once a contact has been invited once, will they be offended to not be invited to the same event next year?

**The vast majority of clients who report events not achieving their objectives admit that the reason was often a lack of, or very late, follow up. They put in 90% of the effort – enough to get “bums on seats” and make the event run smoothly on the day - but forgot that the objective wasn't to run a successful event but to grow the business. They didn't put in the 10% before or after the event that is crucial to generating sales, meetings and customer goodwill. Events can be a very successful marketing tool, but a very time consuming one too. Those who succeed put in the time to plan and execute well.**

Alan Brooks - Hyde Marketing