Events and Seminar Tips

Seminars and corporate events are popular marketing tools used by many professional services firms. Their popularity has, however, led to over-use and clients are now voicing concern over events whose purpose does not provide any obvious value to their business and the issues they are facing. To avoid this criticism, we suggest the following hints and tips for your seminars and events:

Before the event

The invite list:

- Focus the session on an opportunity or business issue that is of current or future burning interest to a section of your clients and prospective clients.
- Target the audience very carefully. The aim is not to have lots of people at these events. The aim is to have the right sort of people. The participation of too many 'low quality' attendees will drive the 'high quality' participants away from future events that the firm organises.
- Beware inviting clients and prospective clients that are competitors if they are sensitive to being in the same room together.
- Where there are specific clients or prospective clients for whom the event should be particularly relevant (and where you have not received any response) then personalise the invitation further through a follow-up email or phone call.
- Ensure support staff contact each guest (or their secretary) within 48 hours of the commencement of the event to ensure people attend.

The venue

- Check the venue out well in advance, walk the room(s) and check out the facilities.

Your people

- Only use the best presenters for the event. Get the presentation team together at least one week in advance to rehearse their input and handovers. Make it a full 'dress rehearsal' including AV. Agree the changes that need to be made and then schedule a final rehearsal a day or two before the event.
- Make sure that plenty of your firm's professionals are on hand for the event. This means the people who best understand the subject and the target audience – not those people whom have nothing better to do. (A rough guide is one firm person to every four participants.)
- Get everyone involved in the event together one week before to discuss how it will be 'stage managed' – this includes finalising the meeting and greeting of each guest, who will look after them during the event and who they should be introduced to. If you cannot get people physically together send round briefing notes or hold a conference call.
- Ensure that each professional is allocated a specific, agreed number of guest for whom they will be responsible.
- Ensure that each support professional knows the questions that they are going to ask as discussion openers with the people they will be meeting. If it is likely that most guests will be 'roaming' then each professional should have two or three questions that they 'own' – so that the guests are not continually bombarded with the same question every time they speak to someone from the firm.

The event itself

The venue

- Set up all equipment immediately and have a dry run – ensure that all the technical equipment works and that sound, lighting, ventilation, heat are all okay.

The guests

- Make sure that the typeface of name badges is large enough so people can read them quickly and easily.
- Keep the guests out of the main presentation room prior to the start – this allows the presenters any final preparation free from interruption and also allows the seating to be adjusted right up until the last minute.
- Where there are opportunities in the time available to enlighten guests on other issues affecting them, then do so. This will add to the value that they derive from the event.
- Where the issue needs greater time and effort to explore, then suggest to the guest that you will drop them a line on the subject.

Your people

- Make the host professional's badges distinctly different from the guests' – saving potential confusion for the guests.
- Ensure that all the firm's representatives - speakers, hosts and support staff – arrive well in advance of the guests.
- After registration the people on reception should take each guest to their receptive host – who should be positioned at a specific 'station'. It is the professional's task to ensure that the guest is catered for.
- Ensure the host professionals sit in on the event to understand exactly what went on, what messages seemed to gain greatest audience interest, and which guests had specific questions.
- Don't use the event to 'sell' to clients and prospective clients – this is not what they came for and it will discourage them from participating in events in the future.
- Use the discussion time to get a feel for the issues affecting the guests and their organisations – particularly in relation to the event subject.

After the event

- Plan for time, at the end of the event, when the hosts and support staff can share intelligence on what they have discussed or learned from different guests.
- Decide on an agreed follow up for each guest depending on the intelligence gleaned and who will undertake it. A standard letter can be used as a core but should also include a paragraph or couple of lines relating to subjects that were raised in discussion with the prospect at the event.
- Where there are specific issues raised between the guest and the host, a telephone call should be made in the immediate future seeking to set up a more focused meeting.

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