



Maximizing Your Event Marketing ROI

Best practices guide to
integrated event marketing



Signal Graphics®

BY THE NUMBERS

According to a 2016 InfoTrends study on direct mail:

- **66%** of direct mail is opened
- **82%** of direct mail is read for a minute or more
- **56%** of consumers went online or visited the physical store
- **62%** of consumers in the past three months made a purchase
- Over **84%** reported that personalization improved likelihood of opening

InfoTrends study, *Direct Mail: Integral to the Marketing Mix in 2016*, http://www.ddprints.com/downloads/infotrends_whitepaper_march_2016.pdf

Events and tradeshow are more important than ever, serving as the primary marketing tool for companies, accounting for upwards of 40 percent of total marketing budgets.¹ Many event planners, though, don't take advantage of the full range of event marketing options available to them, focusing exclusively on a single promotion and ignoring the opportunities for real engagement that come from an integrated marketing campaign. By considering a broader promotional approach that may include personalized mailers sent directly to someone's home or office, or immersing booth visitors in event experiences on-site with promotions, signage, activities and displays, or continuing the conversation long after everyone has returned home are just some of the ways event ROI can be improved.

INTRODUCTION

In the next pages, we will explore several of the marketing efforts available for implementation before, during and after an event. While not inclusive of every marketing tactic available for event marketing, this paper looks at several frequently missed opportunities, efforts that many event marketers and planners don't take advantage of when planning and executing their marketing plan for an event.

BEFORE THE EVENT

- Take an integrated approach to pre-promotion of your event
- Print personalized invitations, direct mailers or dimensional mailers
- Send emails and engage would-be attendees through social media
- Tease any special activities, events, speakers, product launches, in-booth activities or demonstrations
- Look into ways to expand your outreach beyond your own database
- Reach out to editors of industry-leading publications and invite them to meet with you.

Successful event planners find that taking an integrated approach to pre-promotion marketing—incorporating both online and offline tactics—leads to greater success. Forty-four percent of respondents to a benchmarking report from the Data & Marketing Association (DMA) found that marketers are

1. Center for Exhibitions Industry Research (CEIR), *The Marketing Spend Decision*, March 3, 2015

Beginning to end, your event should take your audience through four stages:

- 1. Attract:** Identify and target specific audience profile.
- 2. Engage:** Provide a platform for two-way conversations and personalized connections
- 3. Immerse:** Appeal to multiple senses and continuously integrate offline with online
- 4. Reward:** Your audience's time is valuable; make each experience compelling

George P. Johnson Experience Marketing, 2014. *The Modern Event Is Now a Strategic Marketing Initiative*, <http://gpj.com.au/the-renaissance-of-event-marketing/>

embracing multi-channel marketing, with 44% of respondents indicating that they use three or more channels for their marketing efforts.² For this reason, event marketers planning to leverage digital marketing will also want to consider more traditional tactics—and enjoy the response rates that come with them.

Using direct mail for your event invitations and other pre-event promotions offers a number of benefits for attendees and marketers from delivering personalized, engaging content to greater message recall by recipients, and improved consumer interaction.² Custom mailer shapes, unique inks, die cuts, the use of high-quality images, and digital techniques such as event web landing pages or embedded audio or video links create memorable promotions that will stay with the recipient.

While digital outreach is inexpensive to implement, it also has a notoriously low response rate (0.1% for email and search). By coupling these tactics with direct mail's perceived reliability and much higher response rate (3.7% for house lists and 1.0% for prospect lists)² you can create a more effective multi-touch campaign.

Think Outside Your Database

Expand your outreach beyond your own in-house database. Talk with show management about renting pre-registered attendee lists and sending your personalized invitation to them, as well. Also look into industry publications that rent their lists and see if they match your target audience or persona. Both of these options allow you to promote your presence, any special events or activities that will take place and any key speakers that you will be featuring to a broader audience.

Tradeshow statistics to keep in mind:

- *The average tradeshow attendee will visit 26 exhibitors*—make sure you are on their pre-planning list³
- *76% of attendees arrive with an agenda of exhibitors they plan to visit*—customize your messaging so that your exhibit is a must-see³
- *Less than 20% of exhibitors are doing targeted pre-event marketing*—don't be left out!³

Knowing the answers to these and other questions will help you better understand the messaging you need to use to communicate with your audience in order to be heard. By incorporating this information (data) whether as copy or pictures into your marketing channels, you create customized one-to-one marketing tools that have a better chance of grabbing their attention.

2. As cited on EveryDoorDirectMail.com; <https://www.everydoordirectmail.com/Direct-Mail-Response-Rates-and-Statistics-from-2015-Research-blogpost322>

3. ASI pre-show marketing tip-sheet; <https://www.asishow.com/media/3236/high-impact-pre-show-marketing.pdf>



To improve the return on investment (ROI) from your event, treat conferences with a strategic, integrated marketing mindset. When you take this approach, you'll involve more departments in planning, making the guest list everyone's responsibility.

Hubb, *Event Marketing Best Practices*, <http://blog.hubb.me/event-marketing-best-practices>

DURING THE EVENT

- Booth and table displays
- Signs
- Promotional products/giveaways
- Brochures, flyers, and handouts—make sure you have enough
- Technology—wifi, video, AV—make sure it's working
- On-site immersive experiences
- Smile—remember you're the host!

Your event location, table or booth is a great occasion to showcase your company. By working closely with vendors and services companies leading up to the event, you can build out a comprehensive on-site experience for your attendees. From the table display or booth design to the signs and exhibits at your meeting or event location, you are sending a message to prospects and communicating vital information about your business, professionalism, and interest in meeting their needs. Hand out promotional products that tie into your—or the event's—overall theme and that will get prospects talking with you. Also think about designating exclusive marketing materials or giveaways for those prospects and clients who engage with your sales representatives.

Catch Your Prospects' Eyes

From the moment an event attendee sets foot in an exhibit venue, they may be overwhelmed by trying to take in and process everything that is happening around them. Make sure that you are immediately drawing attention to your business with your booth or display. First impressions are always crucial, even more so at an event where you may be competing with dozens or hundreds of other companies providing the same business services or types of products. While research disputes whether it takes one-tenth of a second or 30 seconds to make a first impression⁴, the reality is that you don't have long to impress passersby and entice them into engaging with you.

Plan out the look of your event display—be sure that your branding is clear, that any theme is incorporated into your overall look, and that your space is attractive and approachable. Perhaps the most important element that ties all of this together is your signage. Whether your exhibit space is 800 square feet, or a 6-foot tabletop display, ensure that your signs and graphics are properly sized for the space, focus on your business' benefits to visitors, and are consistent and cohesive.

Event signage serves many functions, whether your organization is putting on the event or renting space at a larger exhibition. For those businesses hosting an event, consider exterior and directional signs, as well as those on the floor for guiding foot traffic. There are also digital and poster options. For event exhibitors, the list is no less important: exhibit signage, posters, display pieces and banner stands all share your messaging with both potential and existing clients. Mix more enduring brand and business benefits signage with those that tie into specific displays or product launches in the short term.

4. Association for Psychological Science, 2006, *How Many Seconds to a First Impression?* https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/how-many-seconds-to-a-first-impression#.WNcl2xlrK_A



Roughly eight in 10 [survey respondents] admit to looking up [a] brand after receiving a promotional product, and 83 percent said they are more likely to do business with brands from which they've received promotional products than with brands they have not.

PPAI, 2016 Consumer Study Reinforces the Influence, Muscle and Clout of Promotional Products <http://pubs.ppai.org/2016/11/built-for-life/>

Because exhibit booths and displays can be some of the most expensive elements of your event marketing, make initial purchases with the long-term in mind, allowing you to reuse your exhibit again and again. Contemplate buying refurbished and modular pieces, and refreshing signs as new products and services are introduced.

Freebie Fun

One of the things guaranteed to get people talking at an event is the type of promo items at each exhibit. From old standards like pens and candy to really creative,

bleeding-edge offerings that reflect what's in the zeitgeist (for 2017 that may mean technology-centric or eco-focused). In many cases, this is your first opportunity to get a prospect to approach your table or enter your booth. Think about using a tiered approach to giveaway items: a smaller, less-costly item for those who are clearly interested in free goodies, and a more exclusive (valuable or interesting) item for those who engage with a sales representative or who are from your specific target audience.

Educate and Engage with Marketing Materials

It goes without saying that a significant portion of your event marketing budget will be dedicated to printed marketing materials, including brochures, flyers and other handouts. You may also wish to consider small print runs of bound copies of key content that can be shared with VIP clients and prospects. Many exhibit visitors will wish to take these materials back to their offices as reminders of what your business does and how it may satisfy their needs in the future.

Make the Most of the Time You Have

Your exhibit is at the heart of your integrated event marketing campaign—an unparalleled opportunity to immerse visitors in your business. In addition to talking with customers (new and prospective), answering questions, demonstrating product and service capabilities, and building relationships, this is your chance to provide an experience.

Seldom do sales and marketing teams enjoy the special benefits an event brings, “allowing us to achieve multiple sales and marketing objectives at once and in a compressed time period. Over the course of even a single-day marketing event, it is possible to reach multiple prospective customers, meet partners, demo new products to existing clients, and interact generally with your industry much more easily than if you had to do each separately and from some distance.”⁵

Some examples for engaging your audience at your booth include incorporating prize information in your pre-event materials to be claimed at your

5. Eventuosity white paper, *Integrating Events into the Marketing Mix*, <https://eventuosity.com/event-marketing/>

The best organizations are those in which marketing takes an active role in warming the leads via a post event follow-up plan...This way you stay top of mind and are reinforcing your brand and message.

Cheryl Kopka, American Marketing Association, *Pre-Plan Your Post Plan—7 Tips to Maximize Your Brand and Increase Leads After an Event*⁶

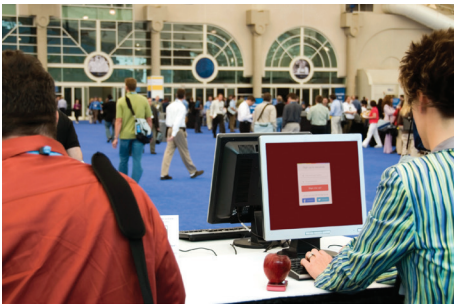


exhibit for answering a question, playing a game, or talking to a sales representative. You could also ask attendees to bring a direct mail piece you sent them to claim a reward. Provide in-exhibit games such as trivia, drawings, guessing games or other immersive experiences that encourage visitors to spend extra time at your table or booth, connecting with your sales team.

AFTER THE EVENT

- Follow-up messaging via direct mail, email, social media
- Post-event sales outreach
- Post-event survey
- Analytics
- Ongoing lead nurturing

Ongoing marketing post-event is a significant missed opportunity for many event marketers. Jumping immediately into planning your next event or catching up on work missed while out of the office are both worthwhile endeavors, but if you don't continue to interact with the people you spoke with at an event, any warm leads will quickly turn cold. Likewise, immediately following an event is the best time to look at your event ROI and analytics in order to know what steps to take with your next event, or for reporting to stakeholders.

Letters and Postcards and Thank Yous, Oh My!

The easiest and most crucial post-event activity you will want to pursue is following up on client conversations held at the event, engagements with new prospects, and sending thank yous to those who entered drawings or other in-exhibit competitions. Your contact medium of choice may be varied (some electronic, some traditional outreach), but all messaging should be customized to reflect the interactions between the prospect and your team. Due to the different types of audiences you will be reaching out to, explore different follow up techniques for each audience segment. For instance, send a letter or postcard to those who engaged with your team briefly, reminding them of your theme, product demos or important business information. However, a handwritten, personalized (and branded!) thank-you card will be much more meaningful for those who engaged deeply with your team.

Whether you used an in-exhibit lead capture system, collected business cards through a drawing, or collected visitor information via the old-fashioned paper-and-pencil method, these contacts should be input into whatever system you use for managing leads. When combined with your in-house list, and possibly an event's post-show lead list, you will have a substantial group of contacts to reach out to for follow-up.

Significantly, your post-event outreach should be part of a sustained campaign. While the first outreach is the most important for closing the loop on an event, a single letter or postcard is also easily overlooked. Continued contact with prospects through a campaign spanning weeks or months will help keep your business top-of-mind for prospects. Again, this may be done

6. <https://www.ama.org/resources/Best-Practices/Pages/Pre-Plan-Your-Post-Plan—7-Tips-to-Maximize-Your-Brand-and-Increase-Leads-After-an-Event.aspx>



through a mix of digital and traditional outreach, but don't overlook the staying power of direct contact.

Survey Says!

An easy way to gauge the success of an event is through a post-show survey. This may, in fact, be included in your post-event marketing efforts with leads as one of the justifications for ongoing contact. The post-event survey gives you the opportunity to determine the business value of attending or hosting an event—was it worth your attendees' time, did it cater to their interests, would they participate again. It's also a good chance to check in on the particulars of your event: did they find your product displays informative, enjoy your in-exhibit

engagement efforts, or discover more about your business? Surveys give you valuable firsthand feedback, including what you did well and where you have room for improvement.

To boost survey response, consider reaching out through multiple media—an email with a link, followed up by a postcard including that same link, for instance. Asking more than once, in more than one format, will help the audience remember to take the survey. It's also a good idea to offer an incentive to encourage survey participation. Incentives can vary widely from the more formal—physical or downloadable assets like high-value white papers, case studies, infographics, industry reports or studies, or product demos that will be of particular business value to your audience—to those that are more consumer-focused and customized to your business, including a discount on the purchase of a product, entry into a raffle to win a gift card, or a free business consultation.

Remember the Bottom Line

Assessing the overall value of your event experience incorporates data learned from the post-event survey, but it is more wide-reaching than that. In the early event planning stages you will want to define what a successful event looks like for your organization, and analyze the ROI post-event. If ROI is the true measurement of success, then your objective is to drive down the cost per lead.

The types of metrics you use to determine an event's success are entirely up to you. These efforts can include almost any measure of your event marketing. Some examples might be the number of brochures and whitepapers taken from the booth by attendees, or promotional items given out; new leads acquired; the progression of new or existing leads through the sales funnel; booth visitor engagement; ongoing visitor engagement through a nurture campaign; sales made vs. costs to market and participate at the event; and discounts redeemed from post-event follow-up.

CONCLUSION

The difference between a good event and a great event is the level of marketing planning that went into it, and careful execution of each tactic. Making sure that you have in place a strong pre- and post-event plan, as well as effective and engaging displays and activities on-site, will help to draw prospects to your exhibit. It is not enough to pursue a digital campaign that allows you to “set it and forget it.” Instead, think about what types of outreach will resonate with your clients and prospects: can you reach them using marketing that will stick with them until—and while—they are at the event? What will you do at your booth or table to draw in new prospects and entertain visitors? How will you continue to engage with your prospects when everyone has gone home?

Finally, don’t limit your organization! Small companies and independent event planners often don’t have the capacity to manage all of the marketing needed for an event. If you need assistance with direct or email marketing campaigns, graphic design work, website design or integration, signage, identifying and obtaining promotional items, booth or display sourcing, and high-quality printing or mailing, Signal Graphics has the resources and experience to help you with many of your event marketing needs.

