

Tips on how to run a successful conference or seminar:

It is very important to make sure that any business event that you are planning on having is successful and is a return on investment. I will outline in short articles the factors to consider in having a successful conference or seminar, these will be written under the following headings:

Corporate reasons for having a conference

How to plan for a conference

Budgeting for a conference

Finding the right venue

Marketing for a conference

Event management and logistics

Conference on-site logistics

Review of the conference and follow up

Part 2

How to plan for a conference:

The last fact sheet reviewed the corporate reasons for having a conference. There can be many business reasons why a company should consider having a conference, not least are that events are an important part of the marketing mix. We will now outline the main check points to consider when planning a conference:

- Clarify the business rationale for a conference, to make sure that this is the correct event for your marketing promotion as outlined in part 1*
- Make sure that you start the planning of a conference in plenty of time to be able to plan and market your event. This can depend on the conference size and how easy it is to book a venue. You need to consider how much time your target audience will need in advance to put the date in their diary and to get them to sign up as delegate. The more time you have the better you can plan your marketing and promotion. Suggestion is at least 5 months in advance.*
- Setting objectives - this is vital not only to understand why you are holding the event but also they will provide direction for every thing in the planning and promotional phases and you will be able to test the ROI at the end of the event. The success of an event will be judged on its achievement of the main objectives. Do not have too many objectives, you need one overriding objective and maybe two or three others that support the main objective. This may be something you cannot do on your own you may have to involve the initiators to clarify their objective and this may be done in conjunction with the marketing or sales department.*

- *In the planning stage it is also good to be able to understand how you are going to measure or quantify your objectives. Specific questions on the feedback form can be used not only for measuring one specific conference but can also be used as a rolling measure of effectiveness which is updated after each event. This gathering of statistical information may be useful in planning the current conference and future events. Further information will be detailed in part 8.*
- *Clarify type of conference – for internal employees or external delegates. If for external delegates you need to understand who your audience is? Are they dealers, partners, customers, potential customers, the media?. The target audience will be guided by the objective of your conference and having a clear target audience will make your promotion easier.*
- *How many people should attend? Your numbers will be influenced by the budget as well as venue.*
- *Will you be charging an attendance fee? This can make a huge difference to the level of your costs or profits from the conferences. Sometimes charging a fee can increase the delegate's perception of the value of the conference. If you are not paying an attendance fee you may consider using a partners to sponsor certain parts of the conference e.g. speaker slots, reception, coffee breaks, maybe advertise their name on documentation such as invitation/programme or delegates pack.*
- *The subject matter/content - theme, this will be guided by your main objectives and should focus on what it is that you want people to take away, to remember and act upon.*
- *Duration of the conference - one day or over several days? How many sessions, which day of the week to hold the conference? Your business objectives and target audience will dictate this. Check that your conference does not clash with another event in your industry or nationally.*
- *Location of the conference - will your audience be from the UK, Europe or world wide? What ever country you decide upon you should also consider easy access for the delegates to attend, near an airport or train station, city centre of a venue in a secluded location?*
- *Type of venue suitable for the conference. Is it to be held in a conference centre, unusual venue, historical, academic venue or hotel the latter is important if accommodation is required? Details of finding the right venue, location and duration will be discussed in part 4.*
- *Setting the budget and having funds that is sufficient to fulfill the objects and make sure that the event is to the right level of standard. Details of setting a budget will be discussed in part 3.*
- *Marketing for the conference - how are you going to manage the creativity of the event? Will you, use an agency, or doing this internal? Creating the brand, theme, signage and graphics for all conference material including the programme and*

invitation. What is the invitation process, how is the conference going to be promoted? Will you use a production company for the presentation all this will be out lined in part 5.

- *Event Management and logistics – decide on whether you are going to do all this your-self, or just certain parts of the project or out source to an event management company. Event management logistics that needs to be considered include:*
 - *Putting together a Gantt chart showing time lines with action points, responsibility and critical dates*
 - *Invitation process to include delegate invitation and registration*
 - *Registration management - client lists*
 - *Travel arrangement*
 - *Accommodation*
 - *Liaison with venue to include:*
 - Room set up*
 - Audio Visual requirements*
 - Food and beverage*
 - Running order for breaks, luncheon, reception*
 - Booking accommodation if on site or hotel*
 - *Logistics of getting materials to the conference venue*
 - *Speaker management including co-ordination of speakers, presentation, hand outs*
 - *Production of delegate documentation including delegate packs and badges*

All the above will be covered in part 6

- *On site management to include a conference desk, registration, delegate packs, on site liaison with venue, speaker and guest management, security, health and safety all this will be outlined in part 7.*

Further articles on how to run a successful business event that has ROI will follow. To receive these valuable ideas and make sure that you do not miss any of the articles we will deliver them to your in-box free. The articles will be full of tips and ideas, to help you and your business in event management.

Reference reading:

John G Fisher - How to run a Successful Conference

Philip Calvert – Successful Seminar Selling