

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 offers a good 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 Part A, B, C
Conference on-site logistics
Review of the conference and follow up

Part 6A

Event Management and Planning Logistics for a Conference or Seminar ***Part A***

The previous fact sheets reviewed the corporate reasons for having a conference, and how to plan and market a successful conference. There can be many business reasons why a company should consider having a conference, not least is that events are an important part of the marketing mix. The event logistics and management is a large area to consider so we will cover this in 3 sections starting with the invitation process and delegate registration plus transportation.

The main check points to consider when planning and implementing event management for a seminar or a conference:

- ***In house or outsourcing the event management***

Whether you decide to do the whole event management and logistics in-house yourself or with your team or use an event company to assist in part or all the logistics and management of the event you will need to have a person responsible for the project management of the event. I will do a separate tip sheet on choosing an event company to manage an event.

- **Project Management**

Once the time and place of the conference or seminar has been decided it is very important to manage your tight deadlines to make sure all the processes, plans and deadlines are completed and that the schedule is adhered to.

Create a Gantt chart or time line schedule, start by working back from the event date, highlight dates and projects when they need to be started and completed. It is most important when setting the dates and actions that the person or team responsible is clearly shown. All of the logistics and management planning of the event should be included. Ensure that the invitation, marketing, logistics of the delegate registration as well as the production side and venue communications are all included and nothing is missed out or forgotten. The time line is one of the stepping stones to planning a successful event.

- **Invitation process**

- *The marketing and creativity side of the invitation process was covered in part 4 of tips; here we will concentrate on the process.*

- *The invitation is not only a way of inviting delegates but also a way to confirm name and contact address of potential delegates and to open a dialogue for further communications before and after the event.*

- *For this you need a database. Depending on the event this can be a database of your own employees, a prospect list from your CSR system, sales records, website inquiries about your products or services, and commercial lists (although these are not always successful as you cannot always know how clean and current they are). Third party lists from your partner or distributors, can also be used. Remember you need to invite far more people than you want to attend; there is often a 25% dropout rate.*

- *Software products are available on the market for the actual process of administering the attendees, and if you do several events a year it is worthwhile investing in a package.*

- *The invitation mailing should be creative and follow the theme of the event. It should encourage acceptance, and give the essential information an attendee requires before deciding to attend:*

- *Name, title, and address of delegate*
- *Date and location of event, map and rail/road/air connections*
- *Start and finish times*
- *Theme of the conference and why they should attend*
- *Guest speakers if famous or a renowned authority on the subject*
- *Personalisation from the conference sponsors*
- *Reply device, with space for delegate contact details and any special needs*

- *The timing of sending out the invitation is important and this should be built into your event plan and further reminders of the event should also be planned before the event and added to your time line. Certain audiences may require at least three months notice of the event, with reminders sent out to the undecided as you near the event date.*

- *Confirmation of attendance, this should be done immediately as you need to build up a communication channel to the delegate leading up to the event both to promote your company and also to reduce the inevitable drop-out rate.*

Communication should be regular and involve email messages, news letters telephone and further details on the programme, joining instructions, travel and accommodation details, hospitality arrangements and other relevant information you would like the delegate to receive before the event. If you are using web based registration you can add their own personal login and ability to communicate with other attendees and find out information about the event.

- *The registration system will be used to specify badges for the delegates. The badges themselves that can be created by the software package you are using and colour coordinated if required to show the different categories of delegates, sponsors, speakers, staff, exhibitors etc.*

The delegate attendee list will also be created from the registration list and can be analysed and produced as necessary. The contact list is most important if there is a crisis during the event and should be up to date and available to all those concerned in dealing with a situation if the needs arises.

- **Travel arrangements**

- *Depending on the event some delegates may be making their own way to the event and will require a map or link on how to find the venue and know the distances from bus, train, motorway and car parking facilities.*

- *Delegates flying to the event may require to be picked up from the airport and taken to the venue, or at least information on how to reach the venue from the port of entry. Depending on the event you might be responsible for organizing hostesses at the airport to meet and greet, and coach or private car pick up for VIP or foreign attendees. You will need to know the group size of attendees arriving on internal or international flights and arrange the method of pick up according to size of group. There are many excellent transportation companies used to picking up clients from airports and stations that have the vehicle suitable to the group size. It is important that you have informed the delegates beforehand about the pick up arrangements so that other passengers are not delayed. If the venue is near the airport then shuttle bus services can be advantageous.*

- It is as important to get the delegates there on time as it is to make sure that their return transportation is waiting for them (order at least 30 minutes before the conference ends) and they have the details correct for departure time and checkout process especially if flights are involved. For national day conferences bear in mind the length of the day: do not start too early say around 10:00hrs or finish too late at around 16:30 so that delegates have time to travel back and not have to leave the conference or seminar before it is finished.

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