

CREATING ROI : THE FUTURE OF ASSOCIATION MEETINGS

Association Forum Holiday Showcase 2008 -- December 16, 2008

Speaker: Jennifer Jones, Marketing and Communications Manager

SET YOURSELF APART -INCREASING YOUR ATTENDEES' ROI

An industry featuring multiple for-and non-profit educational offerings in a challenging economic climate requires attendees to choose between continuing education programs as development budgets decrease. Your organization is an asset and knowledge-leader in your industry [and if it isn't, there is much more work to be done!].

PLAY TO WHAT ATTENDEES WANT

[EDUCATION + INTERACTION]

USE THE TOOLS AVAILABLE TO EXECUTE A DYNAMIC EXPERIENCE

- 1. Don't Guess**
What are your goals? Measure the results of your post-conference survey against a detailed set of meeting objectives you determine in advance of your meeting. If your objective isn't sheer numbers, is it the quality of networking opportunities? The quality of educational sessions? Why do your attendees come to your meeting?
- 2. Continuously Reexamine Attendee Needs**
Use your post-conference survey to get the pulse on attendees and their perceptions, motivations and learning styles –and then implement changes where your members place the most priority and see the most room for improvement.
- 3. NEVER EVER EVER SAY, "Well, THAT'S HOW WE DID IT LAST YEAR"**
Innovation keeps attendees coming back -and it's what gets them talking to peers about their great experiences at your meeting! Keep your eyes and ears open to effective communication strategies and networking opportunities.

QUICK EASY AND CHEAP WAYS TO GROW YOUR MEETING

[ONCE YOU DETERMINE WHAT GROWTH MEANS TO YOUR GROUP]

- Leverage your familiarity with industry best practices and unbiased educational offerings with networking opportunities that start prior to kickoff and continue long after the closing reception.
- Take advantage of both traditional communication vehicles as well as Web 2.0 technologies, allowing you to create a meeting place before and after the meeting to generate interest and excite attendees. (announcements via facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter).
- Internet-based communications can be low-cost and extremely effective -vary your message so you find something that clicks in the mind of attendees, but don't bombard them to death. Research alternate announcement opportunities -associated industries, affiliated associations that are not a direct-competitor. The more avenues you take to reach a prospect, the more likely you are to pique their interest.
- Work with your sponsors to create engaging and unique networking opportunities. Look to the local community for inspiration: winery tastings/dinners, art gallery receptions, local tours.
- Think outside of the box : look to the grassroots community for potential communication strategies. These organizations typically have the least spending power, but the most ingenuity when it comes to communicating their message in an effective manner.
- FINALLY: Not every idea is universally applicable. Use your organization's mission/Vision/brand filters to determine if something is a good idea or just a novel idea.

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Speaker: Diane Barrera, MPH, RD Director, Professional Development, American Dietetic Association

Perceived and actual value in meeting attendance relies heavily on the core educational content offered. Over the past six years, our overall event evaluation data clearly indicates "educational offerings" and "continuing education/professional portfolio needs" as the primary decision factors for meeting attendance and funding among both employers and members.

In order to best meet attendee educational needs, we evaluate a variety of metrics when developing the program. The following is an overview of this process:

Create Value through Education

- Topic Determination
 - Utilize national learning need code data
 - Rank order the 9 primary codes and determine percent breakdown
 - Match program to percent range
 - Rank order the 150+ individual codes
 - Ensure top 10-20 codes are represented in key programming
 - All speakers required to be leading experts with national presentation experience
 - Previous ADA speakers must have evaluation scores of 3.8 out of 5.0 minimum
 - Committee can recommend/require speaker substitutions
 - Analyze the 5 year of history reports for all session topics to determine trends and advanced needs
 - Review previous 2 years of session lockouts
 - Look at trends over 2-3 years and build programming accordingly
 - Move sessions from Level 1-2-3 over that time for advanced knowledge
 - Build 7-9 core educational tracks that flow over all programming dates
 - Shows value for full program registration as opposed to single day
 - Consider aligning program to flow sessions across all days to keep interest

Create New Educational Opportunities

- Hot Topics
 - Develop sessions approximately one month in advance of meeting so programming is cutting-edge and fresh
 - Consider 1-2 sessions per day during the open programming
- Open Discussion/Open Space
 - Offer a session that is created by the attendees
 - Provide a topic and a few facilitators and attendees drive the content/discussion
- 90/10 approach
 - Develop 90% of the educational programming in advance and the remaining 10% is left for "on the fly" programming which can be developed up to the meeting
 - Allows for a creative edge to the meeting while maintaining the core educational principles for the event

Speaker: Stuart Meyer

Tips for Success

- **Attendee research tactics to better understand ROJ:**
 - Quantitative survey of all proposed themes, program topics and activities
 - On-site first-time attendee focus group
 - On-site repeat attendee focus group
 - Impromptu one-on-one attendee interviews
 - Post-meeting quantitative attendee evaluation

- **Creating a lasting impression which lives beyond the conference**
 - Focus on the "emotional value proposition" as much, if not more, than the practical value proposition
 - Behavioral economics teaches us that most people make decision based upon a emotion rather than logic
 - Know your audience
 - Capture the right feelings and emotions
 - Generate energy
 - Deliver the unexpected
 - Foster renewal

- **Create story-driven emotive conference themes**
 - The theme is a story that unfolds throughout the conference and reinforces the practical and emotional ROJ.
 - Keep it simple, relevant and memorable
 - Know your audience
 - Create the right tone and reinforce the association brand
 - Be creative and treat like a storyline
 - Cast your regular members and other respected figures as storytellers
 - Bring theme to life as multi-media story elements

- **The ROI of attendance is "the experience"**
 - Utilize the meeting site to "immerse" attendees in the theme and storyline
 - Bring the story alive at each turn through visual, audible and emotional cues
 - Invite non-attendees to tune into the story
 - Remember, your members can access education and networking opportunities anywhere
 - More than what attendees learn is how the meeting experience makes them feel
 - Transcend the ordinary, deliver the unexpected
 - Appeal to the mind, heart and soul
 - Create powerful memories
 - You are giving attendees something to talk about which creates invaluable word-of-mouth marketing for future meetings
 - A powerful experience helps reinforce engagement and brand loyalty

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." -*Maya Angelou*

