

EVENT PLANNING 101



A 10 POINT CHECKLIST



Things to consider ahead of
your next corporate event

If managed correctly, corporate events can be one of the most rewarding aspects of your marketing mix.

When planning an event, it's a given that you'll be keen to speak face-to-face with your customers or client base.

You may think it's merely about increasing sales, but it's important to spend time pre-planning and researching to ensure that you are making the most out of your marketing budget.

This practical guide consists of a ten-point checklist of pre-planning considerations which you may need to consider before deciding to sign up for any specific events, exhibitions or seminars.

We hope that you can use this as a beneficial tool to help you make the most of your next corporate event.



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1. DECIDE WHAT YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE



Before you dive into the deep end and sign yourself up for a wide range of corporate events and exhibitions, it's vital that you take some time to consider your pre-planning and preparation.

Corporate events can be costly and a significant proportion of your marketing budget so it's vital that you take the time to consider two questions;

- **What am I trying to achieve?**
- **Is this the best use of my budget?**

You need to be confident that you are choosing the right event for your business. Are you looking to meet new customers or clients? Are you trying to sell new products or services? Or is it just a brand awareness activity?

Once you've answered these questions, you can start to establish a strategy which will enable you to achieve maximum return on investment.

With events, you need to take a long-term view, so consider implementing a 3-5 year strategy to help you achieve your goals.

For instance, if you are selling a physical product, you may wish to start small, by attending local retail fairs before progressing onto the regional and then national exhibitions.

Don't put pressure on yourself to make the first event be a smash success. Corporate events are a dedicated skill and it takes practice to determine how you are going to sell your business face-to-face. Try to attend as many small events as possible so you can practice and refine your sales technique.



2. SET YOURSELF REALISTIC SMART OBJECTIVES

One you are confident that you know that you want to achieve from your corporate event, you need to establish some realistic, SMART objectives. This will allow you to benchmark the impact of your event and ultimately allow you to decide if it's been a success and worth the investment.

SMART stands for:

Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Relevant/Realistic
Timely

When you set your objectives, make sure that they are realistic. You still want to set yourself a reasonable challenge but if you choose to aim for unrealistic metrics, it's unlikely that you'll see a strong ROI.

Your objectives are the key to your evaluation because they will determine if you've managed to do what you set out to do.

Examples of SMART objectives can include;

- Number of customers met
- Number of contact details added to a database
- Set increase of traffic to your website
- Set increase in engagement via social media channels
- Follow up prospects within set time frame



3. WHO ARE YOUR CUSTOMERS?

Most companies will say that they attend corporate events because it's a great way to meet their audience. This is certainly true, but it's important to do your research so that you are 100% confident you know who your customers are.

You may think that you attract a certain target audience, but your data analytics may be saying something different. If there is a mismatch in ideas, then your events will fall flat as great event planning is all about the niche targeting of your audience.

Despite data analytics being easier than ever before, many firms still struggle to take the time to really understand who their customers are.

It's important that you take the time to examine your customer analytics - once you know who they are, you can target them much more effectively with your marketing efforts, giving you greater return on investment.



Make the most of your free Google Analytics account. This will provide you with the analytics to help you understand exactly where your customers are based, their demographics and their interests. It will enable you to understand how long they spend on your website and track their behaviour whilst doing so.

This data is invaluable and it will give you more options and a better understanding of their customer journey which can help significantly in event planning.

4. CAN YOUR INTERNAL RESOURCES HANDLE EVENTS?

Great events take time to organise.

Regardless of whether you're hosting a small workshop for a select group of people or a full blown exhibition, it's clear that you need to be able to dedicate the time and resource to ensure that it goes off without a hitch.

Before you confirm your attendance at any event, you need to ask yourself the following questions;

- Do you have the time and ability to plan an event (or plan to attend an event)?
- Can you spare the time needed to ensure that everything is fully prepared?
- Who will be responsible for loading the car and driving to the event venue?
- Will you have someone able to set up and manage your event, or will you need to do this as well as everything else?
- Can you spare the time away from your desk during the event itself – who will be covering your workload or answering the phone when you're not there?

You will also need to consider the time spent following up potential leads and contacting new prospects after the event concludes.

The easiest way to manage event planning is to have a dedicated strategy in place which will allow you to follow up prospective business leaders, whilst also catching up on the volume of emails which inevitably await your return.

Therefore, we offer a dedicated event management service – at Gatekeeper Communications we will arrange your event for you on your behalf, making it easier for you to focus on the work that you know how to do.

Before signing up to anything, you need to consider if your staff can manage the event properly; before, during and after

5. WHAT MARKETING MATERIAL WILL YOU NEED?

Once you have done your research and you know which event you want to attend, it's time to think about what marketing material you may require.

Events are about selling yourself to your target customer face to face, so depending on the style of event you may need to consider the following.

- Brochures / Flyers
- Banner stands / backdrop
- Table cloths
- Registration forms
- Advertising posters
- Magazines / Catalogs
- Customer contact cards
- Business cards
- Price Lists
- Products / Sample kits
- Laptop / Presentation slides
- Branded giveaways

Of course, this list isn't exhaustive, and you should plan each event individually.

Once you've decided what you need to take, you'll need to consider how timescales and budgets for creating the required materials.

You'll need to prepare your material in advance and if you're having items printed, you'll need to consider quantities required. It's very easy to over-order printed material, but they can date quickly so try to limit quantities - not only will it save you ££ but it's much better for the environment!

It's also wise to consider how you are planning to transport your marketing material to your event. Banner stands, table cloths and some leaflets may not seem like much to take, but if you drive a small car, they can take up much more room than you may think! In addition, you will also need to consider how you plan to carry your material from your car to your event space.

Another key consideration is what sort of event are you attending? If it's a trade show or exhibition, your stand will be the primary focus for your business so you want it to look as neat and tidy as possible.

If the event is 'shell scheme' i.e. you have side panels surrounding you, then you may wish to put up boards or advertising panels to showcase your branding.



But if you only have a table and a couple of chairs then you'll need to find ways to showcase your brand in a much smaller space. This is where branded table cloths and pop up banners are essential!

They can showcase your brand identity, promote your website URL and even a phone number, allowing you to clearly define your brand in a simple, yet effective way.

Don't forget your storage! You will want to keep your area looking neat and professional - no one wants to see tatty boxes lying around. At best it makes you look messy, at worst, they can be a trip hazard.

Perhaps consider investing in a small lockable cupboard (often available to hire) which you can use to store away items you're not currently using.



If you need help and support in deciding what material you need for your next event, please get in touch.

We can help you to plan your event and advise on the best marketing collateral to help you stand out from the crowd!



It's important to consider how you are going to let your customers know which events you'll be attending.

After all, they can't meet you if they don't know that you'll be there!



6. RAISING AWARENESS AMONGST CUSTOMERS



You've booked the event, and you've prepared your marketing material. Now it's time to let your audience know where you'll be!

We recommend taking a continuous drip feed approach to your pre-event PR activity. Starting at least 6 weeks prior, you want to start mentioning it on your social media channels regularly so that your customers will know to come and find you.

If you have a large database, make sure you email your customers to let them know where you'll be, and if you are planning on running any incentives for visitors to your event stand.

You may find that traditional PR activity such as press releases and blog posts are also a great way to raise awareness of the event date, location and your personal stand number (if applicable).

If it's an external event with its own event team, then ask them for their support in raising your profile. They may have created dedicated event graphics which you can use on your social media or your email signatures.

They should also be able to confirm any specific event hashtags and retweet/share any mentions on their social media platforms.

Corporate events will only work if you put in the effort. Those who continually share details of the event before, during and after, will see greater ROIs than those who don't publicise their attendance.



It's also wise to continue the PR push post-event. You can write blogs or feature articles to showcase what you learnt and who you met, as well as publish any photos that you took during the event.

The post-event marketing campaign is a great way to continue raising awareness of your brand, and remind customers that you were there.



7. TRACKING NEW BUSINESS LEADS

During an event or seminar, you will be continuously collecting people's personal contact details.

Are you confident that you can take these details quickly and store them away securely during a busy event?



Most organisations will confirm that they attend corporate events purely to benefit from the data capture. If you're attending a large, national event then it stands to reason that you can significantly increase your customer database.

But data capture isn't something which should be left to the last minute - after all, data capture is a huge part of the GDPR regulations which are now in place.

You will also need to think of the customer experience. In a busy exhibition hall, you have mere moments to collect a potential customer's details, therefore it's important to have a system which is quick and easy but most of all, secure!

There is no one-size fits all approach to data capture because each event will have it's own individual challenges and opportunities.



If your event is being managed by an external team, then ask them for their suggestions. They may have systems in place to share delegate details with you.



For large events or trade shows, data trackers or scanners can be a quick and effective option for data capture.

However, they can be costly which is why they tend to be limited to large events.

During the registration process, delegates will be asked to submit key information (such as name, email, job title, phone, company, URL). This data will be available for exhibitors to view via a tracking device which can scan a barcode on that delegates' personalised name badge.

The data in these handheld devices will be held by the event organisers who will supply you with the details within a day or two, typically by an encrypted spreadsheet.

For mid-sized events, an iPad or a tablet is a quick and easy way to track visitor contact details.

This is an easy way if you are looking to automate your data capture as you can integrate your contact forms with applications such as Google Sheets. This sends the data straight to your head office so organised teams can send welcome emails/texts to delegates before they've even left your stand!

However, it's important to note that if there are lots of people attending, you may struggle with Wi-Fi connectivity. Your event organiser may be able to offer additional Wi-Fi connectivity (albeit at a price).

Sometimes you can't go wrong with traditional pen and paper contact forms. If you are at a small event or workshop, this is likely to be your preferred choice.

All you need to do is create some branded registration cards which ask delegates to write down their contact details.

It's quick, easy and the most cost effective option, although you will need to invest in a LOT of pens as they tend to disappear very quickly.

You will also need to dedicate time post-event to manually add these contact names onto your preferred database..

If you are collecting personal data during your event, you must remember to consider the GDPR implications



8. CONVERTING POTENTIAL LEADS TO GENUINE CUSTOMERS

This is possibly the most important part of any event strategy. After all, there's no point in collecting more customer data if you're not going to do anything with it!

All businesses want to use their events to turn potential leads into full paying customers, but this part of your event strategy can be the most time consuming.

There's no right or wrong approach - after all, each business is completely different but the following recommendations are a guide to help you make the most of your ROI.

Contact leads promptly. There's nothing worse than receiving a cold-call email months later when you have no recollection of who that person is, or what your initial conversation was about.



Try to follow up all new leads within a few days (a week at most) – even if it's just a short 'nice to have met you' email or a LinkedIn request.



Thanks to advances in technology you can easily automate many of the straightforward ways of following up with delegates post-event.

Perhaps you want to simply thank them for meeting you at the event, or maybe you want to follow up a conversation with details about a specific product or service. Either way, you can set up your system to provide a "hello, nice to meet you" email as soon as the delegates details are entered into your database.

For those using data scanner pens, this can even be managed before the person has even left your stand!

It's important to remember not to rely solely on generic "nice to meet you emails". You should also add to this with a personalised follow up to build upon the relationship. It may seem lengthy and time-consuming but it's a proven method of improving your ROI as ultimately, people buy people.

Relationships culminated via corporate events may take a long time to convert to sales but the pay off is worth it if you make the effort.

This is why it's so important to continually benchmark all of your event-related marketing activity.



Top tip! If you are creating bespoke marketing material for a specific event, try to use individual contact details which will allow you to track any leads which are a direct result of your event.

For example - you could direct delegates to a dedicated landing page on your website (allowing you to measure visitors via your Google Analytics). Alternatively, you could set up a specific phone number or email address which is only given to delegates from that event.

You can use this data to track how many leads are contacting you following that specific event.

If



9. ON THE DAY TIPS & ADVICE

Be prepared

If you've done your research then you should know if the event is worth attending. Speak to the organisers, find out how many delegates are expected and what is included within your package. Take the time to ask as many questions as you can pre-event so you know what to expect when you turn up. Unrealistic expectations are usually the reason why businesses feel that events have failed.

Consider your stand design

If you have a dedicated exhibition stand (perhaps a shell-scheme or maybe just a table/chairs) then think about how it looks to visitors.

You don't want to look cluttered or untidy. If you are reusing marketing material, make sure that it's well maintained otherwise you may look unprofessional.

Your staff are your first impression

It may be the first time that a customer meets you face to face. This is why it's so important to send the right staff members along. You need people who are optimistic, happy to chat to strangers and will represent your brand correctly.

A key failure of many business events is down to sending the wrong teams to man the stands.

Take inspiration from others

If you're in an exhibition hall with lots of other businesses, take the time to explore their stands and see what is and isn't working well. Whilst no one wants to be a copycat, you shouldn't be afraid to take inspiration from others.

Top tip! If you have a pull up banner NEVER put the contact details at the bottom - either furniture will be placed in front of it, or people will stand in the way, rendering it useless.

Always put key contact information at the top/eye level

Check your insurance

Most public events will require you to have adequate Public Liability Insurance. You may need to provide a copy of your insurance certificate to the event organisers or the venue.

You may also be asked by external event teams to complete a health and safety form and a risk assessment. Take the time to think through all aspects so that you are properly protected in case anything does go wrong.

Take enough staff with you

If you're attending for the first time, you may feel that it's overkill to take two or three staff members with you to man your stand. But you need to ensure that your stand is always covered so that visitors do not have to wait.

On a practical level, having several staff members means that the stand is covered when you want to go for a short coffee break or have a longer, more private conversation with a hot prospect.

Assign roles to each person

There's nothing worse than seeing someone look aimless or lost during an event.

If your staff are representing your business, ensure that they each have a dedicated role to play. Give each person a specific task to do - it may be that one person is responsible for managing logistics whilst another is responsible for capturing the data of visitors.

The exact tasks will depend upon the size and scale of the event, but it will make the event much easier to deal with if everyone knows what they are supposed to be doing.



10. HOW TO EVALUATE YOUR EVENT



If you have already decided what your aims and objectives are prior to the event, then it's much easier to determine if it's been a success.

There is no right or wrong way to evaluate a corporate event but it's important that you do attach some ROI metrics to it.

Events are different to other marketing initiatives as the pay off can take much longer to see tangible results.

If you are a consumer manufacturer then it can be easy to determine an events success - it can be simply down to how many products you sold or how many contact details you gained.

But in the B2B sphere, it's about building relationships with your audience and increasing your brand awareness and reputation. You may find that you've made initial sales or contacts but it's what you do with them that truly counts.

There are numerous ways in which you can evaluate the impact of your event.

- Did you sell a certain number of products during the event?
- Have you increased your database?
- Did you speak to the "right" people?
- Have you seen an increase in traffic to your website?
- Did you make use of social media?
- Has your pre/post-event content been successful?



Once you've started to take a look at the specifics relating to these questions you can start to gauge a feeling for how successful the event was,

You may wish to conduct a survey with your customer base. You should have the contact emails for the delegates that visited your stand, so why not email them asking for any feedback. If they can provide you with positive testimonials then it's further evidence that the event worked in the way that you intended.

If however, you feel that your post-event metrics were not as strong as you had hoped, then it's important to use it as an experience to learn from. It doesn't mean that all corporate events are doomed to fail, it simply means that that specific event wasn't right for you.

Perhaps you didn't do enough pre-preparation, or maybe the wrong team members were sent to act on your behalf. Or maybe the event organisers didn't live up to their promises. There could be a variety of factors but it's always important to learn from what worked well, and understand how you can make improvements for next time.

If you would like to know how to evaluate the impact of your corporate event, then please get in touch. We can advise on how to attach key metrics to your data, allowing you to determine a final return on investment.



NEED HELP WITH YOUR NEXT EVENT?

Hopefully this guide has given you an insight into the complexities behind event management in an easy to understand way.

As you can see, there's a lot more involved than simply printing a pop up banner and a few leaflets but that's where Gatekeeper Communications are here to help.

Our experienced event management team will not only help you to pick the best exhibition or conference for your business needs, but we will be there every step of the way, ensuring that you receive the maximum return on investment.

We can help you to identify the right event for your business, establish a full PR and marketing strategy to help you make the most of it and we can also help you to evaluate it's impact on your overall business.

For more information about our experienced event management services, please get in touch.

Contact:

Amy Dawson,
Director,
Gatekeeper Communications

Email:

amy@gatekeepercommunications.com

Tel:

07857 433665

Website:

gatekeepercommunications.com

