



What Makes a Good Business Event?

One of my business partners thinks that I have too many opinions so in this instance I will limit it to two:

1. Running a great event (regardless of its type, purpose or theme) is good for business.
2. Many people would consider themselves to be an expert on travel just because they have been on holiday lots of times. The same applies to events. However, very often expertise in the head does not translate to excellence in practice!

One of the distinct advantages we have in the Podiem team is that we are able to put ourselves in the customer's shoes, especially if it is a business event. My two partners used to be my clients, and very demanding ones at that! We are fixated, in the first instance, with the need to know the purpose of the event and what the real expectations and outcomes are for all the stakeholders. On many occasions we have discovered that the initial brief doesn't really reflect the complete requirement, which is understandable when this is not a core activity within the firm or organisation. An event is usually part of a wider communications plan or activity so it is vital to keep bringing it back to purpose. You would be surprised how many people think it is a good idea to have an event but have not interrogated the reasons why. Like any other spend an organisation makes, there must be a return on that investment and so the outcomes must be clearly defined at the outset and all future planning activity channelled towards delivering those. Along with the 'why' it is worth considering the four other "W's".

Whoare you trying to reach?

Whatare the key messages, content or calls to action? Who is going to deliver them and how are they going to do that?

Whenis the most appropriate time to have your event? Don't forget to make allowances for holiday periods (including half-terms) and other events taking place that are targeting the same audience. Bear in mind that holiday periods also impact event promotion. Choose the day of the week and time of the day carefully as well, to suit your audience best (some sectors like early mornings, some don't)

Where is the ideal venue. Not only should all the practical elements be considered in terms of where the target audience is coming from but also the number of people likely to attend, the preferred seating arrangement, catering requirements, technical requirements, parking options etc. Often forgotten is the 'personality' of the venue – what does your venue choice 'say' (in unspoken terms) about your event?

So, what are the fundamental dos and don'ts?

Do

- Deliver what you say you are going to, both in terms of content and timing.
- Dare to be a little different – familiarity can breed boredom. I'm not suggesting that you should do something outrageous but try to be innovative. For example, speakers can be fresh but they must also be reliable.
- Do the simple things well – a lot of the attendee event experience happens before the attendee even gets there. Make the event information easy to find and understand, make the booking process simple, provide information on how to find the venue, where to park and send a reminder out in

advance of the event. At the event, provide name badges that can be read from a distance, have relevant and useful event material available if appropriate eg delegate lists, agendas, presentations, have clear signage and get the temperature in the room right!

- Keep event communication simple and to the point. Try to create an event title/brand that is catchy but also says what it is. What is the hook for people to attend? Ensure that this is up front and central in all promotion, whether it is your speakers, your venue or your subject.
- Measure your success – ask your attendees and suppliers for their feedback – think of it as free consulting.
- Implement the suggestions gained through your evaluation – only a fool doesn't learn from their mistakes.

Don't

- Fill space in your programme for the sake of it – We are all busy and our time is precious. A sharp, valuable 2 hour event beats a drawn out 4 hour event every time. Our blunt truth to clients is “you don't go to Podiem events to put your day in”!
- Leave everything to the last minute – try to plan ahead as much as possible.
- Forget to keep a constant eye on your budget – this is the backbone to most of your decisions.
- Be afraid to ask for help and advice from your suppliers – it is in their interest for your event to be a success.

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