



Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: To Market To Market

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Welcome

Marketing is a key element for successful meetings.

Recently, when I was delivering my interactive workshop, 180 Ways to Transform Your Meeting, one of the top "concerns" about meetings was their ability to serve up and deliver on the marketing promise.

This issue of Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events takes a look at pre- and post-meeting marketing to create innovative meetings.

Sue

[Sue Tinnish](#)

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When to Market

A plethora of information exists about marketing. This issue of T.I.M.E. takes a slightly different perspective. Within this issue, I will provide an overview of pre-event marketing tools but delve into "less discussed" ideas about post-event marketing.

Why post event marketing? Well, first, I think there is plenty of great information already in existence about marketing. See my suggestions for reading.

More importantly, I often say, "Once is not enough." when talking about increasing a

meeting's effectiveness. In other words, one single meeting is unlikely to create change or impact if everyone goes back to the same old environment.

How long will people remain jazzed after a motivational speaker if after the meeting they return to place where employees are not valued?

How long will a sales force stay focused on a new product offering if they return to the same compensation package or the same customer service challenges?

How long will people remember your message from a meeting when they are barraged by thousands of other messages after returning from your meeting?

How long can you capture a share of your customer's mind (and wallet) after an event, if they don't have your message reinforced?

So, **yes**, it is important to market your meeting or event. But it is also important to market your meeting's message before, during and after your meeting.

Advertisers Know

Advertisers know that it takes numerous exposures to create awareness and brand recognition.

Your marketing should "hit" your participants and attendees multiple times before the meeting. And to insure retention and awareness, you should plan to create touchpoints **after** the meeting that reinforce the meeting's message.

For pre-event marketing, your arsenal should contain the following tools:

1. Telemarketing
2. Advertising
3. Fax on Demand
4. Brochures
5. Save the Date Postcards
6. Email blasts
7. Pre-event direct mail
8. On line directories and calendars
9. Electronic newsletters (look for opportunities to advertise, publish articles, or post your event on their calendar)
10. Articles written by speakers
11. Press releases
12. Bulletin boards and newsgroups
13. Websites. Use a link to a special page on your site so you can track the number of people hitting your site due to pre-event publicity
14. Links to other websites (convention center site, convention & visitors bureau, hotels, etc.)
15. Strategic use of sponsors (websites & other resources)
16. Discussion boards
17. Scheduled online chats

18. On line surveys
19. Listservs
20. On line registration
21. Marketing to affinity groups

For some excellent ideas on marketing, buy the book [Guerrilla Marketing Weapons](#): 100 Affordable Marketing Methods for Maximizing Profits from Your Small Business

or look into [Priceless: Turning Ordinary Products](#) into Extraordinary Experiences

or for thoughts on positioning, consider [Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind](#)

Marketing 101

It's often starting with the right questions that gets you to the right solutions.

Marketing is all about positioning and repackaging the message. Start with the basic questions:

- What is the goal of the meeting or event?
- What are the objectives?
- Who should attend?
- What are the benefits to the attendees?

The repackaging and positioning includes the fun, creative element. But creativity cannot cover poor underlying design.

I use two questions when evaluating the positioning and packaging of an event.

WIIFM: I often discuss the importance of tuning in to that adult radio station WIIFM or What's In It For Me. When your customer, your internal or external participant, reads what you have published about a meeting, they are asking themselves, "What's in it for me to attend this meeting?" Unless you can clear this first hurdle in grabbing people's attention, their energy and desire to attend the meeting will be limited.

and

So What: Keep asking the question, So What, until you feel that you have drilled down to the core benefits to your attendees.

Apply these tests to every marketing piece you do. And don't forget elements like:

- Agendas
- Registration Materials
- Workshop Titles
- Evaluation Forms

Throughout all these marketing pieces continue to demonstrate to your participants what are **their** benefits. Remember your selling benefits not features!

I love this idea I read from Bill Bachrach and Anne Bachrach. They suggest that conference organizers encourage their speakers to send personal letters to each attendee. These personalized letters describe the benefits of attending the program -- thereby answering the WIIFM and So What question for attendees.

Increasing Conference Attendance

Top 10 Tips to Increase Conference Attendance

Written by Al Lautenslager (c) 2003

1. Create persistent, automatic emails to inform, educate, sample and entertain potential attendees. I recommend two per week starting 3 months before registration cut off.
2. Focus on PR. Spread the news about your event anywhere and everywhere - local publications, national publications, members publications, trade publications, personal newsletters, etc.
3. Utilize Viral Marketing. Ask potential attendees to send in 5 people and contact information who they think would be interested in attending and ask them to send out the soliciting email to two others not included in the 5.
4. Use a hook. Offer a free report, e.g. "How to gain more out of your conference attendance," or "Top 10 ways to budget for your conference attendance."
5. Planned downtime at unexpected hours, e. g. a three hour lunch break.
6. Have a reception, coffee or informal gathering with the speakers after their presentation and after their book signings.
7. Have a pre-conference contest with the winner to be announced at the conference.
8. Open mic night for entertainment or to address management in an open forum.
9. Random give-aways: gift certificates for the purchase of anything at conference, meals, merchandise, speaker's books and tapes, room service, amenities, etc.
10. Tell attendees to send in their photograph to be included next to their contact information in the attendee list.

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Post Event

How can a message be lasting? How can you create some legs on which it will continue to move?

Certainly, one meeting, one speech, one episode is not enough. The onus is on the organizers to "reach out and touch" their attendees (or at least create the structures to do that) beyond the meeting to increase the life of the message.

What are some things you can do to reiterate and reinforce the messages and the value in your meetings and events?

- **Call to action (with accountability and follow-up)** during the meeting. (For some ideas on how to create this call to action in a meeting, email Sue by clicking here [Call to Action](#) or write to stinnish@ameritech.net)
- **Old-fashioned management** Its up to the stakeholders to further the message after the meeting is over. But consider how "valuable" and "consultative" you will appear if you build this task into the meeting planning timeline.
- **Ecommerce** Offering additional books or resources through your on-line store. Or use a program like Amazon's affiliate program to send out suggested reading materials. You will be building your revenue stream and creating another touchpoint.

Generally, people are always looking for information from other attendees on --

- **Sharing best practices**
- **Peer to Peer learning** through the sharing of fellow attendees' experiences and comments

And their are a myriad of ways to accomplish this --

- **Email messages/blasts**
- **Bulletin Boards** Possibilities to consider are phpBB or 22Forum both which are open-source bulletin board packages.
- **On-line Discussion Boards** Since 1995, the National Institute for Literacy has offered online discussion lists offering thousands of literacy stakeholders opportunities to discuss the literacy field's critical issues; share resources, experiences, and ideas; ask questions of subject experts; and keep up-to-date on literacy issues.
- **Post event surveys** I have used on-line survey tools offered by Zoomerang.com, SurveySuite, and Websurveyor.com
- **Listserv** A listserv is a communication tool that offers its members the opportunity to post suggestions or questions to a large number of people at the same time. When you submit a question or something that you want to share to

the listserv, your submission is distributed to all of the other people on that list. There are many choices including Listserv or Topica.

- **Blogs**

More on Blogs in the next section. This web tool has some exciting promises for meetings.

Blogs

Weblogs or blogs are regularly updated online logs usually with links to related content. Blogs are one of the Internet's fastest growing features.

Blogs are easy to create. The May issue of Inc's listed some of the software providers including Blogger (recently acquired by Google), Movabe Type, Trellix and Userland.

Most blogs have not been focused on business content (although that's changing). Blogs have multiple uses in business and could lead to some innovation related to meetings.

Chris Ashley writes in his article, *Weblogs: A Swiss Army Website?*, "Weblog software and the Weblog model of content production...are proving to be increasingly useful and powerful... These areas include content, information, and knowledge management; community building; publishing and journalism; teaching, learning, and collaboration; and course management systems."

Meetings are all about information, community building, teaching, learning, collaboration. Blogs may be the perfect tool to help you with content production.

First, let me review some of the "versions" of blogs in business.

First, blogs can be internally focused or focused outside your company or association. If you operate an intranet, then an intranet blog opens up communications within the company. Internet blogs provide for improved communications between the company and the marketplace (e.g., customers).

In their book, [We Blog: Publishing Online with Weblogs](#), authors Paul Bausch, Matthew Haughey and Meg Hourihan, categorize business weblogs in the following ways:

- Workgroup blogs
- Project-based blogs
- Individual blogs
- Extranet blogs

The Valuable Blog

What's the Value of a Blog?

Websites operate in a one-way publishing mode -- information is disseminated out.

Blogs allows for two-way communication. People from a meeting can share and publish information.

With two-way communication, what happens next is...

Blogs build alignment around common goal. If the meeting is centered around a workgroup and their project, blogs allow for the clear communication of the goal, provides a space for team members to share their feelings and expectations, and build a sense of team spirit.

Blogs can be a resource. By serving as a repository for documents, people can share and benefit from other's knowledge. Blogs can allow you to post questions and create threaded discussions.

Blogs give attendees a new way to participate after the meeting. Blogs offer a new level of participation is meaningful for many people. A blog provides an outlet to communicate ideas and questions with the meeting participants at large.

Also...

Blogs are quick. Weblogs can be updated easily. Weblogs don't require web development firms or IT personnel. Thus, content can be fresh because you can now do the work yourself. In the meeting world, meeting minutes can be recorded in real time on the blog, or posted immediately following a meeting. This ensures that minutes are easy to find and read.

Blogs are searchable. A weblog can be easier to search than e-mail or a traditional intranet site. Depending on the weblog tool in use, posts (when created) can be categorized or assigned metadata, making the rediscovery of that information easier later on.

Blogs allow for easier distribution of information. This benefit is realized in two ways:

1. E-mailing a file attachment isn't the most efficient way to distribute files over the local network. With a group weblog, you can upload the file once to a central location and then announce it with a post and a link. The file can be accessed directly from this central location or downloaded, if necessary, by individuals at a convenient time.
2. Blogs can serve as single repository for documents with versioning control. With the ability to search the weblog's contents, anyone can easily locate the latest information. For smaller meetings, where groups are constantly working on documents, its easy in a weblog to locate a specific document without needing to remember its location on the file server.

Blogs can capture essential details. Over the course of a long project, complete with lots of meetings, the project blog can serves as a record of the team's accomplishment, and provide a project diary that can be analyzed to help improve future projects.

Blogs can supplement corporate messages. Individual blogs can also supplement meetings and messaging. Imagine the internal individual blog of a charismatic CEO. In addition to those Friday afternoon pep talks, what if the CEO was constantly communicating with the organization through her weblog?

Blogs, in conjunction with a websites, offer benefits for external customers too:

Blogs can highlight the newest news. A weblog becomes the roadmap to what's new and interesting on your site. By frequently posting and linking to what's happening internally on your Web site, you make it easier for people to find the newest content. In this way, a weblog is similar to a What's New page.

Blogs provide a consistent location for news and information. With a weblog on your home page, you provide visitors with a consistent place to find all the latest and most important news about your product, service, or meeting.

Great information like this is contained in [We Blog: Publishing Online with Weblogs](#), especially Chapter 8.

If you want to explore more about blogs, here are additional resources for you:

[Blog On: Building Online Communities...](#)

[The Weblog Handbook: Practical Advice on](#) Creating and Maintaining Your Blog

Freebies: Living Examples

FREEBIE:

Sylvia Clark, a Field and Channel Marketing Manager in Cisco's Enterprise Management Business Unit, brought the power of Enterprise Blogger to Cisco. Below, Sylvia shares her thoughts about her blogging experience.

How did it occur to you to bring weblogs into Cisco? What were you hoping to accomplish?

"I was getting frustrated with communication between product teams and marketing groups because we have so many meetings—one or two a week for each product—and we had no good way to track progress and action items. A blur of e-mail was too scattered to really keep on top of important and time-critical projects.

So, 18 months ago, I thought Blogger would really help us solve the problem of having non-technical people daily updating their teams. Program managers began posting meeting minutes and other updates on their team Web pages. "

More FREEBIES I am ready to go blogging myself. If you want to hear about my lessons learned, send an e-mail to Stinnish@ameritech.net or click here [Sue Goes Blogging](#).

Future T.I.M.E.

Thank you to the new friends and colleagues I met in Pittsburgh. I had a great time speaking at their educational conference.

Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events will be accepting limited advertising. If you are interested in using this e-newsletter as a way to reach a targeted audience, please e-mail Ron Hopkins at rhopkins@ameritech.net for more details. [Or Click Here](#)

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T.I.M.E. Gone By

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