



Are You Ready? 2013 is Just Around the Corner

By Joanne Ireland, President of Ireland Presentations

In an ideal world, where everything goes smoothly and you have time to think, plan and strategize, your marketing and tradeshow plan would be developed months in advance: objectives set, shows decided, space secured, and budget in place. By now, you would be only adjusting your sales messages, internal planning meetings are scheduled on everyone's calendar, booth designed and layout decided, demos identified, equipment planned for and there's already been lots of thought about driving traffic to your booth. Now you only need to use the last couple of months of the year to ensure that all the details – pre-show marketing activities, tweaking the logistics, finalizing show staff and travel arrangements - are all in place. In an ideal world, everything works flawlessly and on schedule – planning in advance at its best.

For most of us, that's not reality. Rather, the last 10 months of the year have been a blur: new campaigns and shows come up at the drop of a hat; old shows co-locate with others, morph into something entirely different or go away altogether. Your product mix changes, new products and features are ready to launch, new executives come on board and the messaging suddenly changes, your sales strategy evolves, and new competitors come onto the scene. It makes no sense to do too much planning in advance. However, the time has come to firm up plans for 2013, and there is no better time than now.

During the last few months of the year as things wind down and the holidays loom, without the constant pressure to perform on a daily basis, you need to take the time to think strategically and tactically. And this is true even if you don't know precisely what events you will be doing but you know you need to do them – whether it's an industry tradeshow, product launch, customer event, user meeting, internal strategizing meeting or a combination of them all! Now is the perfect time to set expectations and position your company to take advantage of emerging opportunities.

If you don't have your 2013 marketing plan already outlined, budget detailed and approved, you are faced with planning in the midst of uncertainty. How to do this? First, plan and budget the programs or marketing campaigns that you know you would like to do or at least plan to attend. Now look at the gaps and think creatively of how you can continue to stay in front of customers and prospects through other avenues including high-touch events. Is there anything left in your 2012 budget today? Plan to use it before it's gone on January 1! What company-specific events, such as user group meetings, customer advisory board, sales kickoffs, offsite planning meetings and the like should you look at? Do you have a technical support group that needs to get together to do some brainstorming, or even meet face-to-face for the first time? Now is the time to look at and lock in dates, get them onto executives' calendars early and make sure to avoid awkward timeframes such as quarter-end, holidays, competing events and vacations.

Finally, take a look at what your competitors or other industry trend-setters are doing and what they are attending. Perhaps there are up-and-coming shows that have not proven themselves yet – see if there is a way to get to that show as a registered attendee, but also do a small company event in conjunction with it. This allows you to not only “scope out” the show but also reach some of the attendees to gauge their level of interest and business concerns.

Keep in mind that face-to-face events can be one of the most cost-effective means of building awareness around your company and product. Recent studies show that more than 80% of conference and tradeshow attendees can influence buying decisions. Remember, too, that buying and selling are not the only activities that take place at events. Important contact with industry leaders, relationships with potential partners, strategic alliances, and just plain relationship-building take place during these events, so the cost is often insignificant in comparison to the results.

This is the time that you and your team should be strategizing and planning. Take the time to go through this exercise now, so you don’t have to scramble at the beginning of the year. A little bit of planning now will help ensure you get the choice spots, you won’t have to divert budget from other activities, and you can plan out a story line that will build with each succeeding event.

About the Author:

Joanne Ireland, a 20+ year veteran of the meeting and event planning industry, is Founder and President of Ireland Presentations, a meeting, conference and event planning company based in San Francisco. Joanne is one of San Francisco’s leading consultants in planning, coordination & management of conferences, meetings & events. Her expertise is design, project standards/content, conceptualization & design of project strategy, and contract negotiations. Joanne and her team continue to produce successful events and meetings for a wide range of corporate and non-profit clients both large and small, domestically and abroad. More about Joanne and Ireland Presentations can be found at www.irelandpresentations.com.

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