



## Building Attendance For Your Events

By Joanne Ireland, President, Ireland Presentations Inc

You are organizing the event of the year. What's your worst nightmare? No one shows up.

So whether you are organizing a conference, customer event or a tradeshow, it's often what you do before (way before) the event that makes it a success—building attendance.

**(1) Know your attendees.** This is key, and depending on who they are, it determines how you go about your plan of building attendance. Existing or past customers, those already on your prospect lists or easily identifiable members of organizations or industry groups are relatively easy to reach and target. If you are after a more undefined group, or you want to create general interest in your organization, service or products, you will have to cast a wider net, but it would still help to be able to describe who you are after.

**(2) Give them a (very) good reason to come see you.** Once you know who your attendees should be, you should start asking your team: why should/would they attend? If they are already at the event, conference or trade show, why would they seek you out among the hundreds of other participating exhibitors? If they have not decided to attend, how do you make it their main reason to do so? Once you decide how to attract them, whether it's a sneak peek at a special product, a keynote speaker, or a meeting with your CEO, strengthen the commitment—have a mechanism for getting the date into their calendar, make an appointment, give them a voucher to come redeem something, email reminders and updates. Create the anticipation.

**(3) Tell everyone who matters about it.** So you have a not-to-miss hook. It's time to tell the world about it. Send mailers, postcards, updates. Create material that your entire organization can use – words, pictures, handouts, emails. Get your sales force, support staff, administration personnel to give it to everyone they come in contact with.

**(4) Broadcast it to the world.** Effective use of the media can be very rewarding. Members of the press love information, especially if you are doing something special that makes you stand out from the crowd—hundreds of exhibitors are introducing the world's best products, but you are doing it with a high school band! Guess who gets mentioned. And remember some things are free—your industry magazines' events calendar, the local papers where your event is taking place, the city or state's business newspaper, the show media. And don't forget the bloggers in your industry.

**(5) WOMM.** The old word-of-mouth marketing now has a new name—social media. If your target (see #1 above) is reachable through social media, use it. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs. Create a buzz online. If not, do it the old fashioned way. Direct mail, radio, news releases. Do it early, often, vary the material to keep it interesting, but keep focused on the message.

(6) **Be a good host.** You promised a lot. Now plan to deliver. Train your booth/event staff on who and what to expect, how to deliver your message, what to focus on. Tell them what you promised the attendees – a noted keynote, content, training, a preview to a new product or application. Nothing is more disappointing to an attendee than feeling that they took time from their busy schedule, and possibly paid money, and didn't get something of substance in return. If you want them back again, give them what you promised at this one.

(7) **Keep sending the message.** An event should only be one major effort in a long stream of marketing activities. Have a follow up plan, so that after the event, the marketing continues uninterrupted. You should have prepared news releases, tweets, editorials, for use during the show and afterwards. Hundreds of news releases are sent before an event. Much fewer afterwards—this is your chance to break through. While on site, plan to attract media, load them with press packages and material, give them special treatment so you will get special treatment. And, often overlooked, ask the show organizers for a mailing list of attendees (some provide, some don't, some charge for this), VIPs and members of the press who were present and those who registered but did not attend—these last ones would love a “sorry we missed you” message.

You are now well on your way to a great event. When you have had time to catch your breath, spend a few minutes contemplating plans for an overcapacity conference attendance, an oversubscribed event or the long lines of people heading to your booth.

**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, meeting & 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](http://www.irelandpresentations.com).

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