

Ten Tips to Market your Special Event

By: Carol E. Weisman

Carol Weisman is the president of Board Builders, a management consulting firm based in St. Louis. Board Builders specializes in board training, team building, special event planning and board retreats.

Making money is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to having a successful special event. In addition to raising revenue, they are great for raising visibility, attracting long term donors and clients and promoting volunteerism. Here are a few tips to get make the most of your event:

1. Commitment Make sure you have buy-in from your board members. If they don't support your event, why should an outsider? Ask for a firm commitment to buy or sell tables, a certain number of tickets etc. Do not embark on a special event if you can't raise at least 50% of the cost from within. Keep track of promises and report results. Friendly, good spirited competition should be encouraged.

2. Never sell a ticket, always sell a table. Package your event in such a way that there is benefit in buying 10 tickets rather than one. With a table for ten, offer preferred parking, additional raffle tickets, a place in a program book, a sign on the table. If you have a raffle, sell tickets \$5.00 for one or six for \$25.00. Offer different levels of sponsorship; platinum, gold, silver, etc.

3. Community Fluent. Check out what is being done in your community. If you are already inundated with golf tournaments, have a country western party. If you are in a small community, find out if there is another group having an event the same day and schedule accordingly. Beware of scheduling on religious holidays or Father's or Mother's Day.

4. Find an unusual venue. Everyone is curious how the rich live. Ask someone to donate his or her home. Provide appropriate security. Have a prom in the high school gym. An empty airplane hanger or unfinished building is perfect for an auction. Be creative. Have a hard hat party before the opening of a new building.

5. Find a corporate underwriter and treat them like gold. Use their name in all of your public relations efforts including press releases, posters, flyers, public service announcement talk show appearances and media contacts. Ask your

corporate sponsor to use their contacts to promote your event. Honor the C. E. O. that day or evening. Take lots of photos. Ask your corporate underwriter to include them in their in house publications.

6. Visual Aid. Pick a high-visibility item to promote your event. Find someone to donate these items and imprint them with your organization's name and address, the name of your event and your slogan. Be sure to put your phone number in large letters. Mugs, water bottles, unusual T-shirts, and posters are just a few ideas.

7. Wholesale is good, free is better. Everything from invitations to auctions items; decoration and advertising can be found for free with the right person asking. Find out who on your board does business with these firms, and then have them ask. One friend of mine had an enormously successful, sell out fashion show, but after all of the bills came in, the total profit was \$24.00! He had paid full retail for every item.

8. Identify at least two "point people" for media appearances. Make sure they bring something different to the table. Two middle aged white men in the same profession are as interesting as white bread and Mayo. Mix a businessman and a client. Share your story and your successes.

9. Short Slogan. Create a short, catchy slogan to sum up your event's theme. Try including a call to action in your slogan such as "Walk for Kids." Include the name of your agency on all literature i.e. The Arthritis Foundation invites you to the 10th annual Silver and Gold Ball.

10. Say thanks you. Say it often, say it in writing and say it in public. Make public thanks short and sweet. Always write out who is to be thanked. It will save you hours of groveling when

Board Builders

someone is forgotten. Give major corporate or individual donors a clever rather than expensive thank you gift. Make it something to display in

their office with your name.

Most of all have fun. Appreciate the diversity on your board and ask people to giving according to their talents. A businessperson with lots of contacts should not spend time addressing a thousand envelopes, nor should your shyest board member be asked to call for auction items. Make everyone a star by asking what they most want to do and what they definitely enjoy. Structure a success for your board members, your community and most importantly, your clients by a carefully planned marketing strategy.