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The Seven Habits of Highly Productive Trade Show Managers

By Dave Egan

What separates highly productive people from the rest of the population? Is it genetics? A work ethic, hammered into them since their first lawn-mowing job at age 11? Or is it a learned behavior?

The truth is probably somewhere in the middle. Some may be born with it, some may have had it thrust upon them, and for others it remains a daily practice, struggling toward the ideal of greater productivity.

As a trade show manager you are, almost by default, a multi-tasker. When you're in the office, there's the "regular" work to be done, in addition to the piles of forms that need to be completed and returned for upcoming shows and events. Equipment and services must be ordered. There's travel to be planned, messaging to be determined, booth graphics to proof, airline and hotel reservations to make, meetings to be organized, scheduled and held. And from those meetings – almost inevitably – comes more stuff to do.

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Let's focus on our definitions here: being more productive doesn't mean getting more stuff done (although that's as close as some people ever get). Instead, it means getting more of the right stuff done. And that's where a lot of people fail: by not focusing on what needs to get done, in order to meet your own – or your organization's – objectives.

So where do you start? Some people might suggest a trip to the office supply store for boxes and folders. And while this may be a good idea, that's really organization, not productivity. Chances are, too, that organizing your desk or office isn't the most important matter you should be attending to just now.

For answers, we turned to Tony Wong, Founder of [Digital Onion](#), a California-based project management consultancy. Wong offered these suggestions on how trade show managers can increase productivity:

- 1) Work backwards from goals to milestones to tasks (break big jobs into smaller chunks).
- 2) Stop multi-tasking.
- 3) Be militant about eliminating distractions.
- 4) Schedule times to check your email.
- 5) Use the phone when it's more efficient (don't hold conversations via email).
- 6) Work on your own agenda (don't let other people dictate your schedule).
- 7) Work in 60 to 90 minute intervals (your brain's actually still working while you're taking a break).

There's very little in Wong's list about getting your own work done. Instead, he focuses on how to avoid procrastination and distractions that keep you from getting your own work done. A study by [Dr. Gloria Mark](#), a Professor at the University of California Irvine, found that white collar employees are interrupted, on average, every 11 minutes. That's why it's imperative to rid yourself of the distracting people and things that constantly conspire to throw you off track, then stay focused on Step #6: Working on your own agenda.

According to [another study](#) (this one by a psychiatrist at King's College London University), constant emailing and texting reduces a person's mental capabilities by an average of 10 points on an IQ test (5 points for women and 15 points for men). But then, the women reading this already knew that. 

Best Practices in Floor Management: What to Do When Exhibitors Break the Rules

By Kenya McCullum

Show organizers put a great deal of work into trying to ensure that every event goes off without a hitch. And although they may cross every T and dot every I in order to make the show go smoothly, there is one thing that they can never really predict: rule breakers.

Whether they mean to or not, some people who come to a show may do something that breaks the rules of the event. And when that happens, the show organizer has to make sure these issues are addressed promptly.

"The floor manager's main job is to try to keep things fair, reasonable and safe, and to provide an environment where everyone has an equal shot at putting their products and services in the best light possible," said Dave Poulos, CEO of Granite Partners. "So, when you see somebody acting in an unsafe manner, or putting things in the way that detracts from someone else's display or sales pitch, you have to play the diplomat/policeman."

There are several ways that show managers can balance their roles of policeman and diplomat, depending on the nature of the infraction. The following are some examples of handling people who break the show rules.

Helping people who need it. Some broken rules only need a quick fix to be dealt with, and an organizer can even plan ahead for the possibility that certain rules may be broken. For example, Kevin Nolan, a Dallas-based professional who has 20 years experience managing trade shows for companies across several industries, says that one of the biggest rules he has seen exhibitor staff break is related to dress code.


"For major shows, I will usually purchase and then bring company shirts with logos on them," he said.

Taking a soft approach. In some cases, broken rules are not as easy to deal with. Whether exhibitors are playing music too loudly, placing their booth too far into the aisle, or using the wrong kind of light bulbs, these issues need to be corrected as soon as possible. However, it's best to use a soft approach when confronting these rule breakers for the first time.

"I try to be courteous first, so the first thing I always do is compliment exhibitors about their display and how it's so great because they kind of put their guard down so you can go in for the punch – I do that in a soft way," said Benjamin Rabe, Event Manager at SmithBucklin. "I think the most important thing is to remember that exhibitors are there to do sales, so if you have to wait 10 minutes to go in and see them because they're talking with customers, then you wait the 10 minutes."

Dealing with repeat offenders. In some cases, exhibitors will break rules time and time again. Sometimes it's because there are different people manning the booth who are not aware of what warnings the previous booth staff received; other times people simply forget; and in some cases, exhibitors want to see how much they can get away with.

"When it comes to habitual rule breakers, there must be consequences," says Poulos.

"If the same guy does the same thing year after year, by year three it's your job to pass the information along to the sales department and say 'Hey, maybe we don't want these guys. We've talked to them twice, they refuse to listen, so we're going to have to not invite them because they're making us look bad for not enforcing the rules in an egalitarian fashion, and they're really a chronic problem since they're not listening to us.' Rule breakers often lose their privileges to reach an audience if they do not cooperate." 

Event Planning Strategies to Help You Avoid Disasters

By Dave Egan

Planning a successful event requires a strategic approach and tiered backup plans. When something *doesn't* go as planned, it creates a cavalcade of complications that could be disastrous – and may even shut down your event.

Here are three areas where some strategic planning can help your event run smoothly and sidestep the potential for disaster:

1) Site-Specific Issues

Modern space planning for events is done using CAD (Computer Aided Design) drawings of the event location. It streamlines the process, assures greater accuracy and allows changes to be made far more easily.

Tim Pendergrass, Founder of Los Angeles' [Live Event Partners](#), says, "I always ask the location's representative if they already have accurate CAD layouts of the space. If so, it saves me the time I'd spend taking my own measurements. If they don't, I'll do a thorough site walk and measure everything. The most common problems I run into are low ceiling heights and low hanging chandeliers."

2) Using Outside Vendors

An event involves many suppliers, ideally all working in harmony to bring about the desired results. When there's more discord than harmony, however, disaster looms.

Brad Lipshy, Owner of L.A.-based [Event Solutions](#), feels the best course of action is to hire experienced suppliers in the first place. He suggests, "Look for vendors with a reputation for reliability, superior service and knowledge of the type of event you're planning to produce."

Lipshy also urges his clients to read vendors' contracts carefully. "Have your legal department review each contract to make sure it covers you against any potential problems that might occur. Suppliers should carry at least \$4 million in liability coverage, and all the suppliers' employees should be covered by workers compensation insurance as well." Frequently, vendors hire labor through third-party suppliers that carry the required insurance.

When Pendergrass produces an event in a space that has in-house suppliers, such as a hotel's ballroom, he feels it's strategically important to develop a friendly relationship with those suppliers. "When I'm bringing in lots of gear for a big ballroom presentation, renting some equipment from the hotel's AV supplier for the breakout rooms, for example, can go a long way toward getting their cooperation on all other aspects of the event," he explains.

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A new pedestrian plaza now welcomes attendees and serves as a grand new entrance featuring The Great Hall, a 60,000 square foot column-free ballroom with 25,000 square feet of flexible pre-function space. The Great Hall retains the important features for exhibitions in a hotel-like environment and a programmable lighting system animates the space, changing the mood for each distinctive use. The color, patterns and graphics recall the Mississippi River and the local flora, people and language that make New Orleans the distinctive destination that it is. The Great Hall is divisible into four sections and remains contiguous to over one million square feet of exhibit space, 140 meeting rooms, a 30,000 square foot ballroom, and a 4,000 seat theater and is distinguished as being part of a center that has hosted most every major event on record.

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3) Contracting with Talent

As an event planner, Pendergrass feels the best strategy for avoiding major problems is effective communication with the speakers, entertainers and musicians you're planning to hire. "Communication is key, so finding out exactly what they want – and need – will avoid potential disasters. It also keeps me from over-planning, which would cost my client more, without having anything to show for it."

Pendergrass also has some advice about the riders that usually accompany talent contracts. "Often, the rider is just a performer's high end 'wish list.' Sometimes you can save substantially by asking the talent's manager for relatively small compromises. For example, a high profile artist usually quotes a concert hall-level PA system, but that's overkill in a ballroom setting. Asking the right questions can save thousands of dollars."

Following these strategies will reduce your risk of overlooking a potential disaster, and help you manage more capably if one should arise. 

Creating an Ironclad Contract


By Andrea Montello

Hotels are enjoying a seller's market, giving them the edge when it comes to negotiating contracts. How can planners create contracts that focus on the best interest of the meeting or trade show?

"If you ask the other side for something before a contract exists it's called negotiating. If you ask the other side for something after a contract exists, it's called begging," exudes John S. Foster, Esq., CHME, Attorney and Counselor at Law, Foster, Jensen, & Gulley based in Atlanta. "I strongly maintain that certain legal standards should be met and certain terms should be included in every contract regardless of a seller's versus buyer market."

Here are some of Foster's best practices when it comes to creating a contract that will protect today's planners:

- Understand that negotiating and contracting are both two different skills that must be mastered or outsourced to experts.
- Understand the rules behind liquidated damages in a contract: A breach by one party entitles the other party to damages, but not penalties. Penalties in contracts are unenforceable. A penalty exists if the injured party in a contract dispute would come out further ahead financially by enforcing a liquidated damage clause (attrition or cancellation) than if the contract was performed as anticipated. Generally, damages are defined as lost profit, not 100 percent of the revenue. "Lost profit is defined as 'gross revenue minus variable expenses,'" explains Foster. The injured party has a duty to attempt to mitigate its damages, unless the parties agree to reasonable liquidated damages that encompass mitigation.
- Understand the profit margins in hotels. The industry average is 60 to 70 percent for guestrooms and 15 to 25 percent for food and beverage.
- Base guest room performance damages on anticipated room nights, not anticipated revenue.
- Base catering food and beverage performance damages on revenue, not on guaranteed covers (before the final guarantee).
- Don't agree to performance damages unless circumstances justify it.
- Define a "sold" room to include rooms billed to other individuals for attrition, cancellation or no-show.
- Always include an audit provision in every contract where performance guarantees are included.
- If attrition damages are required in the contract, include a provision that the group rate will be extended after the cut-off date up to the last room available in the hotel. This is required because raising the rates to attendees after the cut-off date makes the meeting sponsor's performance more difficult or impossible. In this circumstance, the hotel cannot then turn around and try to enforce the meeting sponsor's performance obligations.
- Shift the risk of attrition in the sub-blocks to the organization booking the sub-blocks.
- Don't agree to pay both attrition damages and meeting room rental unless your guest room to meeting space ratio is out of balance.
- Understand the legal difference between termination and cancellation of a contract, and provide comprehensive provisions for both.
- Always include a purpose of meeting clause and reference frustration of purpose and impracticability in the termination clause.
- Don't allow the contract to state directly or indirectly that the organization will be responsible for paying for ancillary revenue on empty rooms. Revenue from ancillary activities is discretionary and is not guaranteed.
- Tie increases in rates and prices to the Consumer Price Index.
- Tie the ability to review the room block or change the rates to a drop in the Ten Leading Economic Indicators (www.conference-board.org).
- Use prudent risk management techniques in your contract to shift liability away from your organization (e.g. indemnification and insurance).
- Learn what a well-written arbitration clause should say. The typical one doesn't work. Include terms for legal discovery, specific performance, fee shifting and legal appeal.

Seek advice from legal counsel skilled in the meetings industry if you want to avoid the pitfalls, and reviewing and writing contracts are not your top specialty. 



The Great Hall



A new pedestrian plaza now welcomes attendees and serves as a grand new entrance featuring The Great Hall, a 60,000 square foot column-free ballroom with 25,000 square feet of flexible pre-function space. The Great Hall retains the important features for exhibitions in a hotel-like environment and a programmable lighting system animates the space, changing the mood for each distinctive use. The color, patterns and graphics recall the Mississippi River and the local flora, people and language that make New Orleans the distinctive destination that it is. The Great Hall is divisible into four sections and remains contiguous to over one million square feet of exhibit space, 140 meeting rooms, a 30,000 square foot ballroom, and a 4,000 seat theater and is distinguished as being part of a center that has hosted most every major event on record.

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The Biggest Mistakes Show Organizers Make and How to Avoid Them

By Kenya McCullum

Everyone makes mistakes on the job, and show organizers are no different. However, some mistakes that can be made when organizing a show may have negative consequences for the event – and in some cases, those mistakes can devastate a show cycle. The following are examples of some big mistakes that show organizers can make during the course of an event and how to avoid them.

Mistake: Co-locating with the wrong partner.

Problems it can cause: “If you have not considered what your target audience is and how they’re going to interact with the target audience of the show you’re co-located with, you have missed a huge opportunity and potentially made a deadly mistake,” said Dave Poulos, CEO of Granite Partners. “When those two audiences get together, they’re going to be meshed in the same room and those exhibitors are going to be fighting for attention from the same floor. They’re going to mix and they’re going to mingle. If you don’t find some way to facilitate that mixing and mingling so that everybody gets what they need, then you’re not going to get repeat business.”

How to avoid it: Do your homework. You need to have a clear understanding of the show that you’re thinking about joining forces with – including their audience and their sponsors. If you decide that the two shows can indeed coexist peacefully, be sure to explain the value proposition to the audience, as well as the sponsors and exhibitors, so they know what they have to gain from participating in the co-located show.

Mistake: Making major changes to a show without input from exhibitors.

Problems it can cause: “Making changes to a show is a big deal, so when a show organizer has an idea to change something, from a show standpoint, the last thing you want to happen is to get pushback from exhibitors,” said Aaron Udler, President of OfficePro, Inc. “You need to get their buy in. It’s just like having a homeowner’s association. If someone makes a decision on your behalf and you don’t know about it, you’re going to be pretty ticked off as a homeowner. The same idea applies to exhibitors.”

How to avoid it: Put together an exhibitor advisory board or steering committee that will keep sponsoring companies abreast of any potential changes to the show and how those changes will affect them. Sponsors and exhibitors know their marketplace well, so their input is invaluable. Also, when exhibitors know they are being heard, it will go a long way toward them staying on board with the show after the change.

Mistake: Marketing too late.

Problems it can cause: “Trade shows take a lot of planning. You can’t wait until three weeks before the show to start marketing,” said Poulos. “There’s nothing scarier than throwing a party and having nobody show up. If you get all of these exhibitors and you sold your floor effectively, they’re expecting to see big, hungry buying crowds with pockets full of money. If you don’t commit to funding enough

activity or using the right tactics in order to make that happen, you will start your show on a death spiral because with no attendees, the exhibitors won’t show up, and with no exhibitors, there’s no show. It will spiral downhill over the course of years very quickly if you’re not delivering that audience consistently over and over and over again.”

How to avoid it: Marketing strategies – from the medium to the message – must be planned months in advance, just like any other element of the show.



What Should Your Press Room Look Like in a Digital World?

By Dave Egan

The days when press rooms were filled with chain-smoking reporters banging away on Underwood typewriters are long gone.

If you haven’t done so yet, you’ll soon be making big changes to how your show interacts with the media. Press Room 2.0 won’t need rows of tables piled high with clever paper folders and glossy 8 x 10 photos.

Today, many shows’ press rooms function digitally, and exhibitors are already making their own big changes to effectively connect with the media in this brave new world.

To learn how to modernize a press room, we turned to Allison Fried, Director of Global Event Communications for the [Consumer Electronics Association](#). Their show, [CES](#), has created one of the most advanced digital press rooms in the industry. We asked her how that press room has changed in the last decade.

“Our press room is now much greener, with more open space for lounge areas and sponsors,” she said. “There are fewer flyers and flyer stands because all show information is posted online. Exhibitors use USBs for their press materials instead of paper or disks. These are smaller, lighter and take up less space.”

Exhibitors are also changing their approach to generating media attention. Fried explains, “They’re making use of unique and eye-catching press kit packaging or offering special incentives that drive media reps to their booths, or even having their celebrity spokesperson make an appearance in the press room.

“It’s the digital age, so it’s not just what exhibitors do in the press room to promote themselves. It’s what they do online, too, that gives them an advantage. After completing their profiles in the exhibitor directory and making sure they’ve included a press contact and high-resolution photos, they’re also creating online press kits and press ‘pitch’ videos that remain online year-round.


“They take advantage of promotional opportunities through our show’s YouTube channels, online publications, blogs and social media outlets. At our show, exhibitors can use the search function on our preregistered media list to pull targeted ‘pitch’ lists to promote their participation at the show and highlight events they’re hosting on-site,” Fried continues.

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"Our press room also offers WiFi and plenty of charging stations for their devices. We've created gift bags for the media that are customized with all the latest electronic gadgets. We even offer a variety of healthy food options, like gluten-free, vegetarian and kosher meals."

But Fried isn't content to stop there. She's working with her organization to equip the show's press room for the future. What does she see on the horizon?

"In the future, as we all become more mobile, I see a paperless press room that utilizes smartphones to communicate with media people in real time. The media themselves will download show information and press kits from NFC (Near Field Communication) hotspots," Fried envisions. "I also see beacons being used to send promotions and alerts to the media as they enter our press room, and advanced GPS will help them navigate the show floor."

You can do many of these same things to make your show more media-friendly, while offering your exhibitors new and better ways to capture the press attention they seek. 

Innovative F&B

By Andrea Montello

Allergic to nuts, almonds, fish, gluten, milk, soy, vegetarians, vegans, kosher, halal – the dietary requirements people have today are harrowing. Gone are the days of choosing between chicken and beef. How can trade show and exhibition managers serve meals that take all of this, and more, into account?

Some conferences and trade shows are starting to "ticket" their meals with success. During the event registration process, attendees are asked to indicate any food sensitivities they may have. They will then have a ticket to hand to their server alerting the kitchen staff of the food allergy. It's also important to label each dish that is part of a buffet.

"In addition to dietary restrictions, people's palates in general are more sophisticated and they look forward to ethnic dishes and unique flavorings. Adding seasonings and vegetables to items like quinoa and couscous are budget-friendly yet add a little cache to the menu," says Yvonne Szikla, Founder and Principal of Poway, CA-based Events With a Purpose, a full-service event-planning firm. "Taco bars, hot dog bars with multiple toppings, hot chocolate bars – any bar is a good way to allow personalization by building your own."

Organic and farm-to-table cuisine is no longer expected but required. Healthy choices are a must.


Another trend in the world of food and beverage are smaller portions. They allow guests to sample a variety of offerings. Take mini desserts for example. They make dessert planning easy for a meeting professional, as there is no decision regarding what flavor to serve as a taste of each will be offered. Mini pies, small cheesecakes and dollops of gelato are all popular.

"Along with the mini craze, anything on a stick, mini spoons and towers of desserts are popular. Artful presentations of minis, along

with creative displays, make for interesting and novel presentations and don't have to break the bank," says Szikla.

It's also important to embrace the destination. If your conference or trade show is in Orlando, you better offer some fresh seafood and citrus products in the meals you plan. If it's in Chicago, deep-dish pizza and Chicago-style hot dogs should be on the menu.

"I always try to include what the area is known for. For an event in Boston, I did mini hot dogs as a choice for appetizers, tea bag party gifts, a tea and lemonade mix, and of course, clam chowder shots!" enthuses Szikla. "For an event at Graceland in Memphis, bourbon reigned. Not only was it available to drink, but we featured bourbon-spiked pork. Fried green tomatoes, a mix of sautéed collard greens, and other greens were quite the hit with the vegan crowd. Sweet potato pie was also enjoyed. Attendees look forward to trying new things and local dishes should be weaved into more generic crowd pleasers of chicken and beef."

One innovative way groups are including local fare is with food trucks. Hotels and convention centers are offering gourmet food trucks for meetings and conventions, either outdoors or in. They are a fun way to serve a variety of dishes and desserts that appeal to all tastes. Well-trained chefs oversee many of these trucks. Roaming Hunger (www.roaminghunger.com) is a site that will help you find and hire the best food trucks for your trade shows and events. 

Location, Location, Location: Choosing the Right City When Starting a New Show or Changing Locations

By Kenya McCullum

Just as in the real estate business, location is an extremely important consideration for show organizers. Whether they are managing a brand new show or moving an existing show to a new city, location can be an important element that draws an audience to an event – or discourages them from attending. The following are some questions that show organizers should ask themselves when choosing where an event will be held.

Where is the airport?

Traveling to trade shows can be daunting, so organizers try to make it a bit easier by choosing airports that are conveniently located to the event. When Kevin Nolan—a Dallas-based professional who has 20 years of experience managing trade shows for companies across several industries—organizes annual conferences, he draws the line at locations that are an hour away from the airport.

"I learned that lesson the hard way," he said. "We had an annual client conference at Aspen one year and the airport closed on the last day of our event, unbeknownst to any of us. So we rented every SUV we could find and carpooled people the two- or three-hour drive to the Denver airport."

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Similarly, Nolan will not choose a location that has a bad airport. “If there’s only one airline that flies into that city, I would tend to not want to do a conference there because that totally limits people’s options and could drive up costs,” he added.

Does the location require exclusivity of services?


“I would second guess a location if they required exclusivity for a particular service that I have a partner for and I travel with. Nine times out of 10, you can bring any AV company you want and they’re with a major partner that travels with your show,” said Benjamin Rabe, Event Manager at SmithBucklin. “If you couldn’t bring that person you’ve worked with for years, you should pause and seriously think about if the destination is worth that.”

Is the show’s demographic going to be willing or able to travel to a certain location?

A show location can have everything that an organizer wants, but if no one is going to show up, it won’t matter. When choosing a location, especially when organizing a new show, it’s important to do extensive research on the target audience’s willingness to travel to a certain city.

Will attendees have things to do during their downtime?

Although a show should not compete with too many distractions in a city, there should still be enough going on so that attendees don’t get bored during their downtime.

“Yes people are going to come to an event to see new products, network with each other, and get education, but at the same time, people are human,” said Rabe. “They’re going to want to see something new, cool, or sexy at night or in the morning because their time away from the office and away from their families is valuable. You have to make the location enticing.” 

Competitive Bidding: Is It Always The Best Approach?

By Dave Egan

The process of competitive bidding can be fraught with problems if your Request for Proposal (RFP) is flawed in any way, leading to “apples and oranges” comparisons among the respondents. That, in turn, can lead to the issuer making a final selection based on bottom-line cost alone.

In an attempt to circumvent such problems, the Exhibit Designers & Producers Association (EDPA) created its RFP Certification Program, to assure issuers that “member companies adhere to industry standards and best practices,” including ethical business practices, industry experience and participation, fiscal responsibility, and operational methodology. The certification process is open to all EDPA members in good standing.

That such a certification was necessary speaks to the need for a standards-based solution to the problems faced by issuers of RFPs. However, even this process is not without problems, because those companies holding the certification “pay to play.” In other words, the

certification is not bestowed on all companies that meet certain high standards, but only on those member companies that do so and pay the required fee.


There are other issues complicating the RFP process. Candy Adams, a trade show industry consultant affectionately known as “[The Booth Mom](#),” says, “Many of my clients’ company policies require that I get three bids on non-exclusive show-related products and services, so I do it.”

Does it add value for the client? “Yes,” she says, “in two ways. First, it allows me to force the client into honing their show strategy and supporting tactics before they can even think about distributing an RFP. And secondly, it keeps long-term vendors honest and sharpening their pencils.

“But it also adds to my clients’ overall cost of the show or event for my services while we convene the stakeholders into strategy meetings, determine how to translate their strategies into tactics, and those tactics into the products and services required to support them. Then we have to determine vendors who can provide those products and services – sometimes through a separate process known as an RFI (Request for Information), to find out if the vendor has the basic capabilities to provide what we need – and eventually draft the RFP, get approvals, distribute the RFPs to our RFI short list and evaluate the responses. All this happens before going into the negotiation and contracting process.”

Adams continues, “There’s also a question of how many competing bids makes sense. I recently read a blog somewhere that suggested sending out 10 to 12 RFPs, which I find ludicrous. The most vendors I’ve ever included in an RFP process was four, and that was when the client was adamant about including a vendor I knew didn’t have the capabilities or reputation we wanted.

“There are other schools of thought on doing competitive bids on commodity purchases (like banner stands) versus products that need design, estimating and custom construction. With most commodities, I can do my homework online. But this isn’t the case where I’m really looking for the expertise of a partner on issues like strategy, branding, design, interactivity or experiential marketing.”

Even with all the problems delineated here, competitive bidding is – and should be – a standard practice in your procurement process. Just make sure you know what you’re asking for. 

Should You Publish Your Event Registration List?

By Michael Hart

Size matters – most of the time, at least – when it comes to whether a show organizer should publish the names and affiliations of event attendees.

While there are legacy events that traditionally publish lists of registered attendees on their websites, there are other events for which it would be considered a violation of attendees’ privacy and, at the very least, an unnecessary disclosure of proprietary information.

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Or would it?

Allison Wachter, Director of Exhibitions and Events for the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE), said her organization made the decision a few years ago to put the list of the 5,000 or so people who typically attend the ASAE Annual Meeting & Exposition behind a firewall on its website – and got so much resistance it had to take the wall down.

“We tried to make people use a log-in, but they got so frustrated, so we moved it back out,” Wachter said. “Everybody wanted it.”

What’s more, meeting registrants are told they can choose not to have their names appear on the list, but, she said, “There are very few opt-outs. The complaints we get are quite minimal.”

Complaints or not, David Audrain, CEM, President and CEO of Exposition Development Company, Inc., said an event with 5,000 attendees is way too big to be publishing the names of attendees.

Audrain has managed events as large as the SEMA Show, which attracts more than 140,000 attendees, and conferences as small as 100.

In the case of the latter, there may be an argument for publishing registrants’ names in advance because of the exclusive nature of the event.

“With conferences where you’re talking about 150 to 250 attendees, one of the biggest selling points is who you’re going to be networking with,” Audrain said. “From that perspective, sharing who’s coming is part of the sales process for getting people to the conference.”

However, with larger trade events (say 2,000 or larger), “There’s just no reason,” he said. “In that case, for the most part, people are coming to look at products and suppliers. Telling them who else is going to be there is not really relevant.”

At the very least, Audrain added, “You’re giving critical data away to your competitors.”

While that all may be true for the ASAE Annual Meeting, Wachter pointed out that it is a membership-driven association, and attendees often are acquainted and plan to visit with one another as much as they’re there to look at products or attend conference sessions.

“That is one of the values people find in attending ASAE,” she said, “They’re able to connect with other like-minded people.”

Nevertheless, ASAE does make it hard to use the registration list on the website. While there is a company or association with each name, there is no contact information and the site does not allow a visitor to export the list.



Tell us... what do you wish you had known starting out in your career that you know now?

By Kenya McCullum

What lesson do you wish you had learned about the business when you first started? Benjamin Rabe, Event Manager at SmithBucklin, discusses the nuggets of knowledge that he wishes he had before.

I wish I had known the importance of partnerships with the key stakeholders in your event, like key sponsors and exhibitors. I wish I had known the value of taking the time to sit down and understand what they’re trying to do with their business. I’ve seen how doing that can really pay off. If you focus on one or two sponsors in figuring out what their business needs are, you can put together a really great sponsorship package for them. Then when you roll that out, guess what happens? The other companies are going, “Oh, what are those packages? I want them too!” Then you get the “keeping up with the Joneses next door” effect. I’ve seen that work really, really well, so I wish I would have realized that much earlier in my career, instead of just sending out a prospectus to sponsors and thinking they’re going to buy just because of that.



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The Mother of Mobile Software Is Changing Trade Show Management in China

by Michelle Bruno

In four years, mobile software called WeChat has transformed marketing and communication in China. “WeChat is actually more of a portal, a platform, and even a mobile operating system depending on how you look at it,” writes Connie Chan for Andreessen Horowitz. For both Chinese and international exhibition organizers, it is becoming an essential registration, audience promotion, conference directory, and attendee engagement tool.

Apps within an App

Imagine one mobile app that is actually a portal for other apps. It would be like having all the apps in the Apple Store or Google Play available without having to download and install each one individually. Businesses can use it to create their own channels, called “official accounts,” and build their own apps that access the networking, ecommerce, GPS, content distribution capabilities, and user information inside WeChat. It is also FREE to use.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable aspects of WeChat, says Stephanie Selesnick, president of International



Trade Information, Inc. and U.S. representative for the Shanghai New International Exhibition Center, is that “everyone in China is already using WeChat and they aren’t using individual apps anymore.” She describes the hard-to-explain WeChat as a “combination of Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, voicemails and text with the ability to create unlimited groups.”

How Organizers Use WeChat

Info Salons, a leading provider of event technology solutions for online and onsite registration, data tracking, and data capture in Asia, has been creating channels and deploying applications for its clients’ exhibitions and conferences on WeChat for over two years. They use it in a number of specific ways:

Mobile event registration—attendees use their mobile devices to scan a QR code (WeChat has a built-in QR code reader) and open the show registration page created by Info Salons. When registrants are WeChat users (and almost everyone

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THE MOTHER OF MOBILE SOFTWARE IS CHANGING TRADE SHOW MANAGEMENT IN CHINA (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

in China is), the registration form pre-populates. Once the registration is complete, users receive a confirmation in the form of a QR Code, which they then use to collect their badges (from anywhere) onsite.

Conference-directory app—Info Salons builds show apps on top of the WeChat platform. The apps have all of the features available in most standalone, native event-mobile apps, including general event information, floor plan, exhibitor list, session agenda, speaker list, online mobile registration, interactive marketing, customer services, news, games, and show announcements.

Attendee engagement solutions—capabilities already built into WeChat allow attendees to exchange e-business cards, find other visitors nearby, play interactive games, vote, and complete surveys and evaluations.

Payments—attendees can pay for registration, additional sessions, merchandise or special events using QR codes and one-click payment portals set up for each show within WeChat.

Mobile marketing—Organizers can create personalized audience promotion campaigns and use custom QR codes to track where registrations are coming from. Event invitations, tickets and confirmations can be sent through WeChat and registration links can easily be shared with others in WeChat.

Content delivery and geolocation—WeChat can access the Bluetooth and GPS capabilities of smart devices allowing organizers and sponsors to deliver personalized, proximity-based messages to attendees on site.

How Organizers Benefit

Because the WeChat Application Programming Interface (API) is open and the platform is free and easy to use, it is delivering tremendous benefits to organizers looking to reach exhibitors and attendees in China:

- Increased pre-registrations. “Ten years ago, only about

10% of attendees pre-registered for an exhibition or conference. Today, using QR codes and WeChat, we are getting 50% pre-registering,” says Jo-Anne Kelleway, founder and CEO of The Info Salons Group.

- Unified communication. There are over 750 million Chinese users of WeChat. That means that organizers don’t have to build different promotional campaigns on different marketing automation apps or social media platforms to reach their prospects and customers. They can build one campaign on WeChat and reach everyone.
- Cost savings. Using Wechat to advertise, market and communicate with show participants is free. There is no platform or advertising expense. The costs for onsite registration have dipped dramatically as well. “We used to use hundreds of terminals and staff. Now we use hardly any. The cost savings is huge and we don’t have to charge our clients for the equipment,” Kelleway says.
- Cultural acceptance. “It is not considered rude to message someone on WeChat. It’s a very quick way to get an answer,” Kelleway explains.
- Year-round community building. Because attendees use WeChat all the time, for everything (paying bills, making doctor appointments, doing banking, paying for goods and services, reading the news), organizers can “speak” with them all year long, unlike typical mobile event apps experience a large user drop off in usage immediately after the show concludes.

There is currently no equivalent to WeChat anywhere in the world, experts say. While WeChat can be downloaded on any smartphone anywhere—meaning that any organizer can use it—the massive user base is located primarily in China for now. The owners of WeChat, Chinese investment holding company Tencent, have plans to expand to the rest of the world. When they do, the potential for exhibition organizers and all brands could be breathtaking.

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