

# Creating a **VIP Experience** that Makes Your Event Unique!

By Brenda Farney Merrill



Imagine taking on the task of creating a VIP event within your main event, especially designed for the fan. You accepted the new task of creating this exclusive promotion for your upcoming local event that offers a VIP - red carpet opportunity for your patrons to purchase. You take on the tasks of forming a committee, presenting ideas to the board, developing a plan and selling the experience to your community. In order to separate yourself from the competition, you need to design something special where the VIP can receive an amazing experience making them want to return event after event . . . year after year!

But where do you start? There's certainly a lot of planning that needs to take place, so let's start with the "6 'D' Approach": Define - Decide - Design - Delegate - Day of - Discussion.

**DEFINE** the Experience by Answering the Who, What, Where, When and Why questions:

**WHO** is your target audience?

There are different types of VIP packages that can be designed: The well known Sponsor VIP event where sponsors receive business exposure, signage and preferential treatment for themselves and their preferred customers;

and the Artist VIP event built around a particular celebrity appearance. The majority of the time these "meet and greet" sessions with the artist go on as planned when coordinated with the concert producer and the road manager. However, for the purpose of this article, you are developing a fan VIP event for those in your community who would like to socialize in a stress free environment and enjoy privileged access to the event.

**WHAT** is your main event?

It is important to tie your package into your overall event theme. Is this a celebration for the 100th anniversary of the town? Is your event based around one specific type of sport? Will this take place at the rodeo? At the concert? At the derby? At the parade?

**WHEN** does the event run?

When will be the best time for the fan based VIP event to be held? Will it be available all day or a portion of the day? Is it good for all events or only a specific event? The length will help determine your food and beverage requirements per person. If they attend only one event, is there another event they can participate in for free, i.e. buy

a fan VIP for a concert and go free to the art exhibit the next night?

**WHERE** will you host the VIP Event?

Location, Location, Location! Will your VIP event be in a tented area on the grounds? On a terrace at the building? In a special section of the grandstand or designated arena flooring? Off to the side of the stage? Or on an elevated riser? Be sure to limit access to the back stage area as it is generally cleared of all non working personnel.

**WHY** are you providing the VIP Event?

This is the fun part! You're providing it to reward your festival fans with a unique way to build fond memories of the event and to have fun!

You have an opportunity to use this VIP hospitality area as a tool to provide relaxation to others in a protected location with a privileged view of the event. By offering something in the pre-show package that is hard to obtain such as best seats at a ticketed event or a chance to have partial access to restricted areas, the fan VIP event enhances the appeal of the overall main event. The return-on-investment is intangible. The patrons could choose to spend their money on other events similar to yours, but they picked yours!

## DECIDE What Steps are Needed

As you plan out your next steps to take, keep in mind you must have good organizational habits, strong communication skills, the ability to set goals and manage the plan while respecting the different work styles of your co-workers. During this process you will need to:

- Devise a time line of duties
- Talk about your expectations of the fan VIP experience and write down your goals
- Break down the steps and manage your expectations
- Appoint an Event Coordinator and a Hospitality Chair
- Develop a strategy for the day of the event by breaking the day in to one hour increments and determining what will occur each hour
- Determine financial resources and manage your hospitality funds
  - Is there a way anyone or any group can help share the costs of this experience?
- Keep some funds uncommitted in case of special needs.

## DESIGN it as More Than Just a Nice Thing To Do

The VIP area is the place to be and it must be designed to have a sense of importance. When creating this experience, be sure to take note of the following:

- Name and brand your VIP event with a short slogan such as "Our VIP Experience Delivers Fun!"
- Pay attention to details such as the exact time, date and location of each activity
- Adhere to advertising guidelines and create a campaign that includes a social marketing strategy
- Determine if there are accessibility issues with the location and if it is in compliance with ADA rules
- Is alcohol being served? Determine how that will be set up and how the money will be handled
- Establish equipment and A/V needs
- Check the lighting, staging/risers and chairs. Is any of the area sheltered?
- Have an operations tent or RV to use as your on site office
- How many port-a-lets are needed? Are they designated just for the fan VIP patron?
- Are there any special health permits, food and beverage licenses or extra security needs?
- Where will you need trash containers and when is removal or recycling pick up?

Every dollar spent on an item for 100 people, costs about \$100, in addition to personnel and time. Try to give as much luxury as possible for the dollar amount

you've been given to spend. Brainstorm to find inexpensive or free things to add to the VIP package such as: premium camping spots; parking spaces; short back stage tours after sound check; priority entrances; early arrival times; smaller entrance lines and transportation or shuttles to and from the parking lot for these patrons.

Before the main event, feature entertainment with local solo musicians or acoustic duos. Hire comedians, magicians, a karaoke host or even play soft CD music in the fan VIP tent as a way to create a different atmosphere than where the general public congregates. One festival we work with provides a cool dark tent with a flat screen TV and comfy chairs for their fan VIPs to escape from the heat before the evening concert. Another gives complimentary head and neck massages along with a package of aspirin and a bottle of water. Make available items like band aids, ear plugs, sunscreen, fans and orange juice to provide extra comfort while dealing with the elements.

If a meet and greet session can be arranged with the celebrity, it will add a little more excitement. Since those are limited, consider holding a drawing to see which fan VIP gets to go backstage and meet the artist. Possibly the same type of arrangement can be made for photos with the celebrity or at least an autographed photo.

Flowers can be enjoyed longer and do double duty by serving as centerpieces and table decorations. They then can be given away in drawings or donated to the local nursing home. Gift baskets, goodie bags, commemorative items like T-shirts, patches, mugs, hats, event laminates, event programs or something personalized, are all items people like to collect at festivals.

And what's a party without food? Arrange for a full smorgasbord of refreshing treats, snacks, delicacies and beverages or keep it simple with a cold buffet or gourmet boxed lunches. Host an ice cream and dessert bar or something hardier like a taco or pasta station. Set up a private bar away from the public area and give away a couple of free drinks. You can then turn it into a cash bar or go all out and provide unlimited beer and wine. Something easy to do is serve ice cold drinks, not just cold drinks...it's all in the details.

## DELEGATE and Involve Others to Maximize this Investment

You can't do everything, it takes a team to put everything on, so be sure to rely on your team to pull everything off! Your event coordinator is responsible for all aspects of the VIP experience. They can create a welcome package to send to the patrons with information on the

VIP experience in addition to including the appropriate passes, vehicle parking information, name tags and the name of their hostess for the day. Whereas your hospitality coordinator is in charge of all the food, beverage, comfort details, as well as lining up one hostess or butler for each group of ten guests. And finally your budget manager handles and manages the outgoing money to keep it in line with the budget.

## DAY OF EVENT

Like a good scout, arrive early and be prepared. You and the hostesses will answer endless questions about parking, personal comfort, seating, food, drinks, the entertainment lineup and show times. Each hostess is responsible for welcoming and helping their group throughout the experience. The response every hostess is looking for from every patron is "everything was done for me!"

## DISCUSSION on the Success of the Event

Assessment and review of the VIP experience will help you know how to improve the experience next time. Did fans have a good time? Was it appropriate in length and value? Did all guests show up? Did they arrive on time? Were any late, and if so, why? How was the food quality and quantity? How were the beverages? How did the day of event operations go? Were the hospitality hostesses welcoming and helpful? Were instructions carried out and easy to follow? Did guests express that they would like to come back? Were there any major problems? Is there another event you can create an experience for?

Each and every VIP event is different, with different elements, components, and a different audience. But hopefully by following the "6 'D' Approach" you'll be off to a good start in the planning process, no matter what type of VIP experience it is. The main goal however, is to treat your VIP to the ultimate experience creating them into valued ambassadors for your event, year after year!

Brenda Farney Merrill M.A. is co-owner and Vice President of Winterset Concert Events, LLC. She has offices in Nashville, Denver and Rapid City. Brenda can be reached at (615) 754-5003, [brenda@wintersetconcertevents.com](mailto:brenda@wintersetconcertevents.com) or [www.wintersetconcertevents.com](http://www.wintersetconcertevents.com)