

# Turnstiles: Marketing for Event Managers

By Sean King

## #whippersnappers – 5 Tips to Marketing Community Events to Multigenerational Audiences

Would you send a Vine to your grandmother?

Would you tell your teenager to check out an ad in the daily newspaper?

As marketers of community events, we are tasked with the nearly impossible goal of reaching the majority of our local population, including your grandmother, your daughter and everyone in between. Raising the bar a little higher is that we need to accomplish this task in a short period of time with limited resources using a nearly inexhaustible number of mediums.

So how do we do it? How do we use traditional and social media to reach generations of our audience through multiple medias, with multiple messages without being completely overwhelmed?

With the advent of social media and the proliferation of smart phones, tablets and other communication devices, the game has changed forever and our audiences have adopted new ways to communicate and use technology. Unfortunately, there's not an easy-to-use app to download to direct us to the best media platforms, the most effective types of message and which audience segment will react to the method or message we use. So it is up to us to create the right mix to drive results.

Resources are no longer identified just as money and time. Resources are now the content associated with our event that we want our audiences to consume. As a savvy marketer, you need to define your strategy and leverage every single morsel of content until you reach your goal. Simple enough, right?

However, you unfortunately are about to jump on a moving train. With the nearly daily addition of new platforms, apps and features added to best utilize social media; just as you figure it out, it changes again. The paradigm has shifted from determining where best to spend your ad buy, to where best to place your assets, at what intervals to share, and what metrics to monitor to determine their effectiveness.

When you are functioning at maximum capacity, you are creating new content and publishing it on multiple platforms, repurposing and redistributing it on an almost continuous cycle for each portion of your audience.

Your budget now has more to do with the time you can spend generating messages and the number of posts, tweets, pics or videos created, rather than burning through column inches and thirty second spots. Ad spends are now defined as "buying" your audience's attention with free content which includes promotional or entertainment messaging. The downside to this strategy is that we know our audience has limited available time and personal bandwidth to give to your event while the amount of noise in their lives increases to a fully saturated point.

Here are five tips to help you when attempting to reach a multi-generational audience through multiple platforms and with multiple messages:

### #1 The Media and Message

Some tried and true marketing basics will always be with us. After all, the trillions of dollars spent throughout history on advertising and subsequent research of such, has taught us a great deal, but still hasn't solved all of our problems. When creating a marketing strategy for a multi-generational audience, take into consideration what messaging appeals to a specific portion of your audience and how do they react, and more importantly, is that our intended reaction?

The question is no longer where people consume their media. In the past it was easy: cars for radio and outdoor, home for television and newspaper, but now media consumption is ubiquitous. The new reality makes media buying less expensive, but we have traded the costs of media distribution for those of content curation and creation and maximizing the few opportunities we have to make an impact in today's short-attention span world.

Each generation of our audience has tendencies on how they consume and what they consume, and it is up to you and your team to adjust slightly to what will make each slice of the audience react. A slight change in how the story, pics or information is presented can make a huge difference.

## #2 Putting the Social in Social Media

There are universal truths to the world and no matter if an audience member is 17, 47 or 87, these truths affect individuals in the same ways. Humans are social animals and need to belong. They enjoy the comfort and camaraderie of large groups and except for a rare few, people generally do not want to be the first to the party or first to the festival, or worse, be part of a small event.

Through the social media tools at our fingertips we can now create guest lists and virtual events in advance of our real world events so attendees feel like they belong and can work on your behalf to build buzz around your event.

The social aspects of your event crosses all generations, and having the right people say they are attending makes all the difference in the world. Just as in high school, adults and seniors will go if the "cool kids" go. If not, you are left to build events the old fashioned way, organically, which takes a lot longer than having attendees helping you along.

Mass media also plays a role in this part of the strategy as if there are enough reminders out in the mainstream, it can start to generate conversations and add accelerants to the buzz being built around the event.

This is the point where the elusive tipping point can become engaged. And the question turns from "Are you going?" to "Why are you not going?"

## #3 – It's Not You, It's Me.

Ask any business person and they'll tell you it easier to build your business by taking care of the customers you already have rather than generate new ones.

This is the same for those of us running events. And when speaking to a multi-generational audience, you need to be sure to listen to what your fans and detractors say about your event. What brings them back? Why would they not return? What can you do to make a dedicated fan from a casual attendee?

If you're lucky to have been running an event for a few years, it means that people have found value in your event and you're on your way to building a successful event for the long term. But you must keep fans coming back year after year in order to create a lasting legacy for your event to grow.

Marketing is not only the promotion of your event, but also the sum total of the entertainment value and the overall experience of your guests. Be sure that you are watching trends and constantly

improving upon your product for each of the generations you serve.

Create specific campaigns to bring your past audiences back, while still focusing on bringing new attendees into the fold. Audience churn has happened in many great festivals, be sure to concentrate on minimizing the number of attendees who come once, never to return.

## #4 Are You Trending?

Your event is nothing if it doesn't have buzz. That palpable feeling you get from the phones ringing, email traffic, Facebook posts and Twitter flow.

But generally, buzz is something that comes from the grass roots and bubbles up, rather than something you can simply create. You can put all of the pieces in place, but word of mouth among the generations is what will sell the event.

You need to build the buzz amongst the different pockets within your community and let the growth take a life of its own, with occasional tending from your strategic marketing plan. The buzz might be established at the ground level, but as the organizer/promoter you have the responsibility of putting the right pieces in place so that the members in those audience segments can share and help promote for you.

It's at this point, where using mass media, especially with special appearances, interviews and other scheduled features, can help you generate buzz for your event.

Remember to promote these appearances to your fans so that they can take the ball and run with it. Don't rely on the mass media to do all the work, you simply need to use them as a tool as well.

## #5 It's Not Who You Know...

Those who you know and have experienced your event are already sold and if you've done your job in the past of delivering on your promises, these fans will likely return.

It's probably not the friends of your fans that will make your event a wild success either. But rather, it's the friends of the friends of your fans that will take your event from mildly successful to legendary.

If you are able to tap into that third level of support, you are well on your way. The best way to do this is to create multilevel partnerships with media and your corporate sponsors. Too many folks think these relationships must be based on money, but in truth, the most effective partnerships allow both parties to grow from increased participation.

Increased opportunities for interaction and activation improves the guest experience as well as the return on the investment by your partners and in the end will elevate the stature of your event.

Your media and strategic partners chose to do business with you based on their business objectives, determined in part by their desire to reach current and prospective customers. These organizations are bringing extensive resources to reach specific generations of the audience, you should maximize the potential return by connecting with these audiences to promote your event.

Here's another tip: Don't forget to evaluate these potential partners early on in your planning and make decisions on their involvement based on your audience strategy.

Leveraging all of the possibilities within specific demographics and the companies that are already reaching them, allows for you to create special promotions, offers or entertainment that resonate with each group and bring more people to the event.

It takes time. There's no easy short-cut to look at the demographic make-up of your audience and determine the right message, the right promotion and the right media for the right target audience to find your event.

The main take away from #whippersnappers is that you need to treat each generation of your audience members with customized media and content to maximize attendance. Making sure you are constantly working to build a loyal audience that returns and that your programming encourages them to return, will only provide you with even better results.

The cold hard truth is that you eventually will run out of time, money or human resources. BUT, you will never exhaust the amount of content you can create, nor the amount of buzz you can build, but it's sure fun trying!

**Sean King** has been consulting with small businesses and non-profits organizations for over 20 years. Currently, Sean is the Director of Marketing & Communications for Youth Education in the Arts (YEA!), a non-profit organization based in Allentown, PA which teaches life lessons through music. He also blogs regularly at [www.artsmarketingblog.org](http://www.artsmarketingblog.org). You can follow Sean on Twitter @skingaspire or contact him at: [sking@yea.org](mailto:sking@yea.org)