

Turnstiles: Marketing for Event Managers

By Sean King

Strategies and Solutions for Today's Marketing World

Welcome to the first in a series of articles developed exclusively for Executive Directors and other senior management to provide strategies and solutions for event marketing challenges in today's oversaturated world of posts, tweets, blogs and mass media.



Written from the perspective of over twenty years of event promotion and management, we will offer insight and inspiration to you and your team to face the big questions that affect the attendance, sponsorship, volunteering and brand building of your event.

Our job is to assist you in getting folks through the Turnstile. After all, the more folks that come through the gates the better, because that means you are growing, testing and creating new opportunities for your fans and community.

Maybe you do not have a veteran, marketing department at your disposal, or you run with a team of volunteers? Perhaps you are new to your role and marketing is only just one big cost center to you? Then we believe "Turnstiles" is for you. Consider it a quarterly dose of good old-fashioned common sense in a world where the next big thing seems to be in your inbox every morning.

Whether you run an annual festival, are considering expansion of your festival, or manage an extended series of events, your needs are the same as everyone: you need the audience that is most likely to attend

your event to KNOW about it and DO something about it. In short, you need them to come through the Turnstile and we hope to help you accomplish that goal.

For our first article we pose *The Five Questions You Should Ask Your Marketing Manager*.

1 Do we have a plan?

The first step toward any successful marketing outcome is to have a detailed plan to provide the entire organization with a roadmap to success. With a simple, non-cluttered Marketing Project Plan, marketing will know where it's going, where it should be at any given point in time, what media will be used (and in some cases not used), the tone and content of the messaging and at what frequency the audience will be engaged. Most importantly, the rest of the organization will be able to follow along as well. Doing the work of planning is never glamorous, but just as in the writing a solid business plan, once the initial plan is created, the team will have a game plan to follow for years to come, with necessary tweaks able to

be made along the way creating a dynamic, living, breathing document.

The focus of the plan should consist of five parts: taking inventory of your communication assets; analyzing the media to be implemented; setting the timeline to be followed; determining the audience to be engaged, and developing the tone, content and frequency of the messaging. A plan that addresses these main components is one that is already headed toward success.

After the plan is crafted, you and your marketing manager will be able to chart the course for adventure, while meeting your benchmarks on the way to your goals.

2 What is one new initiative or project that we are adding to the plan this year?

There are many factors at work when putting together the marketing plan for an annual event or festival. The most important factor is the team assembled to execute the plan.

Unfortunately, there are times when organizations suffer the turnover of key individuals from one year to the next.

When that happens, the personal relationships and institutional knowledge may leave with them.

However, if you are lucky enough to keep staff together year to year, there's a great opportunity to push your marketing to the next level by putting forth a mandate to add one new initiative each year.

Many teams adopt this as an ongoing strategy, but if you don't, we encourage you to add it to your plan for your next event. We strongly encourage you to do this upfront in your planning stages, because without forethought, it is difficult in the heat of battle to create and implement a new initiative when resources are tight, and time is at a premium.

When developing a new initiative, examine what has and what has not worked in the past. You will also want to include in the discussion a review of the prior year's plan and what were some of the ideas that in retrospect you wished you could've added in the course of marketing and promotion. These types of anecdotal impressions can make the decision a no-brainer in many cases.

You will eventually wind up with a new initiative such as adding a new media partner, connecting with a new audience segment or adding a social media platform, or exploring other ideas including implementing onsite data collection campaigns, unleashing street teams, courting a new strategic partner or an idea on an even larger scale, perhaps a WOW initiative. The bigger the gamble might mean the bigger the payoff. Although you should be sure at all times, the anticipated result is at least worth the resources and energy placed in developing the new idea.

3 What should we expect from our social media strategy?

Today's conversations with your audience are now about sharing, engaging and providing new engagement and access for your fans. This major shift should play a role in your planning at every step. The scarcity of mass media no longer exists and 'spraying and praying' when it comes to advertising and promotion is the least effective method to build an audience.

Rather, the efficient marketer is spending time creating followers, connecting with fans and building a critical mass of those who would and should attend their event. The new landscape is about relevancy and if marketing messages aren't getting to the intended audience, then the opportunity and effort is wasted.

Of course, almost everyone has a Facebook page, but social media presents a strong opportunity to go far beyond that depending on the audience.

Are all social media platforms equal? Absolutely not.

When attempting to reach a younger demographic, the full array of tools should be considered. However, if the demographic is a little older or less tech-savvy, then an investment in exploring the depths of all social channels should be less. The answer is to know your audience and then create the strategy that resonates best for them.

Lastly, a marketing manager should have at least one, if not a team of, social media types engaging with the event's online community. Without a strategy for social to deliver measurable results, organizations may wind up wasting a great deal of time and energy with very little return on investment.

We are only at the very beginning of understanding social media, and with new platforms and new iterations of current ones being added virtually every day, being able to tell the difference between a Tumblr and a Flickr and how you can leverage one over the other, could be the difference of bringing another new passionate audience to an event or missing them entirely.

4 How can we maximize our strategic partnerships?

Very few advances in the world of events and festivals have had such a profound impact as have strategic partnerships. What first came about as financial sponsorships and media relationships, have now developed into multi-faceted partnerships. These ties allow you to promote your event, while also providing your partner the opportunity to leverage their involvement in new and exciting ways.

What some festivals overlook is maximizing every level of the relationship to benefit financially as well as from the promotional opportunities. Event marketers should explore all possibilities to bring those extra new faces to the event and in turn, provide additional value to their partner. It is through these new initiatives where partners who initially provide purely financial or in-kind support, can actually assist in driving attendance.

Don't forget this type of relationship development impacts the sponsorship sales function as well. Make sure your sales and marketing team works as a team to create mutually beneficial outcomes by creating value-added experiences for your partners and their fans.

5 What does our success look like?

From the perspective of any CEO, Executive Director or Chairman, all the plans and good intentions in the world do not mean a thing unless there are direct and measur-

able results coming from marketing. It is important to get agreement upfront on the goals of the plan and how this impact will be credited to the activities of marketing.

There is no single department as responsible for the short and long term success of an event as marketing. While programming and customer experience teams can assure fans will come back for more, it is up to the marketing team to manage the brand, build awareness and drive traffic. Marketing needs to know when to add more intensity and frequency to the messaging to get results for this year's event, while concurrently building momentum for next year.

In the end, the revenue generated and attendance figures are what determine the success of any event. Marketing impact should be measured alongside all of the pertinent sales data to evaluate the effectiveness of the advertising and promotion plan to determine what components work, which ones do not, which ones need to be expanded upon and which ones may need to be cut.

The final question to your marketing manager is one you're probably already asking at every staff meeting: "What do you need from me?" Successful leaders know their job is to give their team all of the tools and opportunities for success and then get out of the way. Marketing is no different. Have the tough conversations upfront and you'll avoid the discomfort of post-event if-a, could-a, would-a, and should-a's.

In summary, success begins with the plan, the people and a willingness to improve on what you already do well and the addition of new ideas, channels and connections to the mix

We are all very fortunate to have the opportunity to pursue our passions in this industry and to create remarkable experiences for large numbers of people. With a well-thought out and equally well-executed marketing plan, more people than ever will be able to experience your event this year, and that's a really good way to measure success!

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. You can follow Sean on Twitter @skingaspire or contact him at: sking@yea.org