

Turnstiles: Marketing for Event Managers

Something Has to Go!

Five Tips to Lose Your Festival's Extra Marketing Weight

By Sean King



The summer's coming and are you ready to put on that swimsuit? What may be a better question: Is your festival's marketing ready to wear its swimsuit?

As event and festival professionals, we're have a myriad of different responsibilities. Depending on the size of the event and our staff, details surrounding everything from tent rentals to portable toilets cross our desk on a given day, sometimes in a given hour.

As a seasoned veteran of the marketing wars, I'm here to hopefully share with you some tips to make your marketing plan "beach-ready" and to show you the way to shed those unwanted pounds of advertising and marketing and the stress that comes with them.

While we're not necessarily busting myths, we're trying to relieve the anxiety that comes with feeling you have to do everything, when in reality there's you, a few co-workers, a potted plant and a coffee mug to get the job done.

So without further adieu - here's my five favorite tips to balance success and your sanity.

We've all seen the infographics. The more social interaction, the better. There's actually a recent study that shows that hypertweeting (above 50 tweets a day)

proves to be the most successful and activity escalates engagement.

Step back and put down the smart phone. For most of the events and festivals that type of irrational exuberance is a luxury. We're happy if a single photo is posted that is in focus and everyone is smiling.

Bikini Tip #1: Moderation.

Be moderate in your plans to post. Sure, there are going to be unexpected surprises that you want to share, but go into the days leading up to your event with a plan and a schedule as to how social media will work on your big day(s). I'm sure you can find a tech savvy, responsible young person in your family or community that might assist in the cause. Give them the rules and trust and verify their work, but let them do some of the work for you.

Which takes us to Bikini Tip #2: Work from a Calendar

One of the number one stresses, the kind that wake you up in the middle of the night, surround questions such as: "Did we do enough?" "What did we forget?" "Did we get every media release out?" "Are we on top of social media?"

Stop and take a deep breath. Now exhale. The number one priority should be to develop a calendar six to eight weeks in advance of your event.

My advice is to look at the empty blocks of the calendars staring back at you as perfect opportunities to share your event in new ways, with your community with each square begging to be filled in with your most creative ideas.

Take a look at your traditional mass media. How much budget do you have? What dates do you want to run? When is creative due? Then go to your direct mail, then to your digital media and fill in the spaces like you're planning an invasion of enemy territory. What you will be surprised to find is that you may have excess coverage at one point and completely empty days elsewhere. By analyzing, shifting and filling in those spaces, you'll have a game plan and peace of mind that everything is covered and you're not forgetting a critical opportunity to connect with your audience.

A side benefit to the calendar process comes from when you find those rare empty blocks. These are great spots to experiment by taking one thing that you read about or one promotion you've wanted to do for years, and try it out.

Where we get into trouble is when we see all of the great "dishes" we've been craving and want to try them all at once. What you wind up with is half-baked ideas that truly never meet their ultimate potential. So for your event, think about your diet and say "I'm only having one bite (idea) for now."

You're probably feeling a little bit better by this point, right? Hang on, there's three more tips to go.

Bikini Tip #3: Consistency

We've discussed limiting your dietary intake of where and when, now let's lose some "pounds" regarding the "what" of your advertising and promotional plan.

Many of us obsess over what message is right, word-smithing the brochure as it is going to press and generally being manic about every turn of a phrase.

The answer to this stressor is to keep it simple. Far too many people try to become "Mad Men" in trying to be clever and witty in their copy. I'm here to tell you in the rough and tumble world of event marketing and the social media times we live in, it doesn't all matter that much as long as it ties into the brand of your festival and organization and helps to promote it to your city and community.

Like many in the creative world, we are addicted to new ideas; we've never met a campaign we didn't like. But as a festival producer you need to make the smart

choices, present the right ideas to the senior leadership and implement the plan.

This is not a pass to be sloppy, careless or boring. (Lord knows we hate boring!)

There's a simple fact that it is much easier to stay on message and on brand, than to continue to constantly reinvent the wheel with new ideas, new concepts, new visuals, etc.

Find a look, feel and approach that works for you and roll with it. Stay consistent and never waiver and you'll get to your goal much faster than coming up with the next new gimmick, campaign slogan or tagline.

Bikini Tip #4: Metrics are Our Friend

If you don't know where you want to go, there's a good chance you'll never get there. However on the other side, you can experience paralysis by analysis. The setting of goals and measurement of key performance indicators is a great way to not add stress, but relieve it.

The hard work in building goals is identifying the indicators that will lead you to success. In the case of ticketed events, it's pretty easy to see the trends and know when to place additional resources to create results.

While it may be too late for you to identify all of the important numbers for you to track for this year, it is never too late to identify the key five or six numbers that have a direct effect on your short-term results and start to simply track them.

It could be the open rate of your e-newsletter, or the number of your engaged Facebook fans or mentions in the local media. Whatever you determine to be the main influencers to get you to your ultimate goal, track them on a daily or weekly basis and make adjustments if you don't see them heading in the right direction.

The ten minutes the measurement process takes on a daily basis will be definitely worth it in the long run and you will be able to create a baseline for future success.

Bikini Tip #5: Make the Time

The final pain point is time. How many times have we all said or thought, "I don't have time for this!" and we weren't exaggerating.

Time is one of those resources, like money, that there'll never be enough to get everything accomplished. There's really no reason to waste more time contemplating how things might be different. So let's give up that excuse and get on with the work.

Far more eloquent writers and motivational speakers have tried to get people

past their issues and situations. My take on the situation is that "many hands make light work."

We all get the same number of hours in the day. As an event leader or one at least tasked with creating a successful event, you need to maximize the hours given to the project and all of the related tasks. Get some folks to help you! Volunteers are an amazing assistance in making things like marketing projects come to life and they are the life blood of many organizations.

I recently attended a session about how much people are willing to help one another. The takeaway after numerous anecdotes was that people are willing to become much more engaged than we might think. They want to belong. They want to work alongside other great people. They want to be part of something bigger.

I have always been amazed at the sense of teamwork and camaraderie that came along with putting together a performance whether it's a theatrical performance, musical concert, dance production or other activity where folks come together as a group for a unified goal. The same can be said for your festival. If you're already working with teams of hundred of volunteers – kudos! Ask them to do more and ask them to bring more of their friends. You might be amazed at the results!

Summary

As you ready your festival over the coming weeks and months for "swimsuit season," take these five tips for losing the extra weight your marketing plan has been carrying and feel the pounds melt away.

No-one said it was going to be easy, but the truth is that with effective planning and focused execution, your event will be successful and you'll learn lessons that will help you with next year's event.

Now go ahead and have that ice cream cone as a treat – you earned it for all of the hard work you've already put into your event and the success that is yet to come. Good luck and happy swimming!

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