



RE-INVENT

WITH A NEW LENS

BY DIANA MAYHEW

KEEPING IT FRESH AND INNOVATIVE

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Many of us face the challenge of our events getting a bit stale and/or attendance dwindling. Events need innovation in order to meet the high expectations of energy, attendance, budget and value. Change could be required because of internal or external factors: trends changing, the need to start charging admission for the event or costs becoming too high, to name a few. Assessing all opportunities and thinking BIG is the key to re-invention or to fine-tune.

Creative thinking is critical when looking at problems or situations from a fresh perspective that suggests unorthodox solutions (which may be unsettling at first). Creative thinking can be stimulated by brainstorming.

To be successful, it is imperative to encourage and inspire the use of new tools and new thinking in the workplace. Leadership needs to engage and energize their team and elevate out of the day-to-day strategic planning. Get out of the boardroom when planning with your team and enjoy an informal location. Ask for ideas. Conduct frequent brainstorming sessions.

DEVELOP BEST PRACTICES TO HELP WITH THIS PROCESS EACH YEAR. WHAT IS THE METHODOLOGY FOR PRODUCING FRESH AND INNOVATIVE EVENTS?

THE PROCESS

Let's take a brainstorming approach with this topic. Take a step back and generate the questions that will reveal and re-invigorate results. Knowing the questions to ask is imperative. From this process should come "best practices". What do we want to achieve? How do we get there? When making these changes how do you assess impact and value? Here are key questions to consider as you go through this process. Before the big thinking, lay down the ground rules and parameters. Go through a formal process of outlining what is known about the event and organization. What would be defined as future success?

Take a look through a new lens. Recognize event fatigue. Understand the history of the event. Why did it get started and what was the main objective? How has it

evolved? Is it still relevant? What is still working? What is not? Why?

Reassess the goals of the organization. Is the event or program still serving the purposes originally intended? Is the event still serving the stakeholders and community? Are the messaging platforms still relevant? What needs to be considered with change and what it affects? What would happen if this event did not continue? Evaluate existing assets. Explore new ways to frame them in such a way to create new value. Perhaps more focus on revenue streams is required.

What is the decision-making process? It is important to engage and get "buy in" from leadership and the event team early in the process as changes are considered.

CRITERIA...WHY ARE WE DOING THIS EVENT?

Develop criteria to be used consistently when developing new events or deciding on what partnering events makes sense to be associated with or become an "official partnering event."

What is the Impact?

Does it have a wide reach through the onsite audience, through social media and/or potential media coverage? Is it interesting, entertaining and newsworthy? What should this event accomplish? What is the expected experience? Could it provide a "WOW"?

What is the Reach?

What is the capacity of the venue? What is the estimated attendance? Does the event have the potential to reach virtual audiences through social media, web streaming or using other technology? Consider the potential interest and coverage from the local, national or international media?

What is the Relevance?

Does the event align with the mission, messaging and brand of the organization and the community it serves?

WHAT IS THE AUDIENCE TARGET?

What audience does the event currently attract? Is this the right audience? Can the

DEFINITION OF "BRAINSTORMING"

The process of generating creative ideas and solutions through intensive and free-wheeling group discussion. Every participant is encouraged to think aloud and gets as many ideas as possible, no matter how outlandish or bizarre. Analysis, discussions or criticism of the aired ideas is allowed only when the brainstorming session is over and evaluation session begins.

audience be expanded? If so, what other target audiences should be considered and what are the best methods to attract those audiences? Is the event engaging with the attendees and larger stakeholder community in innovative ways?

Understand the audience who you are trying to reach and what they care about. Ask the questions: Who cares? Why do they care? Who should care? Who are the stakeholders?

Understanding your audience's needs and expectations and learning how to manage those expectations is imperative to the success of the event. What audiences are we not attracting and why? Are there gaps between aging and younger audiences? Has the demographics of the event changed? Why?

If you recognize the need to have a particular audience to attend your event, make sure to investigate all the possible ways to reach them... Think outside the box and push traditional boundaries. How can you secure and incentivize attendance of your key audiences?

Something to consider: Did you know that millennials, the next generation of event goers represents roughly 25% of the US population and \$600 billion dollars in spending. Is it important for your event to reach that audience and if so, how do you reach them?

ASSESSING THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INSPIRATION

After you have an understanding of your audience target, transform and shape the event's look and feel that attract them. How can you create a "WOW" experience from entrance to exit? Visual décor is one of the key components. Create authentic experiences. Invite engagement on-site as well as off-site through efforts such as contests and social media campaigns. How do you create an amazing memory? Foster a sense of community and that your audience is a part of the event, whether you are referring to the attendees, participants, or sponsors.

Does the venue need to be reassessed? Is it still the right fit? Costs still aligned? Assessable? How has the city changed... are there other new options for the venue? Add elements of "surprise." Use signage, visual décor, lighting and unexpected elements that capture your guests' attention while still directing them from one spot to the other.

What Entertainment Would Best Align with your Audience you Want to Attract?

Develop entertainment features and programs that connect and hold the attention and interest of and move

audiences....consider storytelling, music, art, dance, demonstrations, games, etc. Of course, budget can be a key factor in steering this aspect of the event. Will the audience have a passive role (watching) or active role (hands-on, physical participation)? Do you have a clear understanding of what is a good fit for or what attracts your audience? Do you have thorough research to back this up?

How Can Technology Be Used to Add to the Experience of the Event and Further Engage Your Audience?

Technology can help take events to the next level and reach virtual audiences. Can technology help you to reach audiences that would attend otherwise? Can you convert that audience into attendees for next year's events? Use technology onsite to enhance attendees' experience and sponsorship benefits and to engage your audience as well as to add unique new features to the event.

How Can you Leverage Partnerships to Enhance your Event?

Review current partnerships. Those that have been long-time partners, have they been taken for granted? Have they gotten stale? Are their objectives the same? Do they still align with your event? Include partners in your evaluation and brainstorming sessions, keeping them engaged and informed. How can you reinvigorate partners with fresh collaboration? Stay up-to-date as to what is new with partners and what is new in the community.

Communicating a campaign or theme well in advance (two years, if possible) and inviting partner involvement early will allow time to develop relevant and quality content, identify funding, etc.

Partner activation can be a valuable asset in adding to the experience and as well as engaging the partner or sponsor. Create activation and amplify what is important. Work with sponsors to incorporate the theme of the event, truly embracing the theme through their activation bringing value to the event without cost to the event or even saving costs.

Can Celebrity Engagement Elevate the Profile of the Event to Give it a Fresh and New Twist?

Consider celebrity engagement beyond a performance. How can you engage a celebrity leading up to or during the event? Adding celebrity association, as long as it is a celebrity that fits your brand, can add a new twist or excitement. Create a "celebrity ambassador" or spokesperson. Perhaps even create an honor or an award, if relevant. Involve the celebrity in a social media campaign or have them push out a message or endorsement for

your event. What types of celebrities or high profile officials would fit the event? Consider entertainers, chefs, writers, government officials among others. Does this celebrity engagement help meet the events objectives and impact desired results? Would this association attract media attention?

What Public Relations "Hooks and Angles" Can Be Developed?

Consider developing campaigns or themes to create that sense of "something new." What is the key message you would like to convey for this year's event? Keep the message short, simple and succinct and repeat over and over again through promotional materials, advertising and verbally at the events and through the media.

Considering leveraging an anniversary to spark an event or to tell a story. Does the event, partner, or sponsor have a significant anniversary to weave into the event? Re-introduce new elements, perhaps a "re-launch" as appropriate.

A grassroots program is a highly targeted and efficient and experiential means of engaging prospects and building loyalty with consumers. With an emphasis on integrated, strategy-driven campaigns and a strong execution, your brand becomes a memorable experience.

How are the different demographics being communicated to? Develop and leverage strategic media partners to reach desired targeted audiences

Brainstorm "hooks and angles." What storylines might be of interest to the media? How do you engage the media leading up to and during the event?

HOW DO YOU MEASURE SUCCESS?

Begin with the end in mind and work toward that goal. What is your definition of success when the event is over? What do you want people to feel or say about your event after they have experienced it? What do you want the headlines of an article to read? It is imperative that your event team and stakeholders understand and buy-in to these goals. Document your success. Capture new event features for further future promotion using it to highlight and better sell the event for future developing promotional materials and identifying funding support.

Understand the goals and objectives of sponsors and partners. How did the event align with these objectives? What are the quantifiable metrics and goals? Identify the tools and resources that can help you measure the results such as surveys, economic impact study, media tracking service, to name a few.

OTHER TIPS TO REINFORCE INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY

Continue Learning and Keep Informed

Understand what resources are available to you and pursue those resources. Networking with others in your industry and taking advantage of IFEA membership benefits. Get engaged. Experience other similar events. Have a professional development plan. Participate regularly in webinars, seminars, industry expos, etc.



NATIONAL CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL – PINK TIE PARTY

Challenges: After being in existence for 5 years, the Festival's only fundraising gala had reached its capacity in the current venue and revenue generation had leveled out; it was time for change; costs were high; changing to a larger, more inspiring venue would be even more costly; need to expand outreach to new audiences

Solutions: Developed partnerships to provide new prominent venue, services, food and beverage, create new assets and benefits for sponsors and secure funding; budget now directed to enhance the guest experience through program content, entertainment and décor; secured high profile media partner that assisted in reaching "who's who in Washington" and developed an event "host committee" to assist with outreach and sell tickets; engaged a high-profile celebrity chef as a spokesperson; developed a new "look and brand" unique to this gala event

Results: Took the event to the next level; secured tremendous in-kind support; attendance doubled; ticket sales and sponsorship revenue doubled; over 30 prominent DC restaurants participated; generated substantial media buzz; attracted a new "DCsocialite" audience to the event and exposed to the Festival overall; format has been sustainable.

Mine Trends

What are the popular, cutting edge, freshest trends? What is going on with the different demographics? How are they being communicated to? Conscious awareness of the market that you are in, on an ongoing basis.

Encourage a Creative Workplace.

Is your staff engaged and inspired and still enjoy working on the event? We all know that in this event-production work environ-



PORTLAND ROSE FESTIVAL – CITY FAIR

Challenges: Interest and attendance continued to decline for their prime revenue-generating event that had been in existence for 30 years in an environment of substantial competition (many events held simultaneously throughout the city); the name of the event, "Waterfront Village" did not resonate with the community; key successful component was the "carnival feature" but that was also getting stale; not much attention from the media.

Solutions: Re-evaluated and redirected the audience target to a younger demographic; created more of an urban celebration reflecting Portland's arts and culture and authentic identity; changed the name of the event to "City Fair", added a concert series geared toward the audience as well as other new cool and relevant features; treated the event as a new event and implemented a "re-launch campaign"; worked with their carnival partner in bringing a new notable ride to the City Fair that had never been in Portland before; created a media event inviting media for an "inaugural ride".

Results: Attendance increased (and continues to grow); the featured ride created a "WOW" affect; gained tremendous media buzz; City Fair continues to be an ongoing success and Portland Rose Festival's number source of revenue.

ment, you need to "love it to live it." Continue to coach your team and encourage them to grow. The event requires and deserves a committed passionate team generating fresh ideas and continued energy!

Diana Mayhew is the Director of Events at the Downtown DC BID and President of the National Cherry Blossom Festival. Since she joined the BID more than a decade ago, the Festival, which attracts more than a million visitors, has grown from an all-volunteer organization to one with a full-time staff of seven. Under Diana's leadership, the Festival is now internationally recognized and offers multiple signature events, including Family Day and the Official Opening Ceremony, and generates more than \$100 million for the city. An area resident for many years, Diana now lives in Maryland with her husband and has four children.

DC PUBLIC CHARTER BOARD EDUCATIONAL FESTIVAL

Challenges: Need to re-vitalize and create alternative sources of funding, attract more sponsors, etc.; minimal resources; needs of the participants were changing; event was not dynamic, was not capturing the attention of the audience for very long; there was a need to attract a more diverse ethnic audience

Solutions: Created a multifaceted event adding distinct new features; key source of entertainment came from sponsors' activation and participant/partner engaging demonstrations; expanded outreach to diverse markets through diverse media partners and bilingual promotional materials; created a more open footprint; charged exhibitor fees;

Results: Costs were reduced, quality programming increased; better experience for the attendees and participants; attendees were more engaged and stayed longer; sponsors and partners met their objectives; laid solid foundation for future events.