

By John R. Melleky, CFRE, CFEE

"WE DO NOT NEED  
TO SPEND MONEY  
ON MARKETING."

"WE WANT TO TARGET  
MILLENNIALS - SO WE  
SHOULD CONCENTRATE  
ONLY ON SOCIAL MEDIA."

"WE ARE A TRADITION -  
PEOPLE KNOW AND EXPECT IT.  
THE PRESS WILL COVER US."

"EVERYONE KNOWS  
OUR FESTIVAL."

# Is MARKETING CRITICAL to Your FESTIVAL / EVENT or Even Your ORGANIZATION?



We all have said it or heard it. But, does it make it true? How important is marketing your festival, event or even your organization and what it stands for? The reasons are more far reaching than you might realize and impacts all aspects of the organization and festival.

To start at the basics, there are three types of media – owned, earned and paid. Owned media includes platforms your organization possesses and controls such as your website, mobile site or social media like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. Paid media is what you pay for and covers all platforms including radio ads, outdoor billboards, print advertising and paid social media posts on Facebook. Earned media is coverage that you obtain that could be considered word of mouth and includes press coverage such as public service announcements, posts or shares about your event on social media, articles based on your press releases, use of your hashtag in the digital world, recommendations or blogs. Earned media can also include what you have negotiated with your media partners including bonus ads after what you have paid for.

All three types are important and each help drive the message. All are necessary to meet your goals and objectives. More importantly, they help identify and engage the festival audience and fan base, which can lead to building the other components of the festival. For instance, if you have merchandise to sell at the festival such as posters or t-shirts, it could be beneficial to build excitement about the merchandise prior to the start of the festival. Many organizations hold events like poster unveilings to showcase the new poster design. Having a press conference tied to the unveiling can lead to earned media and coverage, which expands the audience to the entire community. Sending out social media posts can engage your current base and build earned media through the individuals sharing the content to their social circle. Purchasing radio or print ads

can engage audiences you might be trying to reach to purchase the item or drive traffic to your website to purchase the items online and engage someone new to become a part of your organization and join the electronic mailing list. It all goes hand in hand to build an audience.

But why build that audience? With so many communication messages, people might not have your organization or festival at the top of their priority list. They have attended year after year, but life gets busy and this year, they might miss it without various messages in various mediums to remind them and engage them. How many times have you said, “Oh I forgot about that” and you did not attend? It happens to the best of us. But, what did that mean for your organization if you did not engage someone in your constituency is a loss of revenue, loss of opportunity, and loss to build your community outreach and impact.

Is paid media important? The idea of a media partner has changed. In the past, media companies were willing to be a media partner and your entity would



receive certain amounts of coverage, including some prime hour coverage. That coverage under the control of the media partner – they determine the time, amount, and locations. How does that help you meet your goals and drive your message? In some instances, it may not. Therefore, it is wise to consider some paid advertising. This puts you in the driver seat to determine the message, when it is placed and where it is placed. These decisions should be based on your goals and objectives to reach and grow your constituent base. Many media partners are now looking for “pay to play.” In order to have a full rounded media partnership, you might need to pay for some advertising to get additional spots, more coverage or perhaps even some promotional

activities at the festival or event.

In addition, utilizing all types of media platforms are important. It is not a one type fix to build that audience and engagement. People are creatures of habit and they obtain information in a variety of ways. It can be via radio, television, social media, or seeing a billboard while driving (or sitting in traffic). Knowing your target market can help determine the best platforms and media outlets. As community builders, it is important to include all types of media to inform and engage everyone in your target market. What makes festivals and events incredible is that it should be a way to involve the entire community in a celebration in some way. The celebration is not for a certain few – it should be open to anyone with the interest and excitement. The programming at the festival is a way to segment and engage various members of the community. In addition, as new people come to the community, they are unaware of the festival and tradition and should be included. Communities are living and breathing organisms and without engaging new people, the festival can become stagnant and the audience can diminish. It is important to consider where the new audience will come from, especially since people do get older.

Building audience is one important aspect since it is also a financial driver for the organization in regards to ticket and merchandise sales and also as potential donors for philanthropic programs to increase your impact and outreach. It helps the volunteer program and could lead to future board members. Media is important and also affects sponsorships. Everything ties together... all boats rise with the tide.

Sponsorships are now more than having a company give money and you place their logos on items or at the event. Companies and organizations want to engage with your audience in person and through various forms of media.



Corporate dollars fall into two realms – marketing dollars and philanthropic dollars. Marketing dollars are from the marketing department and relate to the corporation spending to meet their business goals and objectives. It is a business decision. Philanthropic dollars are from the organization's foundation and relate to emphasis areas that they want to support.

Everyone is competing for sponsor dollars and companies do pay attention to what you are doing in local, regional and national media. With sponsor packages, many companies now give the package to their advertising agency to determine the value and if it is a good partnership opportunity. Companies have taken a more business approach to sponsorship – it is no longer doing something good for the community. As festival/event and even nonprofit executives, we must also think in that space.

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As companies measure an organization and a possible partnership, they will

analyze the media component in each aspect – owned, paid and earned. The organization will want to determine the reach in each area. As a nonprofit, you need to be able to have that information and speak to the trends. Knowing your marketing and its impact is vital to tell your story and the impact that your organization's marketing and media has on programs and events. There are various systems available to measure the impact and to know the reach locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Part of that media mix is who is being reached by that media. Having the demographics of the media outlet is as important as knowing the analytics of your owned media. Possible partners are looking to reach certain demographic and psychographic data. The more information you have, the better the ability to develop a strong partnership. This all ties together – utilize your owned media as a hub of information. Paid and earned media can be used to generate interest and your social media platforms can inform and engage the audience to act. By having all three types of media components in play, sponsors can then engage in each platform and a robust activation and engagement can occur. This will lead to larger audiences, and eventually, larger sponsorship dollars.

Marketing dollars and impacts are critical components in a sponsorship program. If there is no media component, many companies might only

sponsor for a year or two. That creates a strain on your sponsorship program as you result in constant turnover. Also, sponsors want to know the media impact of the festival as a whole – what were the specific measures and audience for the festival and the various media campaigns. Are there further activation opportunities throughout the year with this media impact? They are watching and comparing your festival and event against other properties. If yours is lacking or is on a decline, this can be detrimental to your income stream and ways to create new and exciting content for your audience. Without that new content, then the audience diminishes, further damaging your property.

Owned, earned and paid media are all important aspects to promote your festival, event or nonprofit. Each type has various platforms that can build, engage and inform audiences and build engagement with your organization in various capacities. Sponsors look to see the engagement and use of media. Having various media tools enhances the partnership and dollars to your organization. For any aspect of your organization to grow, you must consider the impact of media, marketing, engagement, and sponsorship as they all tie together.

**John R. Melleky, CFRE, CFE** is a Principal of FIG Solutions, a consulting firm that assists organizations in "Filling In Gaps" as needed. The firm assists in all aspects of organizational management, including board relations, strategic planning, fundraising, sponsorships, marketing and public relations, event and festival management, merchandising volunteers and membership. He is also currently working with the Edison Festival of Light in Fort Myers, FL, Southwest Florida's largest and longest-running festival as Executive Director of Development.

Prior to FIG Solutions, Melleky served as the Chief Executive Officer for the Fiesta San Antonio Commission which produces Fiesta San Antonio, an 11 day festival with over 100 events throughout all of San Antonio. Melleky also served for 17 years as a volunteer with the Richmond Christmas Parade and has served as Operations Director for many corporate events for FORTUNE magazine, Time Warner, Real Simple, Warner Music and MasterCard.