

# Turnstiles: Marketing for Event Managers

By Sean King



Sometimes the simplest things are the most difficult to execute. Given we are in the heart of the football season, we thought it would be interesting to take a look at the successful execution of a marketing plan through the prism of a football game plan.

Every football coach has a game plan. Why shouldn't event marketers? Just as there are many pieces that go into creating a plan for a football victory, there are just as many working parts for a successful event marketing strategy.

As event organizers, we all have a strategic plan and a marketing plan, but the chasm from plan to implementation is usually where most of us find our challenges. The quote "We've met the enemy, and they are us" comes to mind when taking a marketing plan from theory to reality.

## The Rules

We all know there are rules regulating the game from the 100-yard field, to the size of the ball, the length of the game and the number of players on a team. Event marketers play our own game with

far less formality, yet we understand there are some basic rules to follow.

Event promoters are mainly guided by rules determined by our organization's mission and resources. With unlimited financial resources, we would be able to accomplish anything, just as fourteen players would surely beat the team with only eleven.

From the smallest event to the largest festival, our mission guides our work as well. There are those decisions within our marketing approach that help us advance the ball while staying consistent our mission, vision and brand. There are also decisions to be made on how best to reach our short-term goals.

Unfortunately, our competition is much more vast than in a simple head to head match-up with another team. Instead of competing with one team, we

compete to gain the mind share necessary for our neighbors to engage our event or activity for an hour, a day or even a week.

## Offense, Defense, Special Teams

When it comes to the X's and O's, football coaches know the impact of utilizing solid techniques and fundamentals in order to virtually predict the outcome of a single play. However, there is always another team on the other side of the ball planning against that play. The strategy behind football is the most nuanced part of the game as coaches and players pit themselves against one another based on tendencies, game conditions or skill sets of individuals or teams.

In event marketing, our adversary is the complete randomness of the marketing

universe. While that's a pretty daunting opponent, we're here to tell you not to worry. With solid game planning and execution of your plan, you will be able to achieve your goals and bank a little good will for the next year's event.

Our intent as marketers is to use the basic fundamentals – the blocking and tackling per se – to achieve our desired outcome by executing on those elements. Success for us is being thorough in our implementation and working hard to ensure victory in the form of smiling faces, increased revenue and overall amazing experiences.

### Offense

When we're on offense, our playbook consists of the elements of traditional media we have worked with for so many years – the tradition of traditional media.

We assign the moniker of offense to traditional media due to its nature of being outbound communication and of a "push" strategy, rather than "pull."

Broadcast media (radio and tv), print media (newspaper, magazine), outdoor, direct marketing and collateral material all should work together as a finely tuned machine.

As the coach, it is your role to determine what your strengths and weaknesses are in order to tell your story. Who are your key players (radio, tv, newspaper, direct mail)? Which players should be carrying the ball? Which ones should be left on the bench due to the lack of resources?

There are intrinsic strengths to each medium, but few of us have the budget necessary to go three or four deep, much less one or two with a level of success.

If you promote an arts festival, your resources might be focused on a visual medium. If your main demographic is slightly older, than an investment in the print medium could be the way to go.

As you evaluate the components which make up your event including audience, focus and calendar, your star players will begin to shine through and make some of the tougher decisions that much easier to make.

Never lose sight of the messaging and the content of your marketing. This is the real strength of your strategy. What images you project, what stories you tell and the overall themes of your messaging is the difference between a tackle for loss or a first down.

### Defense = Digital media (website, email, mobile apps)

In our marketing game plan, digital media takes on the role of the Defense. Sports fans have heard the adage "Defense wins Championships" and

we agree in the marketing world as well. Without a clearly defined digital marketing strategy that combines all of the elements of a great campaign, you may not be maximizing your strengths to achieve the results you desire.

However, with a great strategy and a disciplined approach to implementation, more fans will be able to engage with your event and experience all you have to offer.

When a digital marketing strategy is working well, all elements from website to email to mobile apps are providing consistent information and a positive user experience. All links are working, graphics are uniform and information is easily accessible.

Email is the one digital superstar who can play on both the offensive and defensive squads. When used properly, e-mail delivers quality content to fans that have given you permission to market to them. While email is a push strategy, it can also be a pull, by delivering people online directly to more content on your website, calendar, social outlets or ticket pages.

With a strong offense, traditional media is driving people to your digital assets. With a strong defense, once visitors get to your site they will do exactly what you want them to do: get more information, buy tickets, share with their friends or other desired outcome.

### Special Teams = Social Media

There's a third component to every football team: special teams.

For marketing, our special teams are comprised of the social media elements that have become integral to our success.

Once again, it is best for you to strategize the elements of what makes your event special in order to determine which players you put on the field.

If you are a family friendly event, then Facebooking moms in your community will want to find and share your event with others in their network. If your event appeals to a younger demo or is visually stimulating, then Instagram may be the way to go to reach your specific target.

Does that mean only one social media platform is all you need? Hardly. But to focus your strategy around those that have the most potential to work for you, and to keep the others on the bench is usually the most effective way to manage your social engagement.

Once again content is the key to a successful social media campaign. Keeping information current, engaging and fun will allow you to keep a connection with your fans during the slow times and allow for more activation as you get closer to your

event. Remember, content is everything from short tweets to photos to videos to links. Each plays a small role towards a successful goal, just as each block made by a player allows for the ball to be advanced toward the end zone.

Thanks to social media, we have all of the tools of Fortune 500 companies at our fingertips. The real balance and beauty of the democratization of social media platforms is that our individual networks are more highly valued in the algorithms that generate our newsfeeds than the resources any major corporation can put behind any of their campaigns. Building relationships matters!

Since all event marketing is local, building those relationships is paramount, just as in drafting a top talent and cultivating them into an All-American performer and building a team of these top performers.

### Intangibles (Brand and storytelling)

Every great team has great intangibles. This is the teamwork, the character, the esprit de corps that allows the good teams to be great. In marketing, our intangibles become those elements we've spent time cultivating and curating.

Brand is an especially important piece of our intangibles. Brand is not what we say about ourselves, but rather what others say about us. We spend years making sure that the guest experience is positive, the quality of our food, performances and exhibits is memorable, and the pricing, the signage, the communications are all excellent.

After a few years when your brand is established, you will need to continue to manage it, so when a post, a tweet, a mention or an ad about your event is consumed, fans already have a feeling about the event and know what to expect. That is brand. That is the definition of an intangible.

The stories from your event are also part of the intangibles that feed into the marketing and branding of your event. The family experience shared online, the artist experience shared via anecdote; all of these can be curated to tell the story of why attendees want to come back and share your festival with their friends and families.

A team with great intangibles is nearly impossible to beat – so is an event or festival with a solid brand and stories that connect with your audience.

### Coaching

Of course you can have a great strategy and an amazing line-up of players, but without a coach to make the right calls, you

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may not achieve the success you deserve.

In event marketing, the coaching staff is your team led by paid staff or volunteers. Unless you have strong leadership and the ability for a team to stick to the game plan, your marketing plan will come up short.

Having the experience and knowledge to make the right calls at the right time and to make slight adjustments when necessary is the key to the game. In many organizations, marketing is a one-person show. In those cases, we strongly recommend that you recruit additional volunteer talent, in particular areas of discipline, to broaden the skill set in order to get you where you need to go.

### Overtime

Sponsorships, partnerships and collaborations are a vital part of any successful marketing plan.

While many events look at sponsorships to fill necessary gaps in programming budgets, the activation of these sponsorships can be a key to not only driving more people to your event, but also to deepen the relationship for the future between your sponsors and their customers.

Partnerships, particularly with the media, have also become a key to the success of many events. Media partners love the ability to trade their inventory for access to being a part of the local community. Of course, media cannot be all things to all events, but if you are strategic in working with them AND their customers, it's a win-win-win situation for everyone.

Last but not least, collaborations between events, festivals, corporations and non-profits are the wave of the future. We've only begun to tap into the myriad ways we can work together to solve issues facing our communities and to do it in meaningful ways with partnerships that allow everyone to achieve their goals and make our neighborhoods a better place to live, work and play.

### Post Game Analysis

While many football teams play a schedule of ten, twelve or sixteen games, we as event marketers many times only have one chance to do it right.

Instead of trying to figure out the newest offense or defensive scheme, it's usually good to go back to the basics of blocking and tackling when developing your marketing and communications strategy.

Do what you do well. Look for innovation, but don't think that it will provide the immediate, Hail Mary result you need. Three yards and a cloud of dust will get you to the end zone eventually. Touchdown!

**Sean King** is a Principle at Aspire Consulting Group in Allentown, PA and has been consulting with small businesses and non-profit organizations for over 20 years. He also blogs regularly at [www.artsmarketing-blog.org](http://www.artsmarketing-blog.org). You can follow Sean on Twitter @skingaspire or contact him at: [sking.aspire@gmail.com](mailto:sking.aspire@gmail.com)