

---

# Marketing events with print advertising

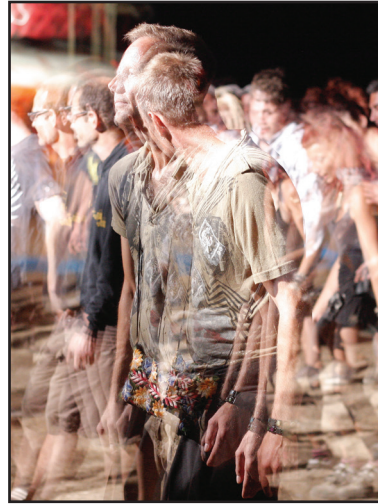
Many organizations in our region depend upon attendance at events and performances for the revenue that keeps their doors open. Small business owners, consultants, and others rely on or supplement their incomes with speaking fees and new business drummed up from seminars and conferences. Booksellers and authors, liquor stores and restaurants rely on wine and beer tastings to bolster sales and reach new audiences. Event marketing is vital to making these endeavors successful, and print advertising is likewise vital to successfully marketing these events.

## **1** Know your audience

The first question anyone selling anything — be it a product, service, or experience — needs to answer is who is buying. Ideally, organizations will have been collecting data about past events so they know who has been coming, and can draw a rough sketch of who might come in the future based upon this information. In the absence of this firsthand data, look to similar organizations that have put on similar

events and see if they're willing to share their demographics with you. You can also research general information about what audiences are likely to participate in what events.

Demographics are a great starting place, but it's important to remember that people within a demographic group can have greatly different tastes and needs, and will respond to different perceived



benefits of attending events. Once you have an idea of who you're talking to, try to identify what it is that will make them excited about attending your event, and develop consistent messaging targeted at the customer profile you've developed. If you can, try to identify several different market segments and develop distinct messages targeted at each segment to broaden your audience reach. Instead of trying to be everything to everybody, ensure that you are a specific something that a specific someone wants.

## 2 Timing is everything

With so much advertising taking place in instantaneous and transient (digital and broadcast) media, it's easy to forget that not everything is as fleeting. As a physical medium, newspapers stick around longer and are typically viewed by multiple pairs of eyes. This makes it advantageous to place advertisements for events in newspapers earlier than one would in the digital realm. In most markets, it's best to begin advertising your event a minimum of two weeks ahead of time, and probably no more than 6-8 weeks in advance, depending on the season and event. It can be worthwhile to tease summer events well in advance — especially family-oriented events — as

“Print still works, which I was surprised about! Every time that ad ran, our ticket sales doubled on that day. It was without fail.”

— Trip Hunter  
CEO Silicon Valley Comic Con  
*How to Draw a Crowd in 2017, AdAge*

many families book camps and vacations as early as the February, and occasionally even the preceding December.

At the other extreme, if your event does not require a great deal of planning to attend, it is definitely worthwhile to adver-

tise through the actual day of the event, as up to a third of ticket-buying audiences wait until the last minute to make a purchase decision.

During the lead-up to the event, it's important to maintain consistency and frequency in your advertising. If your advertising is not seen, your event does not exist — in the minds of audiences.

## 3 Establish a brand

In any medium, you have only a few seconds to grab consumers' attention. It's important to establish a visual shorthand to identify your event, so that all your marketing efforts (in print



BBDO, COSTA RICA | ORQUESTA SINFÓNICA NACIONAL

as well as other media) supplement each other and you don't have to educate consumers from scratch every time they encounter your advertising. This means effectively creating a sub-brand under your overall brand for a particular event. Creating a "hero image," or key artwork, for your event will help make it more readily identifiable across media. If custom artwork is not an option, use imagery of people enjoying themselves (presumably at your event) to convey the value of attendance. In either case, keep your imagery consistent so it becomes associated with your event on a subconscious level.

Plan out your ad placements ahead of time, so that you have consistent copy and imagery throughout. Consider audiences who will see all of your ads as well as those who will only see one or two. In the way that television series used to be episodic and self-contained, yet identifiable as part of a series, try to tease consumers into seeking out your advertisements, but do not count on them seeing every one. This kind of campaign building adds value to each individual placement, and if done exceptionally well, can lead to additional buzz, word-of-mouth, and potentially even earned media if your campaign gains enough notoriety for press to report on it.



DENTSUBOS TORONTO | DISCOVERY CENTRE



## 4 Cross-pollinate

Related events can be used to bolster attendance for one another. Use ad placements for one to promote the other, especially if they are likely to appeal

to similar audiences. If you have a Beer Festival two months after your Food Festival, devote 10-20% of your visual real estate to promoting it. If you're giving a seminar on social media, and next week you're giving a talk about digital remarketing tactics, add a line saying "Up next week!" The events themselves are also great places to boost attendance for coming events, especially if you've invested the time and money into connecting the two brands in your print placements leading up to the event.

For events that stand alone, set up preview events to broaden the audience for the main attraction. Having less time-commitment to put on — and cheaper as well — you can stage multiple previews in your target market area to build interest and word-of-mouth. While guerilla and pop-up style events can be very effective, you can also try promoting these events as



low-commitment alternatives to your main event. Some audiences might initially be averse to committing an investment of time or money to your primary event, they may be willing to give your lower commitment pre-event a shot. Inevitably, some of these attendees will change their minds as a result, and commit to the main event.

# 5 The devil's in the details

Focus on the particulars of your event. If you're marketing a multi-day food festival, place ads featuring different vendors that will be present. Someone who is interested in Vietnamese cuisine might not be interested by an ad for a



Food Truck Festival, but if they see an ad featuring a Vietnamese restaurant's offerings, they will be more likely to attend. If you're promoting a conference, try focusing on individual keynote speakers, and their areas of expertise — allow them to stand out from the crowd. This goes back to the first section and segmenting your market. Imagine the individuals in your audience, and what is going to be the one thing that pushes the needle over the line to get them to come.

---

## *A few more thoughts*

The particular tactics you use to make print advertising most effective for your event may vary, but some other possibilities to consider include.



**What is your value proposition:** This is the “what’s in it for me” question. The answer could be as simple as the joy gained from an entertainment experience, or the quantifiable contribution attendees will be making towards a good cause (e.g. for each attendee, we will raise \$1,000 for clothing for disad-

vantaged children), or a more tangible benefit, such as new business opportunities or free gifts.

**More for less:** The unfortunate truth is that rising costs of advertising across media mean advertisers are getting less bang for their buck, and there's no going back. Budgets that have been increasing by 5-10% annually are almost certainly achieving less dramatic results than they would have less than a decade ago. For more on this subject, read "The New Realities of Advertising Costs (Hint: You Are Getting Less Than You Think)" by Colleen Dilenschneider<sup>i</sup>.

**Use discounts wisely:** Use coded discounts to target specific groups (e.g. \$10 off for students, 30% off for hairdressers, early birds bring two guests free). Track which groups and offers do well and incorporate them into your strategy for your next event. Offer incentives for attendees to purchase tickets early.

**Promote preview events:** use the medium to your advantage and encourage consumers to interact with you. Create experiences, experiment with bridging the gap between print and digital spaces, highlight upcoming broadcast appearances, link a print ad to a custom app, or engage with your audience offline with a live preview, a contest, or some other physical means.

**Boost your digital campaign:** direct readers to online content such as videos, blog posts, behind-the-scenes photo essays — or direct them to sign up for an email list so you can keep them engaged with well-timed reminders, and of course, encourage them to connect with your social media presence.

---

<sup>i</sup> The New Realities of Advertising Costs (Hint: You Are Getting Less Than You Think), Colleen Dilenschneider <https://www.colleendilen.com/2014/09/24/the-new-realities-of-advertising-costs-hint-you-are-getting-less-than-you-think/>

**New England Newspapers, Inc.** offers comprehensive, concept-to-completion print and digital display, as well as search, social, mobile, CTV advertising and campaign management for small, mid-size and large businesses and non-profit organizations. Contact a media sales consultant today, by phone at 413.496.6340 or email at [advertising@newenglandnewspapers.com](mailto:advertising@newenglandnewspapers.com) to learn more about promoting your organization with **New England Newspapers, Inc.**