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An affair to remember


Corporate events build brand and mind share

When times are tough, businesses may be tempted to put all communications and marketing activities on hold until economic conditions improve. Don't. Studies show companies that keep up their profile during a recession come out ahead of their competitors when good times return.

Planning special events is a good case in point. Don't miss the opportunity to build your brand and stay top-of-mind with your customers and stakeholders by hosting a well-crafted special event. But whether your budget is large or small, a strategic and organized approach is the key to ensure your event is a good investment. Whether you're planning a special event such as an opening, corporate anniversary, a fundraiser, or simply a staff party, here are 10 planning tips to keep in mind:

1. Be both strategic and creative. What are your objectives? Who's your target audience? Has your idea been done before? How will your event stand out?
2. Develop a timeline. Creating a timeline helps you to set deadlines and ensure they're met. Knowing what has to happen by a certain date ensures you won't be scrambling at the last minute.
3. Create a budget. Whether your budget is \$250 or \$25,000, you'll need one to help you plan and track your expenses and revenues. Consider sponsorships to offset costs if appropriate.
4. Call in the troops. You can't do this alone, nor does anyone

expect you to. Invite volunteers and colleagues to help you execute the event. Assign specific tasks and deadlines so that everyone knows exactly what's needed and when.

5. Clear communication. Make sure everyone involved knows what he or she has to do. Put everything in writing.
6. Develop agendas. Create both an internal and external agenda. An internal one will likely be more detailed with a minute-by-minute break-down for volunteers and staff, while an external agenda helps suppliers to understand your expectations and timeframes.
7. Confirm – and then double confirm – all logistics with your venue contacts and suppliers. Provide clear direction. Again, make sure everything is in writing. For example, don't recite your floor plan over the phone, make a site visit and follow up with an e-mail.
8. Get prepared. Make an "event box." Don't assume that your venue will have the supplies and materials you'll need. Your event box should include scissors, tape, extra signage, your supplier contact list and agendas. Having these supplies on hand will ensure you can handle any unexpected challenges on your event day.
9. D-Day. This is it, the moment you've been planning for. Stay focused. If you're the organizer, your work isn't over. Make sure everything is unfolding as it should.
10. Evaluation. This is one of the most important, yet often overlooked, steps in the process. Ask for feedback, debrief with your planning team, and measure the results against your objectives. Remember, a happy guest means that your company's name, and event will be the buzz around town. 

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