

SMPS Meeting – April 2010

Planning an event can be a stressful time. With these helpful tips for event planning, hopefully it will make it less stressful and you can actually enjoy the event.

1. Plan In Advance. The sooner you begin to plan, the better. Think carefully about the event you would like to organise before you start and put an action plan together. Work out how long it will take you to complete it, who you could contact to help you out.

Here are some Planning Questions you can go through:

- Is the date suitable or does it clash with any major or national event in your area?
- Who can help?
- Do you need a committee?
- How much do you expect to make?
- Is it worth doing - will you bring in three times as much as you spend?

2. Pull Together A Team. The bigger the event, the more people you are going to need to help you plan. Once you have put together and written down the plan, go over it with your team. Delegate what you can and stress the importance of each person doing their job properly. The last thing you need, is an unreliable person to pull out on the day of the event and leave you hanging and even more stressed.

3. Work Out A Budget. Think about how much you or the organisation has to spend on the event. Costs include postage, printing, photocopying, equipment and hire charges. Try and see if you can get individuals or local businesses to donate some of the things you need, especially if it is a fundraising event. Your income might include ticket/entry fees, sponsorship, donations, raffles, auctions, advertising, sale of goods and refreshments.

4. Lists, Lists, Lists. Keep lists of what you need to do so that nothing gets overlooked. I find it handy to keep a notebook and pen beside my bed because when I am just about to fall asleep I begin to remember all the things I have yet to do. I write them down there and then so I will not forget them.

5. Marketing. The success of any public event rests how well it is marketed.

Here are a few questions to help you put together a good marketing plan

- Who are you trying to attract?
- Do you need any flyers or posters? How many? Who will design and print them?
- Where will you put them?
- Do you need to send a press release to local papers or local radio?
- Do you need to print invites?

6. Venue. The venue you choose is crucial in the success of your event. It effects who attends, the age range, how long they stay.

Here are a few tips when picking a venue for your event

- Is the venue available on the date and at the time required?
- Is it big enough?
- Does it have disabled access?
- Is a deposit required?
- Are there enough seats/tables etc?
- Do they provide catering facilities? How much, what choice, and is there a vegetarian option?
- Is there a cloakroom?
- What toilet facilities do they have and do they have disabled access?
- Do you need a TV, video, CD player, microphone?
- Do you have adequate insurance?

7.Finally, in organising an event, the worst thing that can happen, is all your hard work being flushed down the drain by bad weather. Add a wet weather contingency plan into your overall plan. And do not forget to have fun!

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Tips for successful event planning:

Typical types of events:

- Golf Outings
- Customer appreciation dinners
- Open Houses
- Customer Trips

Golf Courses:

Golf Course	City	Cost PP (green & cart fees)	Phone Number
Cahoon Plantation	Chesapeake, VA	\$45.00 Mon-Thursday \$49.00 Friday \$55.00 Saturday/ Sunday	757-436-2775
Colonial Williamsburg – Golden Horseshoe Golf Club	Williamsburg, VA	\$140 (Gold Course group rate) \$82 (Green Course Group Rate)	757-220-7464
Cypress Point Country club	Virginia Beach, VA	\$65-\$75 per person (depending on food choice)	757-490-8822
Riverfront Golf Course	Suffolk, VA	\$45-\$60	757-484-2200

Lessons Learned:

- Prepare to have one portable cooler per foursome that can be stocked with ice and drinks in case the beverage cart doesn't make it around to them in time for a frosty beverage
- Ask the golf course to have two beverage carts available for your group if it's over 60 people
- Have the golf course have at least one of your beverage carts stocked and ready to go as the players arrive so they can walk up and grab a couple of beverages right after registration
- Prepare goodie bags for each person that includes a snack such as a granola bar, crackers, gum, etc.
- Have one bottle of bug spray and one bottle of sunscreen per foursome – for that extra touch of customer service
- Goodie bags should always have name brand golf balls – never use non-name brand golf balls – I learned that one the hard way.
- Typical Awards: 1st, 2nd and 3rd place teams; longest drive; closest to the pin
- Fun awards ideas: Miss Congeniality Award – get a sash, fake crown, funny dress up stuff and have other players vote on who should win it. Worst Team Award – purchased Bass Pro Shop hat, fishing lures, etc. b/c they'd probably be better at fishing

Customer Appreciation Dinners – non-hotel venues

Venue	Number of People	Appr. Cost per person	Private Room	Menu	Website
River Stone Chop House	30-120	\$75-\$150 per person	Y – 3 to select from	Steak house	www.riverstonechophouse.com
Waterman's	Up to 120	\$75-\$120 per person	Y – nice room upstairs	Seafood	www.watermans.com
Virginia Marine Science Museum	30-500	Depends on group size	Y	Seafood	http://www.virginiaaquarium.com/plan-your-visit/Pages/private-events.aspx
456 FISH	25	\$50-\$120	N	Seafood	www.456fish.com

Customer/ Associate Appreciation Dinners – Celebrations – Hotels/ Conference Centers

Sheraton Oceanfront Hotel – Virginia Beach, VA
 Renaissance Hotel – Portsmouth, VA
 Marriott – Newport News, VA (City center)
 Chesapeake Conference Center – Chesapeake, VA
 Contemporary Art Center – Virginia Beach, VA

Lessons Learned:

- Have a goal in mind – what do you want to accomplish? Needed supporting materials
- Engage others outside of marketing group to help plan the event.
- Pre-Select menu for seated dinner – limited to 3 entrée choices for each person to select from – veggie, seafood, chicken/beef – include in invitation.
- Always ask about the wine selection up front – some venues do not have good choices for serious wine drinkers – and you can have them purchase a specific brand from their vendor.
- Provide agenda for your guests ahead of time and then again at the event – either by using postcards at the tables or with signage. Make sure to stick to the agenda.
- What to Include in invitation: venue, start & end time, RSVP deadline/ instructions, dress code, menu, agenda outline, any kind of theme related to the party (i.e. – 1930's, 70's, NASCAR, etc.), advertise if you plan on raising money or giving away prizes

Open Houses – at your office

Local caterers

Caterer	Phone Number	Type of food
Gourmet Gang	857-6100 www.gourmetgang.com	Sandwiches to upscale menus
Pollards Catering	www.pollardschicken.com	Fried chicken, BBQ to somewhat upscale menus
Cuisine & Company	www.cuisineandcompany.com	*Green Food Service Company* Very high end menu

Lessons Learned:

- Have your goal in mind – unveiling a new project and/or service, saying thank you, new office, etc.
- Get others outside of the marketing team involved in the planning of messaging, customer communications, intended audience.
- Get your speakers' presentations early to review – make sure they aren't missing any pertinent information and/or addressing sensitive topics to your firm.
- Send out invitations in multiple ways to increase RSVP's – twice via mail and 2-3 times via email
- Have a goodie bag to give away – include fun giveaway prizes, raffle tickets for contests
- If you have vendors at your event – have an “enter to win” at each booth – give away different prizes for each or have them donate prizes to give away. Increases traffic flow.

Ideas for creative invitations

- Compressed T-shirts as invitations
- PURLS (personalized URLs)
- Cvent
- Constant Contact
- Create your invitation on a puzzle and have clients put it together

Follow Up

- Attendees can fill out surveys at the event and turn in for a drawing
- Survey Monkey
- PURL's offer ways to gather customer information and provide follow-up leads to Account Managers
- Sales managers/ marketing leaders can set appointments with account managers one week after the event to create action plans and qualifying leads
- Follow up first with customers who RSVP'd and couldn't make it – provide a package sales people can take to them within the first few following weeks of the showcase.