



e4 2015 Express Cafes

BUSINESS

Accommodating Affiliates and Associated Groups

Affiliates and other groups requesting a presence at association events can provide several benefits to the host organization, but they can also be a burden without the right guidelines and processes in place. Join Elizabeth Kunsey, Manager of Meetings & Events at the American Epilepsy Society, to discuss the ins, outs, pros, and cons of hosting affiliates and other groups at association events.

Notes:

- Affiliates are at meeting because you're there
- Look at other websites for examples
- Be clear, concise in rules, regulations, policy
- Approve application, assign space and turn it over to hotel
- Separate affiliate hotel event manager at meeting

Affiliate Pros

- Benefits from F&B spend-make sure it's in your contract
- Help to fill room block
- Tie in A/V, seek %
- Schedule should not compete with program schedule
- Give program time, draw into review process
- Sub contracts for attrition clause
- Cancellation policy
- Another benefit is to charge an admin/application fee, \$100
- Great revenue source, to implement change give fair warning
- Sell to exhibitors as an added benefit
 - 90 min, \$250
 - 90 min to 4 hour, \$400
 - 4-8 hours, \$550
 - Limit multiple time requests
- Exhibitors permitted, follow sunshine act, not vetted
- Is this your only meeting for your affiliates?

- Need to educate the affiliate team
- 1 month cut off, draw the line, room assignment two weeks prior
- Hotel portal rather than excel spreadsheet for event orders.... May be an upcoming trend for larger properties
- Assign space according to priority, pecking order
- Hold back rooms

Cons

- Hostage, sticky with board, political aspects
- Charge consistency
- VIP affiliates, managing their expectations

Research as a Design Tool

Many event pros are discovering they lack the data and insights required to design events that create measurable business outcomes for their organizations and guests. Tammy Smith, Director of Research Services for Maritz Travel Company, hosts this café to discuss the role research can play in your event strategy, how it might bolster event ROI, and enable you to more objectively measure results.

Notes:

- Currently do more *post* evaluation surveys
- Need help getting decision makers to make changes based on attendee needs
- Take advantage of registration to ask a couple questions about them as people or preferences
- Wish had more input into how to best use time/schedule
- Need to boost

“Owning” a City

Creating a bigger presence in the cities where they are holding events, organizations are generating greater awareness, publicity, goodwill, and philanthropic support. Kimberly Dorony, Events Manager for Sage Software, hosts this conversation about creating local partnerships for events that can help generate greater impact, visibility, and ROI.

Notes:

- Background- Sage software just started integrating global. CEO wanted the show to embrace the city. Collaborate with local businesses and create partnerships to advocate for the event in each city. Sage foundation just launched this year, they select a local customer, in Nola it was Habitat for Humanity.
- Sage looks to have a mix of hotel types and different price points.
- Owning it can be spreading your business around to different places and properties
- Gather an economic impact report

Risk Reward Marketing

In a distraction-filled environment where gaining “share of mind” is difficult at best, attendee acquisition marketing must stand out, often requiring bold and risky ideas and strategies for grabbing prospects’ attention. Ken Sien, Director of Strategic Account Management for Experient, leads this discussion to brainstorm risk-taking, perhaps even crazy, ideas for marketing events in ways that grab attention and drive attendance.

Notes:

- Association to drive attendance which in turns drive revenue
- Open discussion there are no wrong answers or ideas
- Don't be afraid
- Let's have fun
- Group introductions

Let's start with three ideas

1. Off the wall marketing ideas that you tried but many have been risky
2. Ones you have heard off and were afraid to try
3. Ideas you had on your own but didn't want to share

Examples:

Larger events that are cohosted; this proves to be a challenge to have a unified brand prescience. We been focusing on promoting one message or the destination and not who they are or the real purpose of the event

- 6 standalone events merged into one. Needed to rebrand. Needed to remind them the value proposition. And how do we get them to love change. Branding was already trademarked, took quite a bit of steps and great risks. Still used a marketing website, community challenges, videos about the conference, bring in content manager
- Toying with creative package through the mail. As we get so much email and the message is getting lost. What will grab their attention? What would be disruptive? What would be the call to action?
- Portland CVB mailed out Legos for you to build something from Portland. Grabbed his attention and unique. What can we do to evoke thought? Creativity?
- How do we keep our attendees engaged and going to the vendor area? We can't lock the doors...

Some ideas:

- Spotlight Lounge, food, beverage,
- Passports to go to the vendors, made them Stay to get your rewards...
- Dedicated exhibit hours
- Do your receptions in the hall
- Mixed up the space. Have theater sessions with quick learnings, shift thinking on time slots, not hours. Maybe it's just 30 minute chunks throughout the day
- Keep their exhibit open and have them invite their customers to business theaters or sessions. Give the a takeaway
- When they rebranded they kept the old names in the marketing for one year post. Give the audience a way to connect

- Added messaging along the way to the exhibit floor. Example was an IBM event in Vegas

How do we drive attendance when it is not mandatory? What works?

- Entertainment
- Education
- Gifts
- speakers can drive attendance, for attendees who refer give them a valued add (transfers, tickets, etc)
- Use social media
- Top line speakers can drive attendance and ask them to help promote the meeting
- Content is important

Delivery for marketing? Keeping the same? Theme? How do we deliver it differently? Taking a chance?

- We've tried direct mail, the press, social media,
- We build it up. Announce. Build it up. Announce with new tool. Rinse and repeat
- How do we add that eliminate of surprise?
- Disrupt yourself before someone else does. Make it a surprise to your attended. Make it an eliminate surprise each day of the show.
- If you had an unlimited budget, maybe this can work
- Why do you go to the conference? Business reasons but you need to add in some fun, with the destinations, we all want to carve out some me time when they are on the road
- Tap your CVB's to help and promote. They have a vested interest in the success of your program
- What was the biggest resource is your attending giving up? Their time to be away from their businesses, family, sales, etc.
- Give your attendance a once in a lifetime experience for every meeting we produce

How important is it to provide value?

- We want them to create their own journey; building their schedules, when to network
- Hold back so you can build more attendance later on
- Tried a secret meeting within a meeting
- Get the internal excitement. Each week have a different clue to build excitement

Off site name badge pick up at the airport and 8 key locations. Avoid the lines. Ppl loved it. You made it very convenient for them.

“Triple Gain” Partnerships

Traditional business models favor a top down approach, but when event organizers work in concert as partners with suppliers and local entities, the results can be superb for all parties. Join Brian Strickland, Director of Strategic Account Management at Experient, to discuss how to form “triple gain” partnerships for events that reap benefits for all.

Notes:

- Triple constraints - PM group
- Quality, cost and schedule: can't have all 3, one thing suffers
- Change that to be proactive and set the stage in a positive
- Triple gain - Equity, transparency and creativity
- Getting people invested and aligned
- Root that makes up a good partnership and tells the story
- Strategic plan created - depends on client need on level of detail
- Overarching theme/philosophy created and all need to buy into it.
- Still put steps and measures in place.
- What makes up a partner vs a vendor
 - Strategic vs tactical
- Excuse to have that conversation with your team or client to look at your relationship
- What are our current challenges or successes?
 - People that don't want to buy into this
 - Need to make it meaningful and measurable
 - Main objectives need to be determined - 3 to 5 - all need to buy in from both sides
- Constantly assess and adjust goals - call out the outliers and determine need to change the goals (personal changes, shift in market, etc)
- What are your needs to have and must haves and outline it in a timeline

Site Selection Timing

The dynamics of lead times, pricing, and other nuances can deeply affect the optimal time to book future events, often resulting in benefits and/or penalties to organizers. Tanya Lowery, Manager of Meeting Services for the American Academy of Family Physicians, leads this discussion about how to hone in on the right time to select sites and begin the booking process.

Notes:

- Meeting Planner Timeframe: example 8,000 peak (10 years out)
- Working with Board Decisions: conservative and won't let them have far out booking windows. Working with a budget and hesitant to commit. Experient help educate Board
- How can hotel help support and mitigate risk and financial concerns to Board
- Availability and depends on booking windows are changing
- Hotels offering availability and offering options with flexibility
- Concerns about booking further out...what will the event look like? What is the growth?
- Citywide-attrition/shared risk tiered room block reviews. Planners letting go of rooms sooner rather than later. Removing clauses with i.e. Such as lower rate clauses
- Information sharing is important. What other hotels are you looking at? What other cities? Full disclosure is the best method
- Experient Rep: Proactive with sharing with hotels a timeline...decision making process...
- Demand is changing. Now feeling more push back and follow up from Hotels. We need to be in better communication about the status.
- Board: one way discussion. Not responsive to the changing market. They are set with their timeframe and the board is not accessible.
- Hotels need to communicate with client and Experient about other group interest to help them share that information with their internals. Exec Director
- Sales need to ask "share with me the process...the board involvement..."
- Hotels holding out waiting for the right business or opportunity. Hotels not taking business 2 years and beyond...waiting for food & beverage
- Site selection: Opening up searches to more venues to get the availability. Market specific. More limited with options coming back
- Flexibility is key...
- Reevaluating timing, dates, locations, space, etc.
- Internal education team...not understanding the process. Why can't we have the same dates? Why do we need to book further out?
- Education: Key to partners, boards, hotels, etc. to help share what is the current market landscape
- Revenue directors looking at demand and future years
- Working through set up times and maximizing space
- Pick up the phone have the conversations about the opportunity. Read the RFP don't ask questions that are outlined on the RFP

Future Site Approval Practices: Best & Next

Different associations use a wide assortment of processes for site review and approvals, involving a variety of stakeholders throughout based on organizational size, culture, and needs. Attend this café, hosted by Nancy Henkel, Events Director at the Quality Water Association, to discuss your current processes and brainstorm alternative models that might yield better results.

Notes:

- Concerns
 - Tighter availability
 - Board not previously willing to plan further out, now wishing they had.
 - Planning further out...but hard due to unknown numbers.
 - Confusion on decision maker... Sometimes everyone wants to be the decision maker
- Do ENAMs and SAMs do sites?
 - Depends on group... And how long Experient has been working with client.
 - Exp. reps like to get site follow up note from the city/hotel right after the site, if they are not there
- Multi-year contracts to save time - with an out clause.. But can take more time to reach a decision.
- More transparency at the end of the process... Just tell the supplier what you need to be competitive
- Problem with hotels driving rates...so clients not getting the offers they need.

Discussion went in another direction at this point on general negotiation.

- Cory recommended copy sourcing and acct mgr on the bid to get the process moving.
- Decision timeline... Often not followed as expected. Board delays the decision
- Recommend that proposals are always customized.
- Board members over involved in decision... Maybe conduct a board member training on current market dynamics.

Determining Event ROI

Whether measuring return on investment, return on objectives or any other “return on,” event pros are increasingly being asked to quantify how event investments are delivering business results. Join Jerry Murphy, Vice President of Operations for Maritz Travel, to discuss the different ways events are measured and how those metrics can be best communicated.

Notes:

A lot of conversation around having a lot of data but how to translate that data into actionable information and make it easy to communicate to upper management.

Also spoke about how to demonstrate ROI to exhibitors

- Predictability software by Hughes group for exhibitors
- Spent a lot of time talking about how to show ROI for exhibitors
- And surveys
 - A lot of conversation around having a lot of data but how to translate that data into actionable information and make it easy to communicate to upper management.
 - Also spoke about how to demonstrate ROI to exhibitors

Transitioning to Leadership

Many planners successfully make the leap to leadership positions within their organizations while others struggle with the transition due to a variety of reasons. Maureen Goodson, Executive Director of the National Postal Forum, leads this conversation about making a successful transition from planning to leading.

Notes:

- You have to start the conversation and let management know what you want.
- Communicate your goals without threatening your leadership. Tell them you appreciate them but want to grow.
- Be vocal about your intentions.
- Discuss the career path, develop a plan.
- Document and sell yourself.
- Develop your goals have frequent conversations with your manager to review and rate your performance.
- Take initiative on a project that is outside your job description. Even if it failed, it shows that you were trying to be innovative.
- When talking to the board or CEO, have some numbers behind it. Numbers talk!
- Sometimes you need stroke management ego. If they feel threatened or insecure that you may surpass them.
- Find out what your manager's goals are. See how you can help support their goals while benefitting yourself as well.
- Interview an executive and ask for a mentor.
- Don't ever back anyone into a corner.
- Become a mentor yourself.
- Be cautious of how you implement change.
- Always get buy in! Plant the seed individually before presenting to the group. Have numbers to back it up! Get people to agree there is an issue.
- Show ROI.

Difficult Conversations with Suppliers

Sometimes we have challenges with even the best of our suppliers, but nobody loves conflict and having conversations to address these issues are often difficult, especially when personal relationships have grown strong. Mike Rowan, National Account Manager for Experient, hosts this café to discuss the best ways to have difficult conversations with supplier partners.

Notes:

- Most delegate or ignore problems when they arise with vendors to avoid the conversation.
- The use of written documentation is typically the first step in dealing with issues, but may go as far as the use of in house legal to deal with problem.
- For a supplier owning up to the mistake and creating solutions is key to overcoming problems that may come up.
- When clients have problems and only present it to the supplier as order taking, it may cause more tension and issues with coming up with a solution.
- Suggestions for communicating from supplier to client
 - Apologizing about problem
 - Have solutions ready for the conversation, even if they are ones that may not be implemented
 - Remember that is isn't personal to separate that from the business decision.
- It is important to be proactive and not reactive when dealing with problems that may happen.

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Civil and Political Crises in Event Destinations

The global escalation of civil unrest and controversial political situations is forcing many organizations to select destinations differently and/or deal with an untimely crisis during the ramp-up to an already scheduled event. Jeff Sacks, Vice President of Strategic Account Management for Experient, leads this conversation about dealing with this unfortunate trend that doesn't seem to be going away any time soon.

Notes:

- Not meant to disparage locations -- not their fault
- Examples -- Ferguson / Baltimore
- Not only natural occurrences -- example SARS / legislation etc.
- INDIANAPOLIS -- ACVIM -- arrival 3 was after legislation re: LGBT discrimination
- Vendors/CVBs become dictionaries for clients
- Act immediately -- web presence, etc
- Didn't run from scenario -- addressed it and countered
- Cities -- careful about following "line of communications" through channels -- third parties etc
- Manage optics of the situation with attendees
- BALTIMORE -- developed emergency plan for civil unrest / change-update website etc. / consider "outside" influencers -- who is doing the actions i.e. Looting, burning, etc. / began constant communication with all parties /
- Ask CVB if city has a plan for situations of civil / political unrest / disruption
- Create banners/ hashtags etc . to specifically address situation
- "Control" the message? How to do that?
- Facility plans to address a variety of situations -- even suicides / accidents / etc. -- both inside and outside the meeting
- Does management of the message fall on the Conference Director? Often yes
- Educate / prepare staff to be prepared for various scenarios
- Consider bringing in crisis mgmt specialists
- Difference in addressing situations between convention centers and hotels -- who/where is after hours contact?
- Association / corporation planners need to take charge of finding out what "plans" exist to address situations
- Consider to whom to communicate plans internally -- board of directors? CEO? Membership?

Conference Health Check: 6 Warning Signs

There are six leading indicators association event organizers should monitor regularly to best understand whether or not their conferences are at risk, and most organizations already have these critical metrics on hand. Join Donna Kastner, Vice President of Expo/Sponsor Sales and Activation for Velvet Chainsaw Consulting, as she leads this discussion centered around the six warning signs that your association conference may be in trouble.

Notes:

This café session had a wide range of participants, each serving different industries, but everyone agreed that the following warning signs (we actually explored seven) should be measured & monitored:

- 1. Paid attendee loyalty dips below 50%**
A few measure loyalty across all attendees. General agreement that excluding comps and focusing on those who pay to attend would reveal richer and more actionable insight.
- 2. Exhibiting company renewals slide below 65%**
“Company” is the operative word here, as some have more than one spot on the expo floor. Retaining and growing anchor exhibitors was a big challenge for many at this session.
- 3. Sponsorship revenue renewal dips below 75%**
Overall, there’s less attention being paid to sponsorship renewals – more on exhibitor renewals. Some debate on whether 75% was the right benchmark to apply to sponsorship.
- 4. Lack of revenue diversification**
If 70% or more of event revenue is coming from one category (registration), more vulnerable to economic dips. Some debate, but most agreed it was a good metric to watch.
- 5. Graying demographics – 65% or more of your conference audience is age 50+**
A hot button for this group – lots of heads nodding, with participants swapping stories on what matters to millennials. Attracting and growing millennials was a priority for nearly everyone.
- 6. Less than 55% of direct expenses earmarked for the attendee experience**
Expenses that qualify as attendee experience drivers: Speakers, entertainment, AV & production, food & beverage, WiFi, etc. Less consensus among the group on this point.
- 7. Top 30 companies aren’t maintaining or increasing their investment**
Few people are taking a holistic look at company spend (registration, exhibits, sponsorship, etc.). All agreed that focusing on the most important investors (80/20 rule) is important.

Wrapped up with discussion about a few more warning signs, including:

- Education consumption (aka “butts in seats” for sessions)
- General Session late arrivals and/or early departures
- Ambush Marketers (Suitcasers, outboarders -- people working fringe of event w/o paying)

- Lighter expo floor traffic – fewer influencers and decision makers attending expo
- Fewer early bird conversions
- Surge in secondary email addresses (Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail, etc.)
Attendees shielding themselves from unwanted/irrelevant exhibitor emails.