

Creating attendee-friendly shows

Tips on reviewing your event from an attendee's point of view

By Linda C. Chandler

Find out what attendees value

- Explore all methods of gathering intelligence, from personal intercepts during the show to on-site survey cards or computer/digital surveys.
- Do pre- and post-show surveys, and compare expectations and evaluations.
- Be sure to include as many open-ended questions as possible. (Typical surveys state the anticipated issues and expected responses but neglect more experiential input.)
- If you can't produce data-rich, cross-referenced survey reports, hire a survey company that can help you look at target segments.
- Survey registrants who didn't show up and last year's registrants who did not attend this year's show to discover why.
- Use focus groups and telephone calls to discover attendee issues.

Use advisory panels

Mix buyers and exhibitors to raise the level of discussion to real issues, not petty complaints.

Include power buyers whose opinions exhibitors will value.

Don't skew your input by naming only supporters to panels. Choose people who are unafraid to give objective, honest feedback, not cheerleaders.

Assign issues/areas for advisory board

members to pay special attention to during a show.

Hold a brief meeting during the show to take immediate action on any noted problems.

Schedule a formal meeting or teleconference within a few weeks after the show.

Encourage advisory panel members to express ideas about strategic issues, as well as operations.

Create special hours

Some shows offer **pre-show tours** or special times for international attendees, as well as an international lounge where special foods, translation services or international newspapers are available.

Many shows offer VIP hours for key buyers and give them special rooms for conducting business.

Appointment-only hours can ensure attendees their target vendors will be available for them.

Early-bird hours with breakfast and coffee may draw early-risers into the show. Late-afternoon receptions on the floor can keep attendees there rather than returning to hotels.

Offer incentives for attendees

In 2005, the AttendTrend survey asked 500 show organizers about their relationships with attendees and value-added initiatives they offer.

Compared with 2003:

- 65 percent more shows are co-locating.
- 42 percent more are offering matchmaking services.
- 39 percent more are offering premium incentives and gifts.
- 329 percent more are offering money-back guarantees.

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