

Executing a Stellar Business-to-Business (B2B) Event

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About The Author

In his career, and most recently with a Milwaukee-based publishing and media company, **Mike Kuharske** was responsible for the promotion of SE Wisconsin’s largest B2B expo and the launch of countless industry and executive-focused meetings, events and workshops with attendance from 25 to 5,000.

Additionally, his experience includes audience and product development, strategic partnership development, marketing and sales campaigns. In 2009, he co-founded Gravity Marketing LLC, a firm that helps B2B organizations grow revenue by optimizing marketing, advertising and sales efforts. He can be reached at 414.202.5874 or mkuharske@gravitym.com.

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to empower you to plan and produce successful business-to-business (B2B) events through a repeatable process and tools.

In the following pages you’ll find step-by-step considerations for planning, promoting, executing and optimizing B2B events, gathered through years of experience.

Every organization has inherent value...it’s why the organization exists. The trick is to find ways to deliver bits of that value, expertise or knowledge to the individuals who need your products and services or can refer you business.

Key Event Tools

Executive Summary, **page 7**

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Sample Event Script, **page 9**

The key to a stellar event starts with these guiding principles:

- Put your audience first** – their perception is reality.
- Be a resource** – avoid a pitch, quality content rules the day.
- Don't reinvent the wheel** – there are tools and ideas that are proven.
- Speak their language** – focus on what they need, in ways they understand.
- Execute against a plan** – no matter how simple, a plan keeps you on track.
- Business events can still be fun!**

Unique Aspects of B2B Events

- Event attendees are more professionally motivated than personally motivated, and it can be argued that if your event appeals too much to their personal motivation it might not correlate to your organization. Exceptions are networking, customer appreciation, or outings where interaction with the right people is the goal regardless of the context.
- Often the audience of a single B2B event might have many different segments who are motivated to attend for different reasons.
- B2B events usually play an integral role in a long, relationship-based buying process of a business customer.
- A B2B event usually has a broader purpose or goal than the event itself.

Step 1 - Generate a Mission Statement

As succinctly as possible (no more than a few sentences), describe:

- What is the event?
- Who should it matter to?
- What will make it matter to them?
- What are the desired outcomes for your organization?

Example – A luncheon to launch new telephony product

Host an “exclusive” luncheon targeted toward owners and top executives of companies between 5 and 50 employees in SE Wisconsin. Additionally, execute a campaign that creates multiple impressions on a target audience of 1,000 to create awareness of telephony capabilities, XYZ company expertise, drive traffic to a micro-site, and culminate in 20 qualified prospects attending the event.

Start drafting an executive summary (*figure 1*), as you work through these steps, you can choose to add or leave out detail as needed.

Step 2 – Create “Measurable” Goals

What are realistic expectations and goals for this event?

Example – without advertising

Audience – roughly 1,000 qualified prospects, clients, referral sources
Impressions – make 4 – 8 impressions on each individual
Attendees – 50 to 100
Post Follow-up – 2 or 3 impressions
Sales Leads – 50 to 100 contacts provided to sales
Sales Opps – 5 to 10 immediate opportunities

Example: Multi-faceted Goal

At the same time that a product demonstration event should produce sales leads, we need to position our company's leadership position in the market.

Example: Organizational Goals

Position company expertise
Lead generation
Training
Demonstration
Networking
Customer retention or appreciation

Example – with advertising

- Audience – roughly 1,200 qualified prospects, clients, referral sources
- Impressions – make 4 – 8 impressions on each individual
- Advertising – 2 to 3 impressions on XX,XXX general targeted audience
- PR – Article/Mention in one publication (XX,XXX impressions)
- Attendees – 75 to 150
- Post Follow-up – 1 to 3 impressions on 1,200
- Sales Leads – 50 to 100 contacts provided to sales
- Sales Opps – 5 to 10 immediate opportunities

Step 3 – Clearly Define Your Audience

Who exactly should attend?

Beyond describing your target audience as prospects, clients or referral sources identify specific demographics or commonalities they share. For a single event, you may have several audience segments which should be considered when you are creating the messaging.

Example #1 – Technology product launch event

Owners and top executives (CEO, President, EVP) of businesses in metro Milwaukee with 5 to 50 employees.

Example #2 – Reception to launch an artist’s corporate work

Primary (Prospects) – top executives (C-suite) of companies with \$50 million in sales an above in SE Wisconsin and executive directors of business improvement districts. Secondary (Referral Sources) – architects, interior designers, commercial real estate developers, and brokers.

Where will invitees come from?

Internal Resources – CRM system, marketing database, sales team, sales records (accounting)

External Resources – purchased lists, advertising, and partnerships (see step 3)

Step 4 – Identify Possible Partnerships

Knowing your target audience, think of places where a community of these individuals already exists. If you’re looking to reach lawyers, perhaps a legal association will help promote the event. If it’s business owners, perhaps there is a strong chamber of commerce in your area. From your perspective, an ideal partner should have a strong community that can be leveraged.

Types of Partnerships

Promotional Partners – industry associations, chambers, charities

Most promotional partnerships need to have mutual interest in the same target audience. Further, there must be some “hook” that would get them to freely share information or access to their membership (i.e. they have a strong drive for new members, your event can be positioned as a member benefit, etc...) The key is what’s in it for them to team up with you?

Partnership Possibilities

- Vendors
- Industry Associations
- Partner Organizations
- Chambers of Commerce
- Business Publications

Note:

WIIFM (what’s in it for me) – think about what value you can offer a potential partner in your event.

Funding Partners – key suppliers, vendors, complimentary organizations

If there is enough mutual benefit, some partners may help offset costs or fund specific aspects of the event/campaign. This could include teaming up to co-produce the event, or accessing vendor co-op dollars for logo or co-branding.

Example – Supply Chain Improvement Seminar

A consulting firm that helps manufacturers optimize their supply chain plans to host a seminar. Instead of keeping it specific to their solutions, they involve a law firm that deals specifically with supply chain issues and an accounting firm with a specialization in cost accounting. Collectively, they now offer a highly-valuable seminar targeted toward mutual prospects and it reduces the hard costs they would incur individually. Often the organization that plans and executes the event can almost completely eliminate hard costs by involving partner organizations.

Step 5 – Decide Your Format & Location

Common Event Types

Conferences	Dinner Meeting	Golf Outings
Receptions	Roundtables	Sporting Event
Breakfasts	Seminar	Holiday Party
Presentations	Demonstration	
Luncheons	Trade Shows	

Location/Venue

Your selection of a venue is dependent on the size, type, format, and desired experience you wish your attendees to have. A few questions to ask yourself:

- Should the location be part of the appeal of the event?
- Is it geographically well located in relation your target audience?
- Can it handle the necessary logistics? (I.e. catering, presentation technology, etc.)

Step 6 – Develop Your Budget

Revenue – most times B2B events are part of the sales/marketing process and are seen as an investment to create interaction between sales professionals and clients/prospects, meaning they are promoted as free to the desired audience.

However, conferences, trade shows, training courses and seminars with high quality content or speakers may allow you to offset costs with a registration fee. Note: a paid event may be indicative of stronger commitment on the part of an attendee, but it may also create a lower threshold for sales contact.

If considering a paid event, research typical price points for similar events in your area. Also, if payment is necessary to offset speaker costs you might find you're your attendance goals are unrealistic.

FREE Event?

Well, maybe not free, but often the organization that plans and executes an event can offset costs by involving partner organizations.

Sample Budget

See page 8

Expenses – identify as many things as possible (and as specifically as possible) that will create costs associated to the event. The most common expenses include:

Facility Rental	A/V Equipment
Food	Marketing/Invitations
Beverage	Advertising
Speaker	Event Materials
Signage	

TIP: Use standard tools such as one of the many template event budgets in Microsoft Excel. These will force you to estimate your costs in advance and then reconcile it with the actual costs afterward (*figure 2*).

Step 7 – Plan Your Promotion

Messaging – create a very succinct message (based on your audience) that you want to resonate with them regardless of whether they attend the event.

Promotional Tools – you may use just a few, or almost all of the following items when promoting your event.

Blast E-Mail	Company Website
Individual E-mails	Web Advertising
Letters	Print Advertising
Invitations	Sales Hand-outs
Post-cards	Telemarketing
Flyers	Sales Phone Calls
Newsletters	Public Event Calendars

Timeline – create a specific timeline of major activities beginning 8 weeks prior to the event and continuing through to event follow up activities (see *figure 1*).

Step 8 - Develop Registration Process

Think about how you want individuals to register for the event. An easy, streamlined process removes a barrier to whether someone will attend the event or not.

If you have complete contact information upfront, perhaps a simple e-mail RSVP that can be checked off against the list is fine.

However, even for free events it may be worth considering online registration tools because of their ease-of-use, completeness of contact information, template promotion capabilities, and retention/reminder function.

Capturing complete and accurate contact information may be essential in securing valuable promotional partnerships or in the success of the event in creating sales opportunities.

Note:

A high-quality free event can justify the attendee providing complete and accurate contact or even demographic data.

TIP:

Different audience segments for a particular event may need to be communicated to differently.

TIP:

Online registration software can streamline the process and capture valuable attendee information.

Step 9 – Generate PR

Generating public relations coverage isn't magic. It simply requires having the *right message* to the *right person* at the *right time*. If your event is substantial enough, you might consider a PR agency. A PR agency has relationships, contacts and knowledge that may justify their fee versus the amount of effort necessary to produce results.

For most events you can follow this **simple plan** to increase the likelihood that you can obtain coverage for your event:

The right media – identify the media outlets whose purpose is to provide information to the exact audience your event serves.

The right contact – figure out who within the media outlet has responsibility for covering the content area your event focuses on (this could be a particular industry, someone specifically covering events...)

The right message – understand their editorial mission (what kind of information do they try to deliver), position your event in that context.

The right time – find out when they need the information based on their production schedule (a weekly publication might need to know of an event two weeks in advance).

Follow up – simply sending out a press-release and hoping won't work. Conserve your efforts, contact fewer people and do it personally.

Step 10 – Develop Logistical Plan

Desired Experience – Place yourself in the shoes of an attendee and walk yourself through the event. How should you be greeted? Where will you hang your coat? Do you have a name tag? Where do you go? How do you find your seat?

Messaging – make sure all staff understand the succinct positioning of the event and can communicate it in their own language. Prior to the event, reconfirm the purpose of the event with staff so they understand how to engage with people.

Staffing – who do you need and what are their roles and responsibilities?

Layout – how does the room(s) need to be set up, whose responsibility? This will vary greatly based on format/type of the event.

Program/Content – Schedule the content and flow of the program, presentation, etc, and make sure everyone involved understands their role. If the event dictates, a complete event script (think movie script) should be developed to assure there are no surprises, *see figure 3*.

Event Materials – plan for any appropriate booklets, flyers, hand-outs, signage, satisfaction surveys, etc...

Step 11 – EXECUTE

Your company or organization will never look better than it does during a well-executed event, and with a plan...it'll seem easy! **Don't forget the Follow-Up!**


Step 12 – Follow-up & Review

Ideally, your well-prepared plan helped you avoid typical pitfalls in event planning and execution and the measurable were achieved. But, this is the real world...things come up and incremental improvement is always possible. Identify those things that could be improved and use them next time.

TIP:

Don't underestimate the value of a basic event script. It avoids the danger of changes made on the fly.

Figure 1 – Sample Executive Summary



Executive Summary

Cocktail Reception for Chrimarie, LLC Featuring the art of Peter Diepenbrock

Summary

Host an invite-only (entrance with RSVP or postcard in hand) cocktail reception targeted toward architects, designers, commercial real estate developers, brokers, key executives and related individuals featuring the art of Peter Diepenbrock. The goal is to introduce Peter’s art to the decision-makers/influencers in this market and position the artist’s capability and portfolio of commissioned projects.

Date:	Thursday, October 29, 2009
Location:	Gravity Marketing
Time:	4:30 – 7:30 PM
Partner Orgs:	CARW (confirmed)
Target Audiences:	CARW Members 500, Real Estate 250, Architects 250, Construction-200, Key Company Owners/Executives-250

Promotion Plan

- 10/02 – RSVP form/link open
- 10/09 – First Post Card (Qty 1000, CARW members, other targets)
- 10/13 – First E-mail Blast through CARW
- 10/13 – First E-mail Blast other targets
- 10/15 – Promote at CARW Annual Dinner
- 10/16 – Second Post Card
- 10/20 – Second E-mail Blast through CARW
- 10/20 – Second E-mail Blast other targets
- 10/27 – Third E-mail Push
- 10/28 – Reminder Email to registrants
- 10/29 – EVENT DATE
- 11/02 – 11/30 – Follow-up (sales meetings, email, mailing)

Budget

Food/Drink (target 150 people)	\$1,000
Promotion (postcards, postage, email)	\$2,000
Event Management (planning, execution)	\$2,500
Campaign Micro-site	\$2,000
Event Flyers, Large Art Photos	<u>\$1,000</u>
Total	\$8,500

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Note:

Starting with a draft of an Executive Summary similar to this example can be a good first step. Utilize the rest of this document to fill in the blanks.

Even if you get no further than creating a top level summary plan for your event, the process will be easier.

Figure 2 – Sample Budget

Event Budget for [Event Name]					
> Expenses					
			Estimated	Actual	
Total Expenses			\$0.00		\$0.00
Site	Estimated	Actual	Refreshments		
Room and hall fees			Food		
Site staff			Drinks		
Equipment			Linens		
Tables and chairs			Staff and gratuities		
Total	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$0.00
Decorations	Estimated	Actual	Program		
Flowers			Performers		
Candles			Speakers		
Audio/Visual			Travel		
Paper supplies			Hotel		
Other			Other		
Total	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$0.00
Publicity	Estimated	Actual	Prizes		
Graphics work			Ribbons/Plaques/Trophies		
Photocopying/Printing			Gifts		
Postage			Total		
Total	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$0.00
Miscellaneous	Estimated	Actual			
Telephone					
Transportation					
Stationery supplies					
Fax services					
Total	\$0.00	\$0.00			

Reminder:

Don't reinvent the wheel! Within MS Office you'll find a variety of starter budgets for events.

Figure 3 – Sample Event Script

11:00 AM	<p>Registration All nametags are layed out on tables with signage Attendees network in exterior area Meals are preset at tables Doors to hall are opened at 11:50</p>
12:00 PM	<p>Lunch & Awards Program steps up and gets crowd's attention, welcomes, then introduces Clare</p>
12:01 PM	<p>Welcome Dan Owner, XYZ Company Clare Vice President of Corporate Communications & Marketing, Chairman of the Board, Clare speaks on behalf of chamber, welcomes everyone, suggested finish "again thank you for coming and enjoy the program", she leaves podium, clapping is sparked and then subsides, lights dim and videos begin</p>
12:04 PM	<p>Sponsor Videos Lights come back partially or not at all, once last video completes Dan comes to podium and says "please enjoy your lunch, we'll begin the awards presentation shortly" Dan comes to podium and starts the awards presentation with a synopsis of the winning companies, total number of employees, years in business, etc...</p>
12:20 PM	<p>Finalist Awards Presentation Dan Owner, XXX Company Dan introduces then introduces Lou Each winner comes to table behind podium to accept award from Dan & Clare Presenting Sponsor - Lou, Regional President Lou introduces AAAAA, BBBBB, CCCCC - then introduces Dan of XYZ Company (prepared introductions on each company by Steve) Sponsor 2 - Dan, Director of Small Group Sales Dan introduces DDDDD, EEEEE then introduces Dean Sponsor 3 - Dean, Partner/Attorney, Office Dean introduces FFFFFFF, GGGGG then passes off to Jon Sponsor 4 - Jon, Regional Marketing Manager Jon introduces HHHHHH and IIIIII then passes off to Clare Clare, Vice President of Corporate Communications & Marketing, Chairman of the Board, Clare explains the concept of the "XXXXXXX Award" and introduces XXXXXXXX, then introduces Steve Steve steps to podium introduces himself and starts Q&A</p>
12:45 PM	<p>Finalist Q&A Discussion Steve Editor, XYZ Company As Q&A wraps up, dan and clare make way to podium</p>
1:15 PM	<p>ZZZZZ Award Presentation Dan & Clare Winner comes to podium to say a few words Clare comes to podium "Again, thank you to our sponsors Sponsor 1, Sponsor 2, Sponsor 3, Sponsor 4.</p>
1:25 PM	
1:30 PM	<p>Adjourn Honorees, sponsors, etc remain at stage area to take photos with awards</p>