3 Keys to a Great Event That Epitomizes Your Brand



To build a brand today, you need to be known for more than just your product. You want to become known as a company that will truly enhance its customers' lives. Apple knows this; that's why its product reveals and Worldwide Developer Conferences are such extravagant affairs. The goal is to create a lifestyle that people want to buy into.

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According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, by 2024, jobs for meeting, convention and event planners will increase by 10 percent. This coincides with another BLS prediction that the event industry will grow by 44 percent by 2020, with much of that growth coming from branded events. If the next frontier in branding in your industry is the creation of events, what can you do to become a pioneer?

Actually, the first thing you need to do – before anyone will trust you or become a loyal fan – is consider what real, emotional connections you can build between your customers and your brand. Personal interactions like those are what customers crave, and a promotional event presents a great opportunity to form them. Here are the "next" steps:

First, know the 'why' behind your event.

The best way to successfully walk that line between a great experience and an overly promotional event is to understand the "why." Why are you hosting the event? Why do you incorporate your brand when you do?

Any event should embody your brand's values and message, so try to infuse your company's core values into the activities wherever possible to produce a unique and memorable experience.

Next, focus on the right things to develop your event.

There are a million logistics involved in event planning, but here are three things to focus on:

1. Know your "three words."

According to the EventTrack 2016 Experiential Marketing Content Benchmarking Report, a survey sponsored by Event Marketing Institute and Mosaic, 72 percent of consumers surveyed said they viewed brands in a positive light when those brands deliver unique, high-quality branded events. Moreover, 74 percent said they were more likely to purchase products that were promoted through engaging experiential marketing events.

The key to developing the most engaging events lies in knowing who you are as a company and why you exist in the world. Our core values at Hawke add up to one "why" that can be expressed in three words — "we grow brands." That idea is echoed in every event we do, and your three words also need to be consistent every time.

Your reason for existing, in other words, needs to spur everything you do, large or small.

In that context, my company recently held an event in cooperation with Google for people who are green to pay-per-click advertising. And in October, we held our first annual ecommerce event, Hawkefest 2017, to bring industry thought leaders and peers together to share experiences and

learn about ecommerce.

Neither of these is a customer acquisition event. They are all about aligning with cool companies and CEOs to demonstrate that “we grow brands” in this space – reinforcing our three words.To illustrate: For our event with Google, we gave away tickets to prospective candidates, partners and clients who wanted help understanding PPC advertising. Hawkefest was a little different because we were trying to provide the most value to attendees and guests. So, while your own company’s “three words” must remain the same each time, the goals of a particular event should inform how you incorporate those words.

2. Have your most enthusiastic staff and customers on hand.

I don’t mean just the people working the event, either. Proactively seed the audience and the venue with people who are superfans of your brand, even if they’re not the most knowledgeable on how your company works. Enthusiasm spreads.

This is an important consideration, as passion is the way to the consumer’s heart. According to recent research that Alan Zorfas and Daniel Leemon published in the *Harvard Business Review,* the lifetime value of customers who are emotionally connected is *double* that of those who are merely highly satisfied customers.

A great way to create a strong emotional connection to your brand is to hold an event packed with your most ardent supporters. These people can help shape a more personalized vibe at the event, so that the overall experience helps your guests see and understand how your company truly “gets” them.

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Cherry-pick your own team members and put people either on the agenda or in the audience who you think will have a positive impact during smaller, one-on-one conversations. This is akin to getting your three best guests on your lineup because you know they'll be the life of the party and set the tone for the room.

3. Align the event with your broader mission.

Can you take your brand's purpose in the world and grow an event around it?

Chipotle provides a good example of a company aligning an event with its brand. In 2010, it launched a festival called Cultivate, which celebrated food and music. Because an important part of Chipotle's corporate mission is to promote sustainability, the company does more than just show attendees a good time with live music, cooking demos and interactive experiences: It also encourages attendees to discuss food sustainability and other food issues.

Six years into throwing this annual event, Chipotle has been able to partner with brands, like Organic Valley and Naked Juice, which align with Chipotle's emphasis on sustainability. The benefits can be mutual and exponential when you keep everyone's interests in mind.

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Hosting events is a fun and exciting way to grow your brand. As long as you focus on your *why*, you'll get to connect with cool people in strategic positions, craft killer experiences that build affection and loyalty in your customer base, and grow your business by introducing it to new potential customers.

The best part is that you can do all of those things at once

and have a great time delivering an awesome VIP experience while you boost your event’s ROI, no matter what your budget.

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