How Event Organizers Can Cultivate Resiliency

Proving your loyalty and flexibility can make up for short-term losses.

April 17, 2020 4 min read

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

It was just over a month ago that SXSW organizers called off the annual music, tech and culture showcase, causing a projected $355.9 million blow to Austin's ecosystem. It was one in a painful series of similar cancellations, leaving event promoters and producers — and the artists and communities they offered a platform to — reeling from tremendous losses.

Nevertheless, many leaders in the events and hospitality spaces are demonstrating true resiliency amid an ever-changing situation that threatens the livelihoods of their companies and employees. Here's how others facing comparable challenges can follow suit.

1. Community remains at the core

Ultimately, what brings an event together is the community of people who want to attend for a shared purpose. In the week that SXSW was cancelled, GritDaily, a news source for millennial and Gen Z brands, made the choice to continue on with its original, in-person programming in Austin. Its co-founder and managing editor, Andrew Rossow, says of the decision that, "Community-building was our central intention. Many were devastated about the cancellation of SXSW, but we

were all together in Austin and knew there was still an opportunity for magic. Community makes us feel more optimistic, and we were all in the same city anyway."

Related: Breaking Down the Business of SXSW

Founder Jordan French and his team made the decision to continue their programming via remote Zoom calls and other social-distancing measures before any shelter-in-place orders had been instituted in any states, underscoring how new innovations can occur with community top of mind.

2. Prove loyalty to your attendees

As hard decisions regarding cancellations and postponements were made across conferences, summits and large-scale events, ticket refunds posed the biggest threat to organizers's economic viability, yet a slew of organizers have fulfilled them anyway (Ticketmaster's intransigence notwithstanding). And airlines and most hotels have followed suit. If there is any way that you can lessen the impact on your attendees, do it. Returning to the principle of community-building, this is the time to prove to your consumers that you'll take care of them. Attendees who feel forgotten or face a hard time receiving a refund won't soon forget that lapse in communication and customer service after this is all over.

3. Go virtual to offer the same value

Finally, take advantage of any and all opportunities to go virtual. While it's not the same as bringing people together in person, there are benefits, such as the ability to reach those who originally weren't going to attend the event and providing the desired value that compelled attendees to buy tickets in the first place. Even as postponements are made, see how you can offer value now to help plant the seeds

for further community-building. As David Alexander, Director of Student Services at the International Career Institute, observes, “A successful business idea should fulfill customer promises and exceed expectations. How can you use virtual events to fulfill the same promises you made to attendees, while also exceeding expectations?”

Related: Why Live Events Are Rocket Fuel for Business Growth

Ask speakers and panelists if they’d be willing to convert their talks to online material for the meantime, and take advantage of community forums or Facebook groups to keep attendees connected and networking. Discover what additional programming and resources you can add to exceed expectations. Virtual presentations come at a fraction of the cost of in-person events and will prove to your attendee community that you care about their growth, development and the community at large even through these devastating times.

This is when companies — especially those hit the hardest — will prove the true value of resiliency.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/349161