

7 Digital Ideas to “Socialize” Your Next Tradeshow

Meetings & Expositions May 2010

By: *Shaun Quigley*

With tradeshow attendance down and traditional marketing approaches increasingly less effective, it's more important than ever to use every marketing tool at your disposal. A leading interactive marketing pro illustrates how to sustain attendance by incorporating seven smart and savvy digital ideas.

To say it's been an unpleasant year for tradeshow marketers would be an understatement. Organizations and individuals alike are watching every dollar, no one is traveling, and attendance levels have dwindled as a result.

So with attendance down and traditional marketing approaches increasingly less effective, savvy tradeshow marketers are scrambling to find new ways to reach members, sponsors, exhibitors and prospects. This is where “going digital,” including the use of social media, makes a lot of sense.

What follows are seven inexpensive-but-effective tradeshow marketing tactics for the digital age; tactics you can begin using today to build awareness and most importantly, attendance for your next big event

1. Use Smart, Focused Email Marketing

Most associations send one major communication per month to generate awareness about an event, which is fine. But once a potential attendee is in the communications stream, the goal should be to convert that person to an attendee by hitting them with progressively focused messages at the right time and in the most personal way possible.

2. Go Wild With Social Media

- Use social media listening tools (www.sysomos.com) to learn what are people saying and where they are saying it, and then tailor your show's programming accordingly.
- Use Google docs to assign tasks and meetings and to make the calendar and information sharing more collaborative.
- Short on budget? Use EventBrite (www.eventbrite.com) or another shareable, transactional registration system.
- Create a Facebook event—promote the event.
- Create a Facebook group—promote the group.
- Create a LinkedIn group—promote the group.
- Create a YouTube channel—promote the channel (see the trend here?).
- Create an open blog for the conference. Tap association employees, exhibitors, and key members to lead the conversation, and promote the blog. Enable this blog for mobile phones.
- Shamelessly promote and post social media communication leading up to, at, and after the event (Twitter).
- Call out your URL in everything you do.

3. Incorporate Video In Your Online Approach

Video continues to be the best way to engage the casual web user, so if you have any video whatsoever that's relevant to your show's topics, develop a branded YouTube channel (it's free!) to house this material. Then, use the embed code (also free) to incorporate those videos into your website and other communications. Also, buy a Flip camera (www.theflip.com) to document the show. For more on making your own videos and creating a channel online, read *Create a YouTube Channel for Your Association* following this article by Renato Cruz Sogueco from the August 2009 issue of *TechnoScope*

4. Make Your Content Sharable

Forget about forward-to-a-friend functionality. Instead, try standardizing share ability of all website content on social networks through tools like Share This (www.sharethis.com) or Add This (www.addthis.com). Everything should be shareable.

5. Measure Better to Manage Better

To improve content maintenance, achieve better data integration, and enable measurement online and off, associations and chapters should invest in a contact or content management platform like Conversen (www.conversen.com) or Eloqua (www.eloqua.com) there are dozens on the market. These sites help identify what troupe members and thespians are clicking on within your web site and identify areas of interest. Highlighting the following areas; understanding your buyers, automating your marketing, delivering quality leads to sales, and measuring your impact as a chapter or association. This is an avenue for increasing sales and marketing opportunities for your chapter and the association. Think of the power of knowing which Dramatics article was of the most interest to students and teachers, which product was considered a hot item, and then how you could connect that to increased revenue. If you're relying on an antiquated legacy system, you're just not getting the insights that inform smarter strategy.

6. Grab the Low-Hanging Search Engine Fruit

When considering *paid search* options, buy keywords by industry, issue, speaker, topic, and test performance. Then optimize on the fly. You're only paying for clicks. For *unpaid search*, there are a number of ways to improve organic search performance:

- Look at member surveys, particularly open-ended answers, to inform keyword strategy.
- Optimize each web page with title tags, image tags, and metatags.
- Launch a link-building effort to enhance organic optimization.
- The more videos and shareable content on your site, the better you'll perform on Google.

7. Jazz Up Your Press Release

Traditional press releases are boring. Consider an interactive news release template that includes shareable photos and videos and provides easy ways to connect with traditional media as well as bloggers and trade journalists. Content can be repurposed from existing assets.

When it comes to thinking digital to boost awareness and attendance for your next tradeshow, it doesn't really matter *where* you start as long as you start. The need to use every tool in the shed has never been greater.

Shaun Quigley is vice president and interactive practice director in the Washington, DC office of Brunner (www.brunnerworks.com).