

8 Steps to Help Plan Your Next Event

Event management is no easy task—there are a lot of tiny details and big personalities to deal with. We'd like to help lighten your load by offering some suggestions on how to get started and stay organized as you plan your event or conference. Here are the most important steps to remember when managing an event:

The first step in creating an event is to **be prepared**. You have an idea for a captivating event theme, so it's time to make a blueprint. What is your budget? Where and when will the event take place? What sorts of sessions will be available for attendees? Who will speak and lead each session? How many attendees will you be able to accommodate? Decide on the specifics and set your goals from the very beginning.

Next, **invest in an online event management system** that will organize and track each component of your event as you plan it. From scheduling sessions and exhibitors to marketing, and from materials management to attendee feedback, there are several dynamics at play when planning and executing events and you'll need a comprehensive system to help you. This is important because it will keep your information centralized in one database that can be accessed by anyone—you, your staff, volunteers, exhibitors, or speakers—with an Internet connection. Communication lines will remain open for all the moving parts of your event and you'll be able to operate at maximum efficiency.

The third step is to **promote your event**. Creating a marketing campaign that optimizes outreach to attract the right audience is essential. Sending email invitations is the fastest and most affordable method, so make sure your event management software includes a built-in email tool. You can also send letters or post flyers, but those methods are more expensive and typically not as effective.

Fourth, you need to **guarantee that event registration is simple** for attendees. The process should only consist of a few steps and should feature options customized to fit the attendees' needs. Look for an event management system that includes automated online registration. With online registration, you can simply post a link on your website or in an email and attendees click on that link to sign up and submit payment online. There's no data entry or manual processes to deal with, saving you a ton of time. And the right event management system will have flexible registration features, such as: enabling a group sign-up option; offering several payment options and special discounts; integrating hotel reservations; managing call for papers; and collecting exhibitor data, to name a few. Letting technology organize and manage these pieces of your event will undoubtedly save you a great deal of time, stress and money.

The next important step is to **get attendees to interact** prior to, during and after your event. Attendees should have the option to create their own online profiles and reach out to others who will be present at the event. When searching for technology tools for your event, find an event management system that connects to your social media platforms or offers networking features. These interaction tools should have the latest networking functionality—like allowing attendees to schedule sessions, share documents, and book 1:1 meetings—to help create buzz around your event and give it a unique, personalized edge.

The sixth step is a big one—the day of your event! **Let your event management software absorb most of your onsite duties**. Tasks like check-in, tracking attendees, and materials management are simple but time consuming. During check-in, use a mobile or kiosk system that lets guests check themselves in from wherever is most convenient for them. Other essential onsite tasks that should be made easy by your software include: printing badges, updating and changing schedules, sending attendee surveys and running reports on any combination of data you'd like.

Seventh is to **incorporate mobile technology**. Adding a mobile interface to your event allows event hosts and attendees to engage in constant, real-time communication onsite. Smartphones allow for instant updates and eliminate the need for paper. Creating a handheld event guide accessible on pocket-sized phones is a lot easier than carrying around a bulky agenda! A mobile solution can also be a powerful tool for event feedback; real-time surveys engage your audience and strengthen the host/attendee relationship.

Finally, once your event is finished remember to **maintain that relationship between you and your attendees**. Leverage your event management system to send automated, personalized thank you notes to attendees. Try to keep conversations going via the social networks that were built during your event and share new information—such as updated whitepapers or presentations—to keep the interest of attendees for as long as possible. Also, post pictures or videos on your website to increase your web traffic and help attendees remember how much fun they had.

Event management doesn't have to be a hassle. Following these steps and putting the right processes and technology in place will help make your job a lot easier as you plan a seamless, successful event.