

The Secret Ingredients of a Well-Attended Marketing Event

A successful marketing event is all about creating a great experience to connect with customers and prospects. This guide is based on data we've gathered from hundreds of events and many thousands of registrations & attendees.

More Information:

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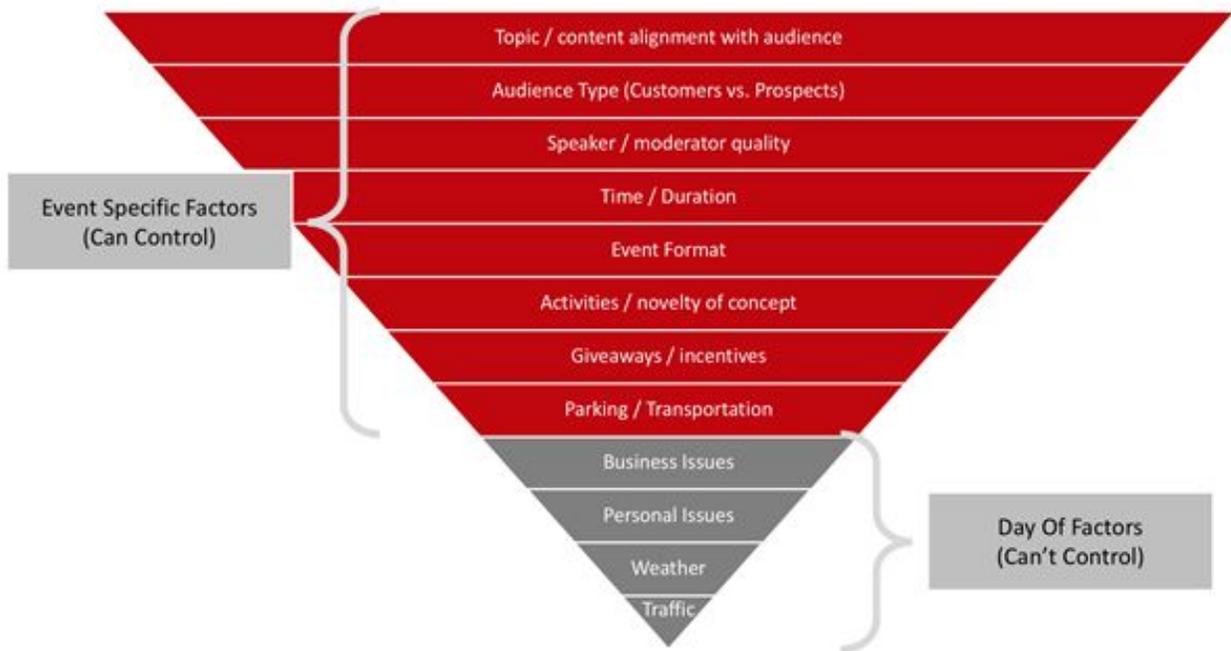


Fig. 1 - Event Attendance Factors Funnel

Marketing Event Attendance

There are a number of factors that impact attendance for field marketing events. These factors fall into two categories: things you can control, and things you can't control. Fortunately, much more is in your control than you may realize.

Making your field marketing event a successful marketing program means getting the right 'butts in seats' to build brand affinity and ultimately generate leads. Understanding and mastering the motivating and demotivating factors (things you can control) that lead to event attendance can dramatically improve your event marketing return on investment.

What Should I Expect?

Event attendance can range widely, and the first factor that matters is your audience. For customer audiences, attendance can range from 40% to 70%. The attendance rate for prospects is typically 25% to 50%. If you have 100 prospects registered for your event, you can probably expect anywhere from 25 to 50 to show up.

Let's take a deeper look into the motivating or demotivating factors that lead to this event attendance drop off for prospects vs existing customers. First off, customers have already demonstrated that your company matters to them. Second, they have an existing relationship with your brand, and probably also a relationship with an account manager or customer success manager.

On the other hand, prospects have none of this. While you may feel that they are a "perfect fit" for your offerings, prospects do not necessarily feel the same way about you. They don't have existing relationships with your brand or your team. (If you do your events right, however, that will soon change!)

Whatever You Do, Don't Sell!

Imagine sitting through a timeshare sales-pitch to get a free lunch; It probably makes your skin crawl just thinking about it. Our belief is that the best events offer objective content that educates attendees about the problems your company solves, and demonstrates your expertise and thought-leadership. This resembles the mass migration a decade ago when many marketers started turning to inbound principles in their marketing efforts, ditching many of the spammy ad-driven efforts of the previous century.

Content should be short, educational, and ideally delivered by someone notable. Often, it helps to have a speaker or moderator who is NOT part of your team. Remember that while you may find your company's executives to be very credible, prospects and customers will view them with suspicion when they extol your virtues.

A better approach can be to offer 30 minutes to 1 hour of educational content focused on the problem-space your offering addresses. For example, if your business sells cloud security solutions, try offering content that your target audience would find interesting, and which offers new and interesting insights applicable to cloud security.

When and How Long?

Pay close attention to when your target audience gets busy. For example, if you are targeting sales teams, don't host your events at the end of the month, and definitely avoid the end of the quarter. If

you're targeting accountants, avoid the first quarter of the year, and probably the first and last weeks of each month. Every audience will have its own unique rhythm, so pay attention, and when in doubt, ask your customers or prospects when they are busiest. Remember that a work obligation will always trump your event.

As a rule of thumb, after-hours events and shorter events both see higher attendance rates. The higher seniority you are targeting, the later and shorter you should plan for, since the most senior people are the most likely to be pulled into last-minute work.

What Kind of Event?

There are a variety of event formats you can choose from. Executive dinners, educational seminars, forums, lunch & learns, breakfasts, networking events, conferences, road shows and more. You should pick an event format that your audience will align with, and be realistic.

For example, executives are unlikely to attend a full-day or half-day event. Your event has to deliver a TON of value to justify that much time, and even then, last-minute meetings or other obligations will preclude many of them from attending. The longer your event is, and the more it overlaps with business hours, the larger the window where a conflict might overlap.

Generally speaking, dinners are great for executives, networking events are great for more junior audiences. Everyone wants to target senior executives, but remember that many purchase decisions are made or influenced by front-line team members. Even if an executive signs the final check, they often delegate decision making to their team.

Parking

This one sounds obvious, but you should have a plan for parking and/or transportation. If you want people to do more of something, make it easier. Make the parking easy, so the attendee knows before they show up where they will park, and that it will be easy for them. An alternative for urban areas is to provide Uber or Lyft credits.

Make it Novel & Fun

Competition is fierce for attention, especially these days. You can improve attendance by offering something fun and interesting. Fun ideas we have seen include: cigar rolling, whiskey tasting, beer brewing, mini-demos, driving ranges, theme parties and lots more.

This works even better if you can integrate your event experience with your sales follow-up. For example, if you do a beer brewing event, your sales reps can follow up to deliver beer to the attendee 2-3 weeks after the event.

Giveaways & Incentives

Giveaways and incentives can be tricky yet rewarding if executed properly, especially if you are working in a regulated industry. Gadgets are popular, especially if they align with your business. Gift cards work, and experience-related gifts work. If you host an event at a brewery, give away beer (and have your sales reps deliver it). We have seen people give away shoes, iPads, Amazon Kindles/Echos, and more.

If you're in a regulated industry, or your audience profile is precluded from accepting gifts, you can offer something that incorporates an educational value to circumvent most rules. For example, an iPad pre-loaded with your company's content, delivered for educational purposes.

Day-Of Factors

There are a few event attendance factors you can't control, but you should still be aware of them. First off, personal obligations can come up suddenly. Sometimes these are unexpected, but sometimes you can plan for them. For example, make sure your event does not coincide with a local school vacation.

Business issues can come up last minute. You can mitigate this risk by understanding the times of the year or month that your audience is most likely to be busy. Most work ebbs and flows, so understanding that pattern for your audience is key.

Finally, day-of factors including weather and traffic can affect attendance dramatically. We have seen events occur during unexpected hurricanes, or when major traffic accidents impede traffic. Unfortunately, there isn't much you can do to plan for these, so it's all the more important that you manage every other factor you can control!

Curious?

If you are curious about these motivating and demotivating event attendance factors, Banzai offers free event strategy sessions. Reach out to team@banzai.io to set up a strategy session today.

About Banzai

Banzai helps professionals fulfill their potential by connecting them to new ideas and to each-other through educational B2B events world-wide.