

PUBLICISING A CONFERENCE BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE EVENT

Organising a conference is somewhat like producing and launching a product for which you must use marketing techniques carefully designed to achieve your objectives (number of participants, stand-holders...) and to meet the expectations of the participants. In terms of attendance and balancing the budget, the success of a conference hinges on publicity.

For each category of potential conference-goer (participants, guest speakers, journalists...), it is important to select the kind of information, the time frame and the medium to be used.

A) Objectives

A conference brings together several different categories of conference-goer. For each target group, it is important to identify:

- The desired attendance rate
- The number of individuals potentially concerned

| Participants | Desired attendance | Previous conference | Potential target |
|--------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Total | | | |
| Members | | | |
| French | | | |
| Foreign | | | |
| Non-members | | | |
| French | | | |
| Foreign | | | |
| Students | | | |

| Spouses | Desired attendance | Previous conference |
|---------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Total | | |

| Guest speakers | Desired attendance | Previous conference |
|----------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Total | | |

| Stand-holders | Desired attendance | Previous conference | Potential target |
|-------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Total | | | |
| Number of stand-holders | | | |
| Expo area | | | |

| Journalists | Desired attendance | Previous conference | Potential target |
|-------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Total | | | |

B) Publicity tools

1. Printed material

There are various types of promotional documents:

- introductory profile of the conference (contractors, sponsors, official bodies).
- initial advertisement (participants). Provides the dates, place and themes as early as possible.
- commercial dossier (stand-holders, sponsors)
- draft programme (all target groups). It includes the information required by participants for registration. Accompanied by a registration form (participants, spouses) and a call for abstracts form (conference speakers).
- reminder (all target groups)
- final programme (all target groups)

A few tips:

- decide on a standard conference image (initials or logo of the conference, standard colours...) so as to ensure consistency among the various types of printed material: from letterheads to conference minutes.
- before ordering documents from the printing firm, request a genuine sample (produced on the actual paper to be used for the final product) to as to ascertain the exact weight and postage costs.
- as a general rule, send 10 programmes per registered participant (the ten-to-one rule)
- have someone who is not a member of the organising committee fill out the registration form, as a test.
- when proofreading the documents, pay particular attention to major headings, dates and address.
- for international conferences, extra care with translated versions.

How many copies to be printed per language?

Which documents to be sent to Spain, Argentina, Germany, the Netherlands when there is no translation into Spanish or German...?

2. Direct marketing

- create a data base per target group (participants, stand-holders, media...)
- purchase or hire of data bases. They must be updated, as and when possible.
- delegate the sending of documents to a third party
- personally-addressed letters
- telephone contact
- fax
- e-mail

A few tips:

- it is advisable to send out documents at intervals over time to potential participants (in accordance with available information and the needs of the target groups)...

- data bases soon become outdated. Expect 30% of the addresses to be out of date after one year. Each erroneous address generates unnecessary costs (sending documents...)
- it is important to keep track of all information sent out, even when the task has been contracted out
- if charging different registration fees according to registration date, set time limits that represent real incentives, so that they act as indicators allowing enough time for you to make adjustments: hiring additional rooms or, in case of the opposite problem, restricting numbers...
- if possible, number the registration forms so as to gauge the usefulness of the data bases used
- when sending a bundle of documents to a mailing house, always include a receipt acknowledgement letter (you will at least be certain that the documents were received)
- consistently include your own data in files (with a spelling mistake) to test the mailing house, detect delivery problems and identify any unauthorised use of files
- do not hesitate to sub-contract mail-outs to a mailing house (their fees are usually compensated by the savings you make in postage)
- for faxes, there are firms that can send thousands of faxes in just a few hours for less than 0.25 euros per fax

3. Website

- creating a website for the conference enables you to send comprehensive and up-to-date information around the world: location, date, travel, detailed programme, list of guest speakers, accommodation, social events programme, conditions of registration...
- the information on the conference website can be included in “push” marketing, targeting potential participants. They will receive a message in their e-mail inbox with a link that takes them directly to the website.

A few tips:

- when making up the data base, don't forget to record the e-mails
- for sending e-mails en masse, there are contractors who can send millions of e-mails very cheaply

4. Media

- The press can play a significant role in promoting a conference
- try engaging an official partner from the media sector
- negotiate a variety of possibilities, as either a purchase or an exchange (distributing the newspaper during the conference or setting up a stand...), reserving publicity spots (advertisements, articles), perhaps inserting the draft programme in the newspaper, sending a mail-out to all the newspaper subscribers...
- organise a press breakfast or lunch to raise your profile among the media
- send regular press releases to those in the data bases

A few tips:

- if your budget allows for it, engage a specialist to liaise with the press

- sign up to a clipping agency to keep an eye on the media coverage you receive (press-book)

5. Building a network

- so that the partners directly engaged in hosting the conference can be involved in publicity
- stand-holders and sponsors. They can distribute programmes and perhaps even customise some of the conference documents (insert their own initials or logo...)
- professional federations and associations (lending data bases, sending the draft programme with their newsletters)
- authorities, ministry (sponsorship, lobbying, subsidies...)
- organising committee and participants. Any of these people can be an ambassador for the conference (sending personally-addressed letters, programmes, contacting potential stand-holders...)
- contractors: transport services (see negotiating a contract with official carriers), travel agencies (for international conferences, see designating official agencies in some countries, which will promote the conference by offering flight+accommodation packages)

A few tips:

- arrange a meeting for potential stand-holders where you outline your publicity arrangements and offer to involve them. They are often very familiar with the domain and know many potential participants. They also have significant information and promotions channels available to them.
- contact the Presidents or Secretaries General of national associations in other countries (personally-addressed letters with a questionnaire requesting dates of upcoming conferences).
- take part in other conferences and fairs prior to your own and negotiate reciprocal agreements – inserting programmes in the participants' souvenir bags, showing a slide at the end of plenary sessions with the date and location of your conference, including a flyer in the participants' programmes, having a promotional stand provided....

C) Marketing

With your chosen publicity tools, create a Marketing-Mix plan for each target category and, in the case of international conferences, for each country.

Each procedure needs to be budgeted:

for example:

cost of data base: x euros per address (manually collected or purchased)

cost of initial advertisement: cost to include graphic designer, phototypesetter, printer, envelopes, printing of labels or composition of personally-addressed letters, mailing house fees and enveloping service, postage, purchase of advertising space: costs of hiring the space and creating the template...

Each procedure needs to be allocated time in your overall schedule of things to be done. Include each procedure in the timetable, noting the time required for planning and execution.

Some procedures, notably the sending of reminders, depend on the results of earlier operations. Set dates to serve as "indicators" for initiating certain secondary courses

of action. A member of the organising committee must be in charge of each procedure: someone in charge of printing and publishing, someone in charge of the exposition, someone in charge of advertisers and sponsors, someone in charge of media liaison, someone in charge of contacting authorities, someone in charge of liaising with service providers (airlines...)

REMEMBER



The conference is a product, competing in a very tough market, which must be sold to various target groups of participants. Every possible effort must be made to ensure that the conference is attractive (choice of date, location, themes) and to promote it as prestigiously as possible (quality of publicity material, choice of information provided given the time remaining before the conference dates).



The publicity arrangements for your conference, determined by your available resources and your objectives, must be flexible, able to be adapted as registrations progress.



Publicity must include everyone in the organising committee. Each and every member having a specific role to play.