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QUICK GUIDE TO EVENT MARKETING

9 tactics to boost your ROI

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Quick Guide to Event Marketing

9 tactics to boost your ROI

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Event Marketing: 9 tactics to boost your ROI

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TACTICS YOU CAN LEARN OVER LUNCH

Welcome to *Quick Guide to Event Marketing* – a resource from MarketingSherpa featuring bite-sized tips for busy marketers.

In this report, we give you ideas for increasing the return you see on your investment in events.

Events are a big focus of most marketers' efforts. Unfortunately, they can also eat up a huge chunk of your budget – which can be especially painful if you don't see adequate payoff. It's unrealistic – and probably unwise – to totally abandon events altogether, but how do you avoid sinking valuable resources into an event that won't be worthwhile? You need to find ways to ensure that you can maximize the return on the money you spend on the event.

In this report, we'll show you:

- Why creativity can be a priceless asset
- Tips for using social media to boost your ROI
- Why you should consider holding virtual events
- How to continue the momentum after the event

We know you're in a hurry, so let's get started. We're eager to share these tips on how you boost your event-related ROI.

Bobbi Dempsey
Editor, *Quick Guide to Event Marketing*

About *Quick Guide to Event Marketing*

MarketingSherpa's *Quick Guide to Event Marketing* is designed with you, the busy marketer, in mind. We provide quick, simple tips you can use right away.

For each *Quick Guide*, we scour the vast MECLABS library of marketing research, from MarketingSherpa case studies and Benchmark Reports, to MarketingExperiments optimization tests and analysis. We highlight tips to help improve your marketing performance right now ... or at least by the time you're done with lunch.

Tactic #1: Do your research

In the B2B Lead Roundtable blog post, [“Nine Simple Tactics to Drive a Higher Return on Trade Show Investment,”](#) Pamela Markey, Senior Director of Marketing, MECLABS, suggested doing as much research as possible beforehand, which might even help you do some pre-event lead scoring.

“If you have access to the registration list, analyze it. Look up registrants on LinkedIn. Develop a list of targets you want to seek out during the event. Research the sponsors, too. They should all be on the event website. There may be ways to join forces with them to reach your audience,” Markey explained.

Tactic #2: Reduce costs

It's simple math: The less you spend on the event, the higher your profit margin will be. One way to cut expenses is to cut down on paper-related costs – which is very easy to do these days when you can use technology to distribute information.

In the MarketingSherpa article, [“Mobile Marketing: Juniper Networks' QR code event strategy leads to paperless conference,”](#) Juniper Networks, a computer network company, was planning its first Global Partner Conference, and wanted to make the conference as paper-free as possible. The team realized they could accomplish this by using mobile marketing tools.

Luanne Tierney, Vice President, Worldwide Partner Marketing, Juniper Networks, said the company prides itself on being innovative, and mobile is an area of focus for Juniper. To “practice what we preach,” Tierney said, the entire conference was served through content accessed by scanning QR codes instead of providing pounds of paper collateral to attendees. By doing this, Juniper was able to show its clients how to really exploit mobile marketing, and at the same time, be eco-friendly by not handing out all that paper that would mostly be heading for the landfill.

Some steps the team at Juniper Networks took to execute the mobile-centered event included:

- Creating a microsite for the event that was optimized exclusively for smartphones.
- Strategically placing QR codes around the event. For example, the QR code at the registration desk led to the microsite landing page with the “welcome” video.
Using a paperless evaluation form. Attendees were pushed to a QR code that led to the appropriate evaluation form. This electronic evaluation could be completed right on the mobile device and helped keep the paperless theme of the event intact.

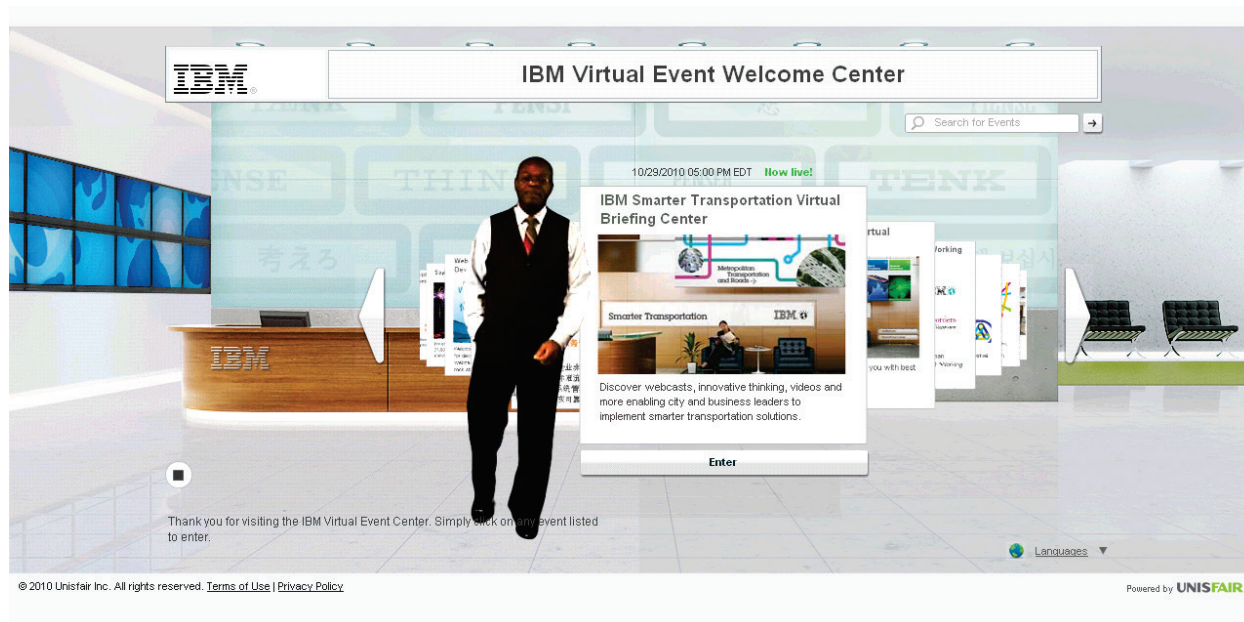
Tactic #3: Focus on virtual events

Virtual events can be a much more budget-friendly alternative to in-person events. And, they also let you reach a much wider audience, many of whom may not be able to travel to an on-site event.

As explained in the MarketingSherpa article, [“Virtual Events: How IBM's marketing department quickly responded to the economic downturn,”](#) a few years ago, IBM – a company known for hosting live events across the globe – found some of its marketing groups experimenting with virtual events, prompted by a bad economy that was keeping people from attending live events. So, the company decided to create a companywide virtual event

initiative called the Virtual Event Center, which hosts a variety of virtual events ranging from announcements to multiday meetings.

EXAMPLE: IBM VIRTUAL EVENT CENTER



While most companies don't have the budget or resources of IBM, smaller companies can still follow the same basic strategies.

One of the most important tactics was to ensure attendees didn't feel like they missed out on anything by attending an event virtually. To accomplish this, the platform was created to be a simulation of a face to face event, to actually replicate the experience of a live event.

The Virtual Event Center offers many elements of a physical event including:

- Networking lounges where visitors communicate with other attendees
- Briefing centers where visitors ask questions to be answered by experts
- Resource centers with information for download in multiple formats
- Breakouts with smaller groups of people congregating

Of course, you also need to consider the limitations on simulating face to face interactions. For example, participants with lower bandwidth will be facing buffering with streaming video. Even with the limitations, the experience has become sophisticated because it is possible to replicate many elements of a face to face event such as live interaction at the virtual event.

The typical interaction at these virtual events is instant messaging between attendees and speakers. These conversations are typically watched or moderated, and many events are done in real time. Twitter is also used for communication at the virtual events.

IBM certainly isn't the only company embracing virtual events. Budget concerns and a desire to reach a larger potential audience have motivated many companies to go this route.

The MarketingSherpa article, "[Event Marketing: Virtual event campaign drives 10,155 registrations and 1,800 new database names](#)," shares the reasons why Marketo felt the time was right to focus on a virtual event. Marketo was experienced with event marketing – the marketing automation software vendor had participated in events as a sponsor and hosted its own in-person events in multiple cities.

When the company created a partner ecosystem called LaunchPoint, Marketo wanted to promote that program with what Jon Miller, Vice President of Marketing, Marketo, called an "anchor event." He said the company had launched another major initiative with a live event that was successful. However, the event cost Marketo around \$50,000 and only directly touched the 100 or so attendees. To announce LaunchPoint, the team wanted to directly touch thousands of people, so the decision was made to create a virtual event allowing many more people to receive the full experience of the launch. Specific tactics they used in executing this event are detailed later in this report.

For more tips on virtual events, check out the MarketingSherpa article, "[Primer on Virtual Event Marketing: 10 Tactics, 3 Strategies to Draw Visitors, Sponsors](#)."

Tactic #4: Think creatively

As we mentioned earlier in this report, it's important to find a way to stand out from the crowd at events. This increases the odds that attendees will remember you and your brand, and will want to stay engaged with you after the event. In the MarketingSherpa article, "[Event Marketing: Zombie-themed campaign nets \\$1.2 million revenue impact](#)," Stonesoft, a network security company, wanted to make sure it stood out at the 2011 Black Hat Briefings conference.

Heather Pritchett, Director of Marketing for North America, Stonesoft, said the team came up with the idea of tying a popular culture meme – zombies – with an aspect of Stonesoft's business. In network security parlance, a computer compromised with malware is called a "zombie."

Pritchett added, "One thing we do at Stonesoft is not treat an event where you just show up and stand there. We typically build a campaign around events."

It's a strategy that pays off – the team's efforts at Black Hat 2011 led to a \$1.2 million impact on revenue.

Step #1: Maximize the event sponsorship opportunities

As a sponsor, Stonesoft had the marketing opportunity of hosting a party during the event. Pritchett said all the promotions, both the company's pre-event marketing and the promotions to the attendees through Black Hat, were driven to a dedicated landing page tied to the zombie theme where attendees had to pre-register to attend the event party.

Step #2: Include a prize incentive at the live event

Along with the event party, a major topic of the pre-event promotion through Black Hat channels was a pre-event sign-up for Stonesoft's grand prize incentive – a trip to Universal Studio's "Halloween Horror" nights, providing another tie-in to the company's zombie event theme. Pritchett said Stonesoft also offered several other, smaller zombie-related prizes at the event. The event party was held the first evening of the event, and featured the grand prize giveaway and a Stonesoft employee wearing professional makeup and costume to look like a zombie.

Step #3: Create a video featuring the theme to promote the event

“We really centered the pre-marketing around the video that we created,” Pritchett said. “We actually had someone here from Stonesoft that really helped us out.”

That employee served as the technical advisor on all things zombie, and actually served as the “spokeszombie” in the video. Stonesoft hired a makeup artist from the television show, “The Walking Dead,” to create the spokeszombie. The script was carefully written so that “it was not too cheesy,” according to Pritchett, but so it still got the Stonesoft message across.

Step #4: Include email in both pre- and post-event marketing

Email was part of the promotion Stonesoft received from Black Hat as part of its event sponsorship, but the marketing team also included email in its event marketing mix.

Before the event, three emails were sent to Stonesoft’s subscriber database with a call-to-action to register for the Black Hat event, and the larger goal of driving traffic to the company booth at the upcoming live event. The pre-marketing email content promoted the zombie theme for the event, and also included an element of brand awareness around Stonesoft’s business for recipients who were not going to attend the event.

The follow-up email after the event featured a message from the Stonesoft spokeszombie with a call-to-action to set up meetings with Black Hat attendees.

Step #5. Tie theme to on-site event marketing material

Because Stonesoft’s entire theme for the Black Hat event was connecting pop culture zombies with the concept of a malware infected “zombie” computer, the zombie theme was part of all event material, including:

- Event poster
- Tabletop display
- Booth easel display
- Booth flyer
- “Zombie-Free Zone” 12 by 12 inch placard
- Floor stickers

EXAMPLE: STONESOFT BOOTH FLYER

CAN YOU SURVIVE A ZOMBIE ATTACK?

At Stonesoft, we're busy helping you keep your network free from many threats, such as Zombies. For example, our IPS and FW devices are able to work together to detect, block and blacklist many incoming threats. Combine this with our clustering technology and ability to detect Advanced Evasion Techniques (AETs) and you now have network security worthy of a zombie apocalypse!

See for yourself and help us pick off a few zombies at our zombie Invasion video game tournament. **Games start at 7:30 pm!** Not ready for battle? Get a few practice runs in on our specially made zombie pinata!

DON'T FORGET!
Register to win **TWO TICKETS** to Universal Studios and Halloween Horror Nights!*

ZOMBIE FREE ZONE

Black Hat Circuit
Wednesday, August 3, 2011
7:00-10:00 p.m.
Pisa Room – Caesars Palace

ZOMBIE FREE ZONE

STONESOFT

* Airfare and hotel included. Prize maximum value \$2,000.

The booth also included a screen for demos.

“The easel board had a zombie look to identify the overall theme, and had some key messages that we wanted to promote at the event,” Pritchett said. “The flyer promoted some side events, like meetings, that we were doing as well.”

Pritchett offered her key learning from this campaign: “The key takeaway for a successful event is that you must know your audience. Tap into resources to get into their minds and understand what will resonate. Be edgy if appropriate, interesting and fun at a minimum. It’s critical to find a way to stand out from the crowd.”

Many other marketers have also found creativity can help greatly improve their ROI from events. In the MarketingSherpa article, [“Event Marketing: HubSpot’s Dreamforce effort generates more than 2,300 new leads and 362 product demos,”](#) the HubSpot team wanted to find a way to stand out from all of the other exhibitors at Dreamforce '11, the Salesforce.com user conference. HubSpot was a platinum sponsor, and the team wanted to get the most return on their investment.

Marta Kagan, Director of Brand and Buzz, HubSpot, said the key was careful planning and a creative and unique theme. Kagan said the event planning began with a four-part concept and strategy:

1. Offer something of value to event attendees
2. “Be remarkable” to stand out from other event sponsors
3. Provide calls-to-action “everywhere” to create engagement and turn event leads into prospects
4. Be as “everywhere” as possible at the event

The offer of value and main call-to-action was achieved by staffing the event a little differently. Instead of sending a sales team and hiring “booth babes,” HubSpot sent its inbound marketing consultants armed with tablets and a software tool to provide attendees with an actual mini-assessment and one-on-one consultation of one aspect of their inbound marketing.

For another example of how a marketer used creativity to achieve great success at an event – with the help of a President Barack Obama lookalike – check out the MarketingSherpa article, [“Event Marketing: Stunt combined with social media draws 2,500 to Dreamforce booth.”](#)

Tactic #5: Incorporate social media

This is probably a no-brainer in today’s business environment, where companies use social media as a standard part of many marketing strategies. But, the relatively inexpensive nature of social media makes it a great way to maximize your event ROI. And, following with the previous tactic, social media meshes especially well with virtual events.

In promoting its virtual event in Tactic #3, Marketo turned to its social media network: The company had 30,000 Facebook fans and more than 50,000 Twitter followers. Jon Miller, Vice President of Marketing, Marketo, said those platforms gave the team “good reach” to broadcast the virtual event message out to its core audience.

He explained part of the value in social media outreach was some people will respond to a message through that channel over email. The Twitter strategy included a series of six tweets over the three-week period the event was promoted. Miller stated the contents of each tweet were variations on the different messages from the email campaign.

Internal social promotion

The team also leveraged an internal tool offering suggested tweets and LinkedIn posts to Marketo employees making it easy for those internal sources to tweet the suggestion. This aspect of the campaign included a gamification element with Marketo employees earning points for T-shirts or other small incentives.

Social referral program

Anyone who registered for the virtual event was provided a personalized URL (pURL) and encouraged to share that link through their social network. This encouragement included buttons for Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn that were already prepared with each registrant's pURL. Marketo offered a small incentive in the form of bumper stickers for any registrants who drove three additional registrations from their pURL.

Promoted Facebook posts

Miller said paid promotion in the form of promoted Facebook posts was an important part of both the social media strategy and overall promotion of the event. He described paid promotion as one of the "pillars" of the entire campaign.

He added Marketo's overall Facebook strategy was including images with every post, and for the virtual event, the team created custom graphics tied to the messaging for the promotional posts. Miller said paid promotion also included targeted search engine advertising.

Tactic #6: Think beyond the booth

You can only connect with so many people when you're standing behind a table. Try to find ways to mingle with attendees and be visible throughout different areas of the event.

HubSpot (see Tactic #4) achieved "being everywhere" by [occupying four "un-booths,"](#) instead of placing its staff in a traditional sponsor's booth. The "un-booths" were HubSpot-designated areas at the event, featuring casual seating and no walls. Three were located in the main exhibitor area, and the fourth was actually on the second floor of a building that hosted breakout sessions.

HubSpot wanted to have its staff literally moving around all of the event locations and performing the one-on-one consultations, but Salesforce limited HubSpot's presence to the four "un-booth" areas.

EXAMPLE: HUBSPOT UN-BOOTH



Tactic #7: Choose giveaway items carefully

A common pitfall many companies make at events is to spend a lot of money on swag. While it's nice to be able to give people something fun, make sure you choose your items strategically so they tie in with your theme and serve a valuable purpose from a branding perspective.

In the case of HubSpot, the marketing team made certain all event materials fit into the overall concept.

- The entire team, aside from the HubSpot employees presenting at the event, wore the campaign's distinctive orange tracksuits during the event and at night when socializing with attendees.
- Each team member was given an iPad with the custom app created for Dreamforce to conduct the one-on-one consultations.
- Every attendee who received a consultation also received a stuffed unicorn dressed in an orange cape with a HubSpot "sprocket" logo, a URL and a QR code that went to the e-book landing page.
- The e-book content was shared on LED screens at HubSpot's "un-booths," on the large overall conference screen and each speaker included the material either before or during the presentations.
- The attendee bag insert was a sheet of rainbow unicorn stickers with the landing page URL and QR code and no other HubSpot branding.

Kagan explained the insert: “If you have been to conferences and tradeshow before, you know that most of what ends up in that bag is a sheet of paper with some call-to-action and advertising. Instead of doing that, we put in a sheet of rainbow unicorn stickers and really nothing else, so we created a bit of fun and intrigue and tried to be the remarkable item in that attendee bag.”

Tactic #8: Follow up with a prompt – and personal – connection

In her blog post from Tactic #1, Markey said you should be thinking about your follow-up email early in the process.

“Before the event even begins, be ready to follow up. Prepare a brief, customizable email template to send out immediately afterward. It can come directly from the sales professional who spoke with the prospect, or it could reference the conversation and any key information you were able to capture,” she explained. “If the prospect doesn’t respond, follow up with a thoughtfully scripted phone call where you position yourself as a resource they can turn to when they are ready to talk. Don’t stalk and don’t be pushy, but do be responsive and close the loop. And, be absolutely sure that only one person is doing the follow up. (This is why it’s critical to work from a single database.)”

Tactic #9: Reap ongoing rewards after the event ends

One of the best ways to increase your event ROI is to realize residual benefits long after the event is over. Ideally, your investment in the event will pay off for quite some time.

In the MarketingSherpa article, [“Combining Social Media and Event Marketing: Year-round effort boosts clickthrough 236%,”](#) the team at Cisco Systems wanted to achieve maximum benefits from its annual conference, Cisco Live, which is one of the company’s “major marketing opportunities,” according to Kathleen Mudge, Social Media Marketing Manager and Consultant, Cisco Systems.

The most recent event included over 17,000 attendees. The yearly event created a high level of enthusiasm for the company and for the networking marketplace in general, but all that excitement tended to fade once the event concluded. The marketing challenge Cisco faced was finding a way to maintain that engagement with the company year-round.

The solution was to implement a social media marketing strategy based around engagement with prospects and customers.

Step #1: Create the social media presence and publishing schedule

To launch the social media outreach effort, Mudge took a number of immediate actions:

- Created a presence for the Cisco Live communities on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn
- Began managing the conversation on each platform
- Developed a plan for providing information

- Asked for community input for nurturing conversations
- Connected experts with the community to solve day-to-day work problems brought up in community discussions

Mudge said the idea was to tie all of the community involvement with the yearly user conference, and to foster year-round interest and excitement in the engagement that event creates between Cisco and its customers and prospects. To encourage participation, social media was also used to ask community members what subject areas they wanted addressed at the next event, as well as speakers they wanted to see.

Step #2: Provide different social media platforms with different types of content

Mudge said understanding people engaged with Cisco are not necessarily engaged on all three channels meant any major announcement or important information was presented to Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. At the same time, content pushed to each platform provided end users with content types specifically tailored for that platform's strengths.

Mudge said that Twitter was best for just releasing information, mostly in the form of links, out there to people, particularly people who might not even follow the Cisco Twitter account. Using hashtags can bring in "a huge number of eyeballs."

"In LinkedIn, that's where I can be the most technical because I can provide a deeper explanation, or a little deeper blurb in starting a conversation. [End users] can respond in kind to the community without that character limit they have on Twitter," Mudge said.

She continued, "Higher-level and less technical information is easier to put on Twitter, and then Facebook is kind of in-between, where you do have more characters. So, I can put more information [on Facebook,] but they are more about having a conversation. It's kind of fun on Facebook. They are not as inclined to get into any technical discussions."

Step #3: Involve internal experts in social media conversations

When community members would post technical questions, or questions that touched on specific subjects, Mudge reached out to internal experts at the company to answer the question, providing value to the community.

She said the process works in two ways. If the internal expert is comfortable in social media, the ideal response comes directly from that expert in whatever channel the question is posed – Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter. When timing or unfamiliarity with social media prevents this, the expert provides Mudge the response and she posts the information from the brand's social media handle.

"I love it when I get more of the Cisco subject matter experts engaged in the communications directly because people love to feel connected to the brand," Mudge said. "It's great to have [internal experts] accessible. Then, I think people feel more connected to the brand through all these individuals."

To help facilitate these interactions, Mudge said she creates Twitter "chats" with Cisco experts.

Step #4: Continue to evaluate the program

About the social media outreach, Mudge explained, "It's always changing and always evolving. And, I am always evaluating. Now [that] it's after the big event, that's when we start the evaluations, and I am looking at, 'OK, what am I going to do differently?'"

Mudge said part of the process is looking over the previous year's social media messaging to find out what was most successful. Even though this process is conducted month-to-month and quarterly on an ongoing basis, she said there is value in taking stock of the program as a whole on a yearly basis.

One challenge Mudge has found is hot topics on social media can change rapidly, and what was most successful six months ago might not be so hot in the present. This requires keeping track of end user conversations, understanding the community's concerns and maintaining the two-way conversation.

"I want to make sure I am sensitive to the audience, and I am aware of their needs, what their discussions are, what their pain points are, [and] what they [are] wanting to know more about," Mudge said. "It's constant monitoring of engagement and actively adjusting whatever I plan."

Useful Links and Resources:

[MarketingSherpa Article: Lead Generation: Targeted event marketing effort leads to 300% ROI, generates 140 qualified leads](#)

[MarketingSherpa Article: Event Marketing: Regional customer forums improve field events attendance rate by 150](#)

About MarketingSherpa LLC

MarketingSherpa LLC is a research firm publishing case studies, benchmark data and how-to information read by hundreds of thousands of advertising, marketing and PR professionals every week.

Praised by *The Economist*, Harvard Business School's Working Knowledge Site, and Entrepreneur.com, MarketingSherpa offers practical, results-based marketing information researched and written by a dedicated staff of in-house reporters.

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