

This guide is written on the premise you are thinking about putting on some kind of model event, show, contest. Specifically, this is a layout of a plan to help promote your event.

It's Your Event

If you fail to get the word out, you might as well meet your buddies at a Denny's for breakfast and have the event to yourselves. Because no one else is going to know about your big show. Time and time again it seems a group of people developing and putting on an event do everything they can to keep it a secret.

This is not what you want.

If you don't believe in what you are doing, if EVERYONE in your group doesn't believe in what you are doing, it will not be it's best. You want everyone outside your group to believe that your event is the BEST DAMN THING THERE IS.

Do you believe that? Of course you do.

So how do you communicate that outwards to get people to come to your event? How can you make ME believe it's the best thing since sliced bread?

Getting the Word Out

Think of it as advertising, but not so much in a conventional sense. You have to be creative. Let's cover the basics of ways to communicate your message.

WEBSITE

I'm starting with this, since this is 2008, and it's the number one way to communicate. It allows for all types of media. Pictures, color, downloads, email, video, type, art, photos, just about everything. It's also the cheapest way to reach the most amount of people.

Here is what your website needs to communicate. Let's say this is a plastic model show.

1. The HOME page main content has to be about the show. Think of it as a Newspaper. Where do they put the important stuff? Right on the first page. Don't make visitors click through several pages like they're some kind of search and destroy mission. Get it in their face. After all, this is the BEST DAMN SHOW EVER. Show it with pride.
2. Some things can be dispersed on other pages of the site, such as downloads, classes, rules, things that might not fit on the flyer or home page. Just be sure the information is easy to find, and concise.
3. When you talk to people who do not know you or your club, you need to get information to them right away. The easiest way to do that is to send them to your site. So you want to have a page ready for that. Make a page that lets a visitor (let's say a sponsor) know who your group is, what you do, how long have you been doing these kinds of things, what is your club's goals, etc. You need to be professional. You are SELLING your event to a sponsor or an individual / company that you want to get involved.
4. If you have had past shows, get pictures online. Not just of the models, but of people. Because PEOPLE make an event. My favorite pictures are people waiting in line. That's right. People are willing to wait ! They will stand in line because they are at the BEST DAMN event there is ! Groups of people hanging out. Parking lot's full of cars. Stuff everywhere. See where I'm going with this? You get excited just talking about the show, now let's get that enthusiasm online. It's all about people. If people don't show up, you just have a room full of tables.
5. Make as many of your forms, such as flyers, registration, etc as a download. Always use PDF. Basically, it's universal. It's in color, and any computer, any platform can use it. Using downloads can save you postage, time, printing costs, and is helpful to your visitors. They are also very easy to update.
6. Keep the show information on your home page all year round. This keeps it out front, always a reminder, and always at a visitor's finger tips. It takes a year to really put on a good event. If the show is the biggest thing your club does all year, keep it always on the home page, as close to the top as you can. You know what I do? When I attend a good event, I want to know when the next one's coming around. And I want to know as soon as possible.

7. Websites are very important if you want to draw a large crowd. Meaning, let's say you are having a show in Alabama. Now, there are a lot of surrounding states. Or, since this event is the BEST DAMN SHOW EVER, someone may even want to get on a plane and attend. How do you reach these people? By website. If you want people to travel, to spend their hard earned cash to drive 5 hours to get to you, you need to sell them on the event. You need to get them excited about the show. They don't know you, they don't know your show, they only know WHAT THEY SEE ON THE WEBSITE. So you have to work very hard to present your website as a color brochure. That doesn't mean putting your weird uncle Bernie's picture on the home page, or a photo of you at summer camp when you were 9. Use your head. Still not sure? Next time you take a drive, stop and get a travel brochure. Could be anything, a hotel, an amusement park, you know, the tri-fold things. Look at it. It's advertising a place you have never been. Maybe never heard of. That entire piece of paper is to SELL YOU the idea of going there with just pictures and text. You are a stranger to them. But this is how you need to use your website, to SELL your event. Entice, enthrall, capture, once they see your site, they will check back constantly, waiting, anticipating, planning..... ready to come and enjoy!

BUSINESS CARDS

1. You really can't get much of anything on a business card. But for you, it's the best way to get people to your website. They are cheap, easy to carry, and easy to handout. You go to a hot rod car show. You talk to people. Like cars? We do a show with model cars. Check out our site, it's killer.
2. Make the web URL as big as possible on the card. Do a phone and email if you want to (though, once you print that on paper it can't be updated. Websites can be updated with a new email address or phone number in 5 seconds.)
3. Everything revolves around the site. It's your hub.

FLYERS

1. Flyers are great. Black and white is very easy and cheap to print. I don't think there is a big advantage to color because of the expense, but also, why do that when your website is in color? Use the flyers to outline your event, but keep your website in their face at all times. Make it big on the flyers.
2. A disadvantage, or downside to flyers is they are only good locally. Easy to hang up at a hobby shop or give out. But very limited as far as reaching people outside the close area.

NEWSPAPERS

1. Most newspapers have a section that mention things that are happening locally, and they usually do this for free as a benefit for the community. (as long as you let them know well ahead of time) Hey, it's free advertising. You'll be right in there with the rose clubs, coin collecting and seniors night out at the dance, but at least you are there. You never know, many times people look to these for interesting things to do on a weekend. That's you !
2. Doing a newspaper ad to me is too expensive, compared to a website that you already have that already reaches millions all across the world.
3. Do you know someone who works for a paper? If not, see who writes some of the local articles and mail them a "press invitation". Let them in for free, give'em a cup of coffee, and let them do their thing. Maybe they will write something? It's free publicity if they do. You can even send the "press passes" to a couple of newspapers. Even school newspapers. (it's a model show, what high school doesn't want to cover that??)
4. If you have vendors, see if a local vendor can run a personal ad in the sales section. People can meet him at the show to see what he has.
5. These reporting people will talk and spread the word for you. It's what they do.

TV

1. TV is a lot like the newspaper, in that you need a reporting of the event. You should still mail out something to local reporters if possible, because if they don't know about the event, they can't report it. You never know if it will be a slow news day and they take an interest. With a few stamps (and a kick ass website ready for them), you might strike gold.
2. Remember that TV coverage doesn't do much for attendance, unless you have a 2 day event, and they show up on the first day. Don't rely on it for that years event, but it can do wonders for next years. You should always be thinking about the next year.
3. Get a copy of the video if they do tape for your website !

RADIO

1. This works a lot like TV. Pretty much the same. Though they don't do any reporting as far as news. Still, if a local DJ is famous or well know to our town, and you send him a "Pass", what do you think he's gonna be talking about on the morning show? You. Again, free publicity for next years show.

GETTING THE WORK OUT

1. There are always other ways to get your message out. The Forums and BBs can be used. Any website that keeps tracking of up coming events / calendars needs to be contacted, as well as any magazines related to your event. These are all free to do.

Drawing in People to Your Event.

Sometimes just having a show isn't enough. You have to SELL the idea that people need to travel to your show. They NEED to come. They NEED to experience what you have to offer. These are some suggestions.

We already mentioned above about reporters and maybe a local Radio DJ. Those are some ideas. But for an event, you have to keep the PEOPLE busy. They want things to do. Things to be part of. Happenings. All these things should be on your website:

1. A lot of people, especially from out of town, will not know the area. So you want to mention other things they can do locally.
2. For instance. The guy wants to attend the model show, but his wife does not. What is in the area that she might be interested in? Gardens? Parks? Malls? Shopping? Fashion? Tours of the city? Horse riding? You need to mention these things on your site.
3. Dining. Good restaurants nearby? Mention them.
4. Maybe for the guys, there is an airplane or car museum, or a Bass Pro store, or whatever. Models are great, but if they can make a couple of days vacation out of it, that's better.

HAPPENINGS AT THE SHOW

1. There are many things a show can do to keep people busy AT the event.
2. Small seminars and How to's.
3. Trivia contests.
4. Guest speakers. If it's a model car show, are there any older racers who live nearby? Maybe a local restoration shop? Try and find someone interesting who will speak.
5. Vendors.
6. The idea is to find things that will help convince people that your show will be the event of the year.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

1. Modelers come from all walks of life. I doubt there are few who did not at least build a couple of models when they were kids. And just because they do not build them now, does not mean they will not enjoy looking at them. You need to get the word out to everyone. For a model car show, you need to reach every local car shop, dealership, car related business you can. Go to 1:1 car shows. Car parts stores. Malls. Anywhere you can set up a table and talk about your event. Anywhere you can speak.

Do whatever you can to make your event the best damn thing. :-)

At this time, these are ideas I can write to help you.
I will probably update this as times goes on and I remember other ideas.

My Background:

I was part of a model car club that did IPMS shows for 7 straight years in the 1990's. This was before the internet primarily (wish we had it back then!). The shows were successful, but after 7 years, we felt it had run it's course, and some of us had lives to lead. But it was a great time and a lot of fun.

My brother is in the entertainment business. I have helped him do large conventions, such as Scifi, Horror, and Pop Culture type events. For more than 3 years I worked primarily on coordinating the event websites and publishing.

end.