

THYMEBASE

The Massive Guide To Event Marketing For Small Business

By

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The Massive Guide To Event Marketing For Small Business

The Massive Guide to Event Marketing

Event marketing is totally accessible for small businesses, micro-businesses, and even solopreneurs. Surprised? That means you've got a lot to look forward to.

I was initially inspired to write this small business event marketing guide after discussing knitting with my wife. See, she's a knitter, and knitters love knitting circles. It suddenly dawned on me that yarn stores have been using event marketing for years.

What used to be knitting circles have become well-attended events with cool titles like stitch and bitch, or knit night. The yarn store hosts an event, sells products, builds clientele, and grows awareness. And best of all, it's super cost-efficient. I decided it was worth sharing the idea that event marketing is accessible to you, whoever you are.

And yes, let's talk about that Mixer. A friend of mine frequently travels for business. He invites three or four customers to his hotel room, along with ten prospective clients in each city. He orders drinks, snacks, and guides his visitors in some light networking. And he sells. The coolest part is that he's not even a salesperson. These social mixers are not the primary reason he travels – they're merely incidental to his routine work. And if he can do it from a hotel room, you can do it anywhere.

But let's get real for a sec. Not all event marketing is as guerrilla as this. Although much of it is. I'll also discuss some more elaborate strategies that are still small business-budget friendly. But just remember that Tupperware built a plastic container empire on small events.

Small Business Event Marketing Ideas



Small Business Event Marketing Ideas

You know your customers far better than I could ever guess, so I won't list every possible idea here. But I wanted to spitball some possibilities, just so you can get your creative juices flowing.

Another friend of mine who owned an IT company in Hawaii held monthly events focusing on IT security. He'd speak to local businesses about common security issues and their practical solutions. They were open to any local companies and generally had ten to twenty people in attendance.

A florist in my neighborhood regularly puts on workshops teaching flower arranging, terrarium building, and more. But the key thing is all the materials are purchased on-site. She just provides some drinks and snacks.

An accountant could host a class on bookkeeping. A lawyer could discuss common labor law pitfalls. Any company can do this. A recruiting company could rent out a small venue and host a job fair locally.

I used to do event marketing with my previous startup, Mad Mimi, which was acquired by GoDaddy. I regularly held workshops for up to 50 people on email marketing, search engine optimization, and social media.

But not all small business event marketing ideas are so small. Many small businesses put on conferences themselves with a few hundred attendees. These are complicated, but can actually end up profitable. And it's also within reach. Much of this guide will focus on smaller events, but we'll touch on some more ambitious events.



Event Marketing Works For Businesses

Event Marketing Works For Businesses

31% of marketers believe that event marketing is the single-most effective marketing channel, according to [Endless Events](#). And according to Marketing Charts, 68% of marketers state that live events generate the most leads.

For all of the data, some common sense must come into play. You'll always need to consider the likely return on your investment. And that's why I recommend starting small and growing into larger and larger events. But the math generally adds up. If you're a physical therapist with an average customer lifetime value of \$1400 per customer, then hosting a small event is feasible since you'll come out on top with even one new client.

So take the time to calculate the attendees' value, whether you're making sales or building awareness about your service. This will help you decide on the type of event and the budget.

But if you agree that event marketing is worth giving a shot, then lets get cracking on the practical tips and tricks.

A magnifying glass with a black handle and frame is positioned over a colorful geometric pattern of triangles in shades of blue, green, pink, and yellow. The magnifying glass is focused on a white rectangular box containing the text.

Focus Is The Best Event Marketing Strategy

Focus Is The Best Event Marketing Strategy

Any event you put on must have a particular focus. You should consider your business goals, look over your product range, and choose what single service or product you'd like to highlight at the event. Then your event theme will focus on that.

Let's go back to the IT company discussing security. While they offered a broad range of services, my friend focused his events on security. It allowed for focused discussions and sharing of ideas around a precise topic. It also meant that he could prepare well for it, with brochures about his security audit. My friend could get customers to sign up for the security audit, then and there. And the attendees knew what they would learn if they showed up.

The focus doesn't need to be too narrow, but there needs to be a *hook* of sorts. A boutique might do a *summer fashion evening*. A salon could hold a party for people with short hair – with stylists sharing their favorite pixie cut styling tips. Unless you've got superstars, people don't show up to music festivals – they go to bluegrass festivals, or hip hop showcases.



Measuring Event Marketing Success

Measuring Event Marketing Success

Small businesses can't afford to waste time and money. So your event should have a clear and measurable goal. Let's take each of those in turn.

Set an event marketing goal

Have a reason for hosting your event, and state it out loud. Better yet, write it down. The goal might be to increase revenue, or it might be to build brand awareness. If you want to achieve, you need something to aim for. Common goals for event marketing are:

- Sales
- Revenue
- Lead generation
- Brand awareness
- Community building
- Attendee engagement
- Customer education
- Upselling to existing customers
- Recruiting
- Referral generation

Each of these goals will have their own markers for success – a way of keeping score. Because if you can't keep score, you won't know whether the event *worked*. If it did work, you've got a new marketing tactic to use in the future. Maybe you'll even host larger events.

How to measure event marketing

How you measure success will depend on your goal, but you need to track *something*. So let's run through a few of the above ideas and look at some reasonable metrics.

Sales: You could track either the number of sales generated at the event. Or you could look at the sales revenue. Or both. But income is probably more important in deciding on whether the event had a return on your investment. If the event cost you \$500 to execute, but you made \$1500 in sales, you've got a clear signal that the event turned a profit.

Revenue: Well, we pretty much covered this above, but let's dig a little. Setting a revenue goal before the event – one that *feels* like success – is actually part of the planning process. Do you need extra staff to manage sales? Are you set up to make the sales at the expected volume? Have you tracked expenses against which to measure the net income from the event?

Lead generation: Easy, peasy! Did you get new leads into your sales funnel? How many? Even with this relatively simple metric, I'd recommend setting a dollar value to the lead. There are some basic [formulas to help calculate this](#), but I like $\text{Value} = \text{Average Sale} \times \text{Conversion Rate}$.

Brand awareness: Measuring awareness is a tough one. The number of attendees is a reasonable metric to start with. Still, you might consider a survey asking who knew about your brand before the event vs. after.

Attendee engagement is a little trickier. A common tactic is to count the number of attendees who took part in specific activities at your event. Divide that by the total number of attendees, and you've got your attendee engagement metric.

All in all, you'll be looking at sales, revenue (net and gross), attendees check-ins, participation, and attendee surveys.



Create A Sales Plan For Your Event Marketing

Create A Sales Plan For Your Event Marketing

The best reason to utilize event marketing for your business is to generate sales for all the possible goals. After all, you gotta eat, right? So you'll need to create a plan to make the sale!

It doesn't have to be an elaborate plan, but you don't want to wing it either. I remember the first-ever conference I helped organize for my previous startup. We had about 150 people in a lovely venue in Brooklyn. I'd wrangled two employees into registering guests. We had the speakers, the panel moderators, the sponsors, and partners. Sorted, right? Nope.

We had no one actively collecting the leads or making the sales. Chalk it up to inexperience, but we figured that all the non-customers would love our event so much they'd sign-up themselves when they got home that night. Whoops. The conference barely broke even on the ticket sales, but we lost out on new customers.

So set your goal, and make a plan around how you'll juice it and boost it. So here are the four tips to successfully achieve your event goals.

Step 1. Pick your product

Remember the focus section above? Well, it helps to know what you'll be selling at the event. By picking your product or service you're going to be focusing on, you can set do solid preparation.

Step 2. Plan the process

Once you know what you'll be selling, you can plan. Print brochures, set up a special stand in the venue, train your staff and craft a presentation. But it's a little bit more involved than just knowing what you want to sell.

If you're doing a presentation, you'll need a screen and a projector. And if you've decided on a display, you'll have to design the banner and make sure it can be hung.

And consider the funnel too. If potential customers need to see the presentation, you'll have to show it early, but not too early. And what about latecomers? Like a boy scout, be prepared to focus the event on your goals, whatever it takes.

Step 3. Know your ask

And be ready to close the sale, sign up the lead, get the survey response, and take the money. While you know what you want attendees to do, have you actually prepared to ask for it? Get the *ask* set up and, well, go for it. If you're hoping to make a sale, plan out at what point you'll actually ask for the attendee to fork over their cash.

If you need inspiration, look to non-profit fundraisers. They always lead up to the donation request, but importantly, they've planned their lines in advance. And they don't shy away from it.

Step 4. Don't get bogged down elsewhere

If the event is all about making the sale, and you're the only person who can close the deal, then you can't be the social butterfly. So consider hiring a host which frees you up from mingling. Or have someone on-site who can close the sale for you.

But the last thing you want is to be schmoozing with your guests and missing out on the whole purpose of the event.

If you're putting on an experience at a venue with suppliers, staff, and complexity, consider hiring an event coordinator. Let someone else worry about executing the event while you work on your business. Especially if it's your first large event.

What I'm saying is, free yourself up to make the sale, or, at the very least, ensure that someone is around to facilitate the transactions.



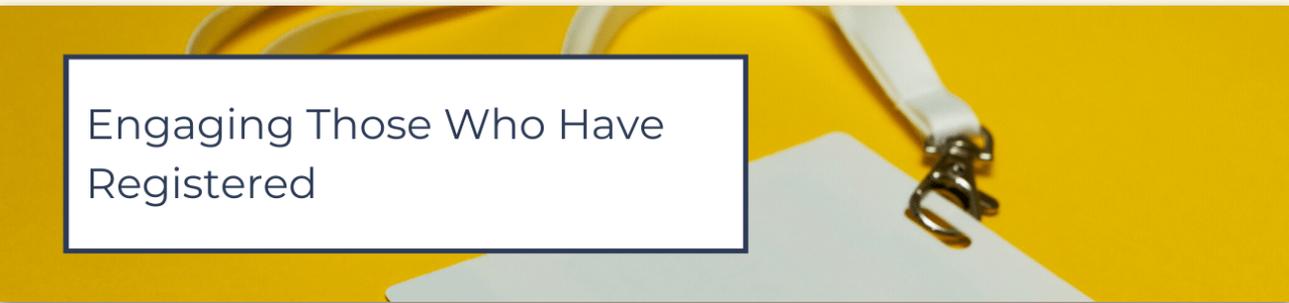
Selling Tickets To Your Event

Not all events will charge for attendance, but don't be afraid to do so. And if you opt for a free event, it is still worth asking for people to book their spot.

Tickets are a way of tracking your pre-event marketing effectiveness, which we'll discuss in a moment. It's also a way to keep expenses in check by not overbuying food and drinks.

One of the biggest sites to handle the ticketing aspect is [Eventbrite](#). If you're doing a one-off event, I'd recommend them for a pretty reliable experience. But if you're thinking of ongoing events, like a series of workshops, then [Occassion](#) is an awesome, and very affordable, platform. It's a crowded space, and you won't have a problem finding competitors who handle tickets for events of any type.

There's always Facebook Events too. It's easy to set up and free. But because of the low level of commitment required. It's one of the reasons why I recommend charging for an event. It's a realistic way to gauge interest and even cover costs. From personal experience, figure for only about 1/3rd of RSVPs to actually show up if there is no cost.



Engaging Those Who Have Registered

Engaging Those Who Have Registered

Registrants need to be nurtured. Between sign-up and attendance is a chasm, and to have a fantastic event, you'll need to keep people motivated. Here are a few tips to keep registrants excited about your event.

Tip 1: Have a pre-event ask

Maybe there's something you could ask them to do to help make the event better? It could be to tweet about the upcoming event. Or it could be to send in their questions so your speaker can answer it live.

Tip 2: Engage attendees on social media

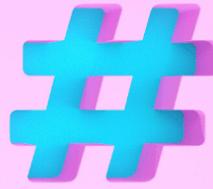
Reach out via social media and have public discussions. This gets your event in front of more people who, in turn, might sign up.

Tip 3: Email automation

If you use Mad Mimi, MailChimp, or another email newsletter tool, consider connecting it with Eventbrite. You can set up a few pre-planned newsletters to remind sign-ups about the cool things they'll experience at your event. And you can ask them to share it with their friends too.

Tip 4: Send reminders

At the very least, you'll want to send out reminders via email and social media. Consider a month, a week, a day, and day-of. It sounds like a lot right now, but it's not too bad. Trust me. In these reminders, share the excitement. An excited crowd is the best crowd.



How To Market Your Event

So you've planned the event and mapped out a sales process. Now you just need to get those people to sign up. Because event marketing isn't a viable customer acquisition channel unless you're actually getting people to show up.

There are a lot of ways to market the event. Some of the options are a one-time chore, while others will need frequent attention leading up to the event. But before we dive into that, here's something to keep top of mind.

Your marketing efforts should target both existing and potential clients. New customers are obviously valuable for business growth, but your regulars are vital to a great event. Getting existing clients to attend the event means opportunities for upselling, building relationships, and showcasing new products they might not know about. Plus, existing customers will naturally act as advocates or evangelists on your behalf.

Having people who like your business and products, and who can attest to your quality or effectiveness is a powerful sales tool. It's like having 5 Star reviews walking around in person. They'll offer testimonials on your behalf, and build trust with potential clients who might be on the fence.

Facebook for event marketing

Get your event on Facebook. Do it, even if you choose other channels too. Facebook events are eminently shareable, and you can quickly invite a large number of people. And once people engage with your Facebook event page, you can follow up with them efficiently too.

The event page's wall is a great way to answer questions, share updates, and more. Plus, Facebook typically tells others when their friends sign up to attend an event.

Instagram for event marketing

I like discovering events through Instagram, but you might need to swing some marketing budget to this channel. Be prepared to create visually enticing Instagram posts, share Instagram stories about the upcoming event, and, yes, maybe pay for some sponsored posts. If your business and your customers are active on Instagram like ours are, you'll need to spend time on this channel.

Paid advertising

This is a broad topic, but I'll try to summarize several paid marketing channels into one idea. Paying to get in front of potential customers can, and often is, very useful. Now, I don't mean publishing a full-page spread in the local newspaper, but that might be considered one day. I mean, paid digital ads.

"Boosting" a Facebook post to your business' followers is one option, and an affordable one. Paying for a sponsored post of the event itself is worthwhile, too, in many cases. And running a cheap campaign on Facebook allows you to add Instagram ads automatically.

There's also Google Ads. Google's display ads mean you can run banner ads on local media sites. Often a very cost-effective measure, but don't expect results that will light the world on fire. The search ads are an interesting opportunity. Depending on keywords, search volume, and local interest, paying for Google Search Ads is something to consider too.

All paid digital ads are complex and can be wasteful when not done correctly. So trust me on this – talk to a professional or do some research. At the very least, take a brief online course on paid ads. It'll make all the difference.

Local news media

This is one of my favorite marketing channels, and it's so often overlooked. Most towns and cities have local media, whether it's radio, TV, magazine or newspapers. Then there are often local bloggers, news websites, and classified sites. Most of these media sites, especially at the local level, will be delighted to share the news about the upcoming event.

Take the time to call or write your local media, and some will bite. You might even get some serious publicity. Don't think your event is too small or too niche. As long as your event's theme is attractive to your customers, it'll be interesting to others also.

Magazines like Time Out and many other publications allow you to list your event for free or a small fee. Just make sure to start working on this channel as soon as possible. You don't want to miss publication dates.

Create a meetup

[Meetup](#) is a great website to discover events and gatherings. They're big enough to have users in most places, especially in the US and Europe. So, first, consider creating a group and setting up a meetup as part of your event. The website will walk you through this process. They'll do the marketing for you by inviting people who have indicated an interest in related activities.

Additionally, you could reach out to existing meetup groups in your area who might be interested. Invite them to host their meetup in your space, in partnership with your event. It's a win-win for both. The meetup will get a new venue and, I'm guessing you'll provide the snacks. You'll get their community at your event.

Eventbrite

[Eventbrite](#) is something we keep coming back to. It's a way to handle tickets and registration, sure, but it's also a fantastic way to market your event.

Eventbrite is super-duper search engine-friendly, so your event will show up in searches. It's got a massive audience too. People can visit the Eventbrite homepage and browse events they're interested in. Hopefully, they'll stumble across yours.

Email marketing

I love email marketing. There's no better way to reach your existing clientele. So yes, use email to keep existing customers informed about your upcoming event. Don't be shy and send one email. Send emails starting as early as possible and increase volume closer to the event. In your email campaign, highlight everything great, from speakers to products to giveaways. I repeat – don't. Be. Shy. Event marketing ain't for the bashful.

Influencer marketing

Okay, I'll be candid here. In most cases, influencer marketing sucks. But for a local event, you don't need to think of duck-lipped pouting Instagrammers or ripped fitness gurus. Think of any local, respected thought leaders who have a following that intersects with your customer base. Then invite them. Maybe invite them to speak at the event. At the very least, tell them about your event and ask them to share it with their audience. It's worth a shot and can be very useful.

For one of my conferences, we invited a well-known entrepreneur with a large Twitter following to moderate a panel. He was responsible for bringing in a significant number of attendees. He also introduced us to other business leaders who ended up as speakers or on panels. And they each had substantial followings who attended.

So, invite well-known locals, even if they might not be "influencers" in the Instagram or YouTube vein.

Turn attendees into event marketers

People who are excited about your event are probably not going to show up alone, and that's cool, but you don't want to leave it chance. In fact, a great marketing channel itself is getting registered attendees to register or refer others.

So incentivize it. It could be by offerings deals at your event, free drinks, or lower entrance fees. If your product or service is high-priced, it could even be a referral commission.

Or you could simply ask your top customers to invite friends because you have a warm relationship with them. But have a plan for it, and don't be afraid to ask.

Create an online community

My last little marketing tip, for now, is to create a closed online community. Consider creating a Facebook Group where people who have attended your events get access for later networking and expertise.

This works for service-based or online businesses where, post-event, customers can engage with each other and with you. Plus, it's an excellent way to market upcoming events to people who already value what you do.

The group functions as an inducement to attend an event, a ready-made referral team, and a way to follow up post-event.

Try different marketing tactics

It's not reasonable to do all of the above, not for most small businesses. And certainly not if you only have one person handling the marketing. So dip your toe in each of these and see which ideas work for you. You want to be comfortable executing your marketing plan, so choose something that feels right for you and your business.

One of my favorite marketing strategies is the [bullseye framework](#). It's a way of prioritizing and testing marketing ideas. I recommend it if you're paralyzed by too many options.

But it boils down to this: pick one marketing channel and test it out to be sure it works for you. Focus on it exclusively until you're sure it won't work, or it's working so well that you can add a new marketing channel to the mix.



Setting Up an Event Website

Setting Up an Event Website

Attendees need information. That's the one reason to create a website for your event. See, event marketing only works when people can easily find the details, like the address, speakers, time and duration, dress code, etc. Opacity in event details is like an obstacle for people to struggle through. Only the most motivated folks will soldier through to show up. And that doesn't suit anyone.

If you're unquestionably confident that you can provide full and comprehensive details on an Eventbrite or Facebook event page, then that's fine. At the very least, create an event page on one of those websites.

Here's a [video walk-through of setting up events](#) in Eventbrite. Or get it straight from their [help documentation here](#). I strongly recommend prepping the elements of your event, much like you'd do when gathering ingredients before undertaking a recipe. You'll want to prepare:

- Event Title
- Location
- Date and time
- Details
- An event image
- An event description
- Any additional text, images, and video
- Decide on a price for tickets if you're charging.

If you have this stuff at hand, whipping up the event page will be a breeze. Trust me, it sucks to come up with all of these details on the fly.

[Setting up an event on Facebook](#) is pretty much the same. Take some time to prepare all your relevant content before you begin building out the event. Just one thing to note. If you create a *public* event, you can't change it to a *private* event later. And it goes the other way too – you can't change a *private* event to *public* either.

Creating your own event website

Often for bigger events, conferences, or merely a matter of choice, you might not go the Eventbrite or Facebook or route. You still need to make sure your attendees get all the event details. So a good event marketing practice is to create an event website of your own.

Some event marketing software provides event website templates. These generally look quite good and are easy to fill out too. The information you'll need to prepare is the same as above. But with an exclusive event website, you'll have more flexibility in content. For example, you can highlight speakers, their bios, multiple locations, and more.

A low-key route is to use your company's blog. You can add all the details in a blog post, which is an adequate solution. Or, if you're on WordPress, you can use a Page instead of a Post and create sub-pages for a more extensible event website.

And if you're motivated, you can use a GoDaddy, Wix, or Squarespace website too. The bottom line is to make sure that your event details are accessible to attendees and potential attendees.



Event Marketing Is Better With Partners & Sponsors

Event Marketing Is Better With Partners & Sponsors

Why should you try to partner with anyone for your event? It's all about you, right? Well, depending on the type of partner or sponsor, there are different reasons. Let's take it step by step, but I'll keep it brief for now.

The difference between a partner and sponsor

In event marketing, a partner is someone who works on the event alongside you. They're not just hanging a banner or putting their logo on the event materials. A partner is someone who is actively working to find attendees and market the event just as much as you are.

On the other hand, a sponsor is somewhat more hands-off. They're buying exposure from you. And it's your job to provide the exposure in exchange for the funding you take.

When to bring on partners

Providing value to your attendees should be paramount. So if you can add value to the audience by joining up with others, then go for it. That's not the only reason, but it's a biggie. But all partner decisions, and indeed sponsorship proposals begin with understanding your event and audience.

When to bring on sponsors

This one's easy. If you need money to fund the event or believe you can turn a profit while selling exposure to others, then go for it. Good sponsors add credibility to your event too. It can be a headache to find a sponsor, but if you're willing to weather the rejections, then it's worth it.

You'll need to draw up proposals, contracts and make some serious commitments, so please don't take it lightly. Your sponsors have worked hard to earn their money, and they're taking a risk on your event. So do consider your own reputation and only promise what you believe you can deliver. And have a lawyer review your contracts!

The theme of your event

Every event has a theme. It's actually the reason anyone might show up. The theme might be supporting local restaurants, or it could be the tax benefits of investment. Either way, your event has an initial idea, a subject, a focus.

So are there other businesses that fit your theme? Or might compliment your participation? For example, an account testing event marketing with a workshop on tax deductions might invite a tax attorney and a bookkeeper to present.

Know your audience

Your attendees are also of interest when it comes to partnerships and sponsors, even if the theme doesn't entirely fit the potential partner's business. Here's a real-life example in my neighborhood. A coworking space partnered with bars in a series of free coworking days at different pubs.

The bars got to use their downtime to grow their clientele. The coworking space offered a low-risk test to those who weren't sure about shared workspaces.

In this instance, the incentive to partner came not from a related theme, but rather an intersection in audience profiles. Office workers need a place to work. They also need a place to blow off steam after.

If your customer profile fits another type of business, then a partnership might be on the cards. Here are some more examples. Cooking classes could partner with kitchen tools and specialty food markets. Labor lawyers and safety

equipment. Real estate agents and interior designers. There are tons of possibilities!

Finding sponsors and partners for your event

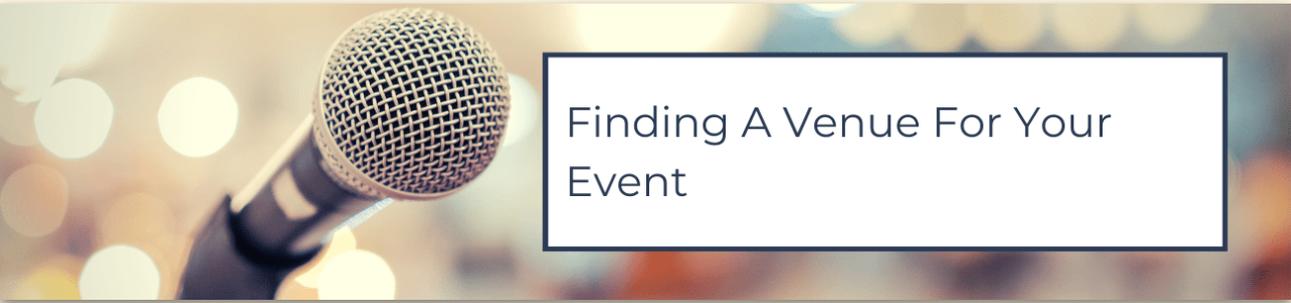
You're playing the numbers somewhat here. Your sponsor or partner is someone who already values event marketing as a customer acquisition channel.

Here are some ways to find companies who might be likely to join in with you in making the event successful.

- Look at who has sponsored other local events.
- Are there corporations that sponsored similar events or share a customer profile?
- Ask your attendees for referrals.

Then, create a list, a proposal, and work the phones. Or send emails. And don't forget to follow up. People are busy, and if you don't get a reply, then it's not exactly a *no*. But it is a hard slog and requires patience and thick skin. So start early, because it can take to find the perfect fit.

And remember, a lousy sponsor with a poor reputation will actually detract from your event. So be choosy.



Finding A Venue For Your Event

Finding A Venue For Your Event

Every event needs a place to occur, right? But do you really need to book a venue? Maybe. The first consideration is the size of your event. For many small businesses, the best place to host an event is in your place of business. But that's often not feasible.

You might not be able to make space for a party or simply might not want to. There are set up issues, post-event cleaning, vendor access, and other worries that could make your place unsuitable. So while retail stores, restaurants, and other public-facing businesses probably could put on a small event, service-based businesses reasonably can not.

So if you're going with a venue, choose carefully. You'll want to weight the following:

- Location
- Cost
- Availability
- Parking
- Capacity
- Food and Beverage minimums
- Ambiance

If those work, then the other details like acoustics can be quickly figured with the venue directly.

But a fancy venue with high costs and insurance requirements might not fit the size of your event. In which case, I recommend [Peerspace](#). It's like the Airbnb of venues. You can find a place for your event, even if it's quite small. And they handle the fussy stuff like contracts too. So if you're an inexperienced event marketer, start small.

But don't forget about partnerships. Many restaurants and bars would be happy to partner with you to provide a venue during their downtimes, especially if attendees are paying for the food and drinks.

Using your own place for event marketing

Look, there are plenty of cost savings when you keep things in-house, and I absolutely support hosting events wherever works for you. But throwing a party in your own business has some risks.

When it comes to set up, you'll need to shift everything around to make space. It also limits the decor opportunities if your day-to-day work paraphernalia is in the way. Then, your landlord or insurance might not be okay with it, so definitely check into that before sending out the invitations. And if you have fragile or expensive items around, well, you know the score. Accidents waiting to happen, right?

Event spaces are big blank canvases, ready for you to throw a lovely party. So for the safest event marketing experience, go with a venue, even a really small one.



Virtual Events in Event Marketing

Virtual Events in Event Marketing

Virtual events have been all over the news recently (due to COVID19 and the shutdown). As regulators put a stop on gatherings, online events became a part of the public consciousness. But webinars have been around for years, and that counts.

Virtual events have a lot of positives. They're easy to do. They're accessible for people anywhere. There are cost and time savings for both promoters and attendees. Event marketers, businesses, and event planners will frequently weigh the pros and cons over the coming months.

Obviously, virtual events don't suit everyone, but you might be surprised. I've seen online wedding fairs. There have been virtual "strolls" through boutiques. And that's in addition to more common ideas like online workshops, classes, tutorials, and webinars. I recently attended a Yoga gathering, workshop, and discussion hosted by a friend in Zurich with registrants from all over the world.

So if you think you have something to offer to customers digitally, go for it.

Setting up a virtual event

Even though the event is virtual, you'll still want to set up an event page on Eventbrite or Facebook. Or, at the very least, a form where people can register.

Then you'll want to follow the same steps as an in-person event. Keep people engaged through newsletters and updates.

And here are some [quick tips for a successful virtual event](#). Remind them of the upcoming event and ask them to share it themselves. Take time to test out your microphone, make sure you have a quiet place with great internet, and familiarize yourself with whatever software you're using. And please, check your lighting too. No one likes staring at a speaker hidden in shadows.

Oh, and make sure you know the limitations of your software too. Are there time or attendee limitations?

Double Oh, and make sure you know how to mute attendees. Trust me on this. Someone will always forget they're muted and not pay attention as you beg them to pipe down.

Tools for virtual event marketing

- For hosting the event, you have Zoom, Skype, Google Meet.
- For email updates, I recommend Mad Mimi or MailChimp.
- Slack for a chat group before, during, and after the event.
- Google Drive or Dropbox to share files with attendees.
- And if you want cool Zoom backgrounds, [Canva has some cool ones](#).



Take Event Planning Seriously

Take Event Planning Seriously

Let's get serious for a minute. When it comes to throwing great events, live or virtual, careful planning is required. And I mean that. Event planners are excellent improvisers and but that's because they're meticulously organized. When something goes wrong, and it will, the event planner knows everything else is in place. So they can focus all their energy on solving one problem at the moment.

And that applies to event marketing for small businesses too. Let's think about it. It's the big night. Your place is full of eager guests. But there's nowhere for catering to set up. The table you rented won't fit through the door. And you forgot to confirm with the photographer, and now they're late because they thought it was tomorrow. And who has to solve all of this? You do.

While you're scrambling to make things right, your attendees are neglected. You're not making sales. You're not building relationships with customers.

Poor planning manifests itself even before the event. Perhaps when you try to book a videographer but can't find anyone available. Or if you forgot to send the images to the printer. Last-minute stuff is stressful, shoddy, and pulls you away from your real work. And it's avoidable.



Planning Leads To Functional Event Marketing

Planning Leads To Functional Event Marketing

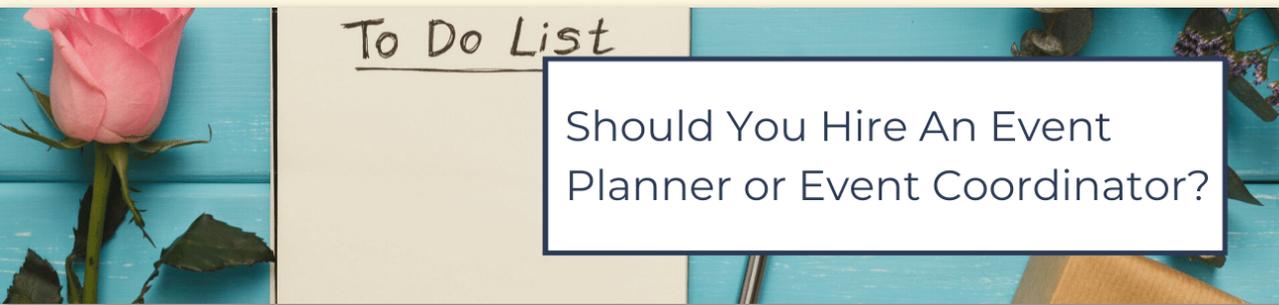
Once you've committed to having the event, start planning. And sure, of course, we think you should use our [event planning software](#). No matter what you use, planning out your tasks leading up to the big day will help you stay on top of them. And building out an [event day timeline](#) will keep you and the vendors on schedule.

But it's not only about organization.

When you build out a timeline, you're forcing yourself to take time into consideration – whether you'll actually be able to fit in the 20-minute presentation. You'll know whether you'll have time to complete set up before the attendees arrive. And you'll see whether you can have five speeches or only two.

Similarly, by laying all your tasks and setting due dates, you won't screw up printing or leave the caterer too little time to come through. When it comes to event marketing, time-to-event matters. So you'll need to complete tasks one month before, two weeks before and two days before. And you'll need to remember to check-in with the venue and vendors in advance too.

Believe me when I say that you can't figure it all out the day before. So whether you prefer to use excel or ThymeBase, make a plan. Or get some help.



Should You Hire An Event Planner or Coordinator?

On the topic of planning, the question arises. Should you hire an event planner, or go it alone? Well, I could easily take the cop-out and say *it depends*, but no one likes wishy-washy answers like that. So I'll state an opinion. Yes. But it depends. If you meet the following criteria, then you probably don't need to hire a planner.

You absolutely love planning parties, and you've done it before. Or, your event is under twenty people, and you plan on ordering some pizza for the food. Frankly, if you're dipping your toe into the event marketing waters, it's not a bad idea to start at the most basic levels.

But if you're looking to create an experience that will really resonate with customers and wow them, then finding a planner is a good idea. Here are five reasons why an event planner is worth hiring.

Accountability

A few months ago, I chatted with the CEO of a health care company that was planning their second conference. He mentioned that their last event was a success, but it was a massive headache. Leading up to the conference, no one in his small team was accountable for remembering all the details. Sure, they'd assigned tasks, but the day to day work of growing their business always took priority.

Their COO was too busy. The sales guys were happy to chip-in during the conference, but they weren't going to lose a sale today to plan decor. Their

marketing person didn't know what was even needed. And the CEO was doing a million things to keep his business afloat. In the end, they either dropped things, missed tasks, or scrambled at the last minute to find vendors.

An event planner is someone accountable for ensuring a great event. They'll know the payment schedules, remind you of your tasks, or handle the necessary actions directly. If you'd like a successful event but don't have the manpower internally to take it on, then hiring an event planner will make a massive difference.

Focus on your goals

During the planning process, an event requires energy, focus, and time. But if you don't have anyone in-house who has that time, and the bandwidth, you're going to have to make a choice. The choice is to let the day-to-day work slide, drop the ball on your event planning, or work some serious overtime.

And during the event itself, your focus ought to focus on your attendees; on selling your product and service. And having a fun time. I mean, it is your party, after all.

An event coordinator will carry the burden of marshaling the vendors, setting things up, and ensuring everything runs smoothly. They'll do what they do best, and free you up to do yours.

Planners keep costs in check

When you book an event planner to help with event marketing, you're hiring their experience too. And that experience includes knowing what everything costs. But even better, an event planner understands the tradeoffs you can make to lower costs in one area so you can achieve your vision elsewhere.

Event planners also have relationships with vendors and venues. They know who to hire that can achieve your goals within the budget. And if it's not possible, they'll know the alternatives. An event planner will know how to source the right materials and people who fit your style and your budget.

Time is money

Do you have time to call twenty venues and check their availability? And then do the same for photographers, videographers, caterers, and rental pros? Do you have the time to review their proposals, negotiate the price, and review the contracts?

Are you willing to spend time fussing about the beverage orders and confirming everything before the event?

And during the event itself, will you have time to answer calls when the caterer needs help lugging tables up the stairs, and the DJ needs to find the outlet?

If the answer is no, then you need professional help. Talk to an event planner and coordinator.

Imagination and event design know-how

Now, if you're hosting a simple workshop, then this section won't really matter much. If you're throwing a *party* and want to create an *experience* for your guests, let's talk about event design.

But unless you're a pro party planner, your creativity and design skills will be limited. But a good event planner will know how to take your vision and make it a reality. A planner will translate your idea into balloons, linens, flowers and place settings and all the little things that you might not even notice, but your guests will *feel*.

There is a lot of art involved in event marketing. So you might need to hire an artist. In other words, an event planner.



How To Spend Your Event Marketing Budget

How To Spend Your Event Marketing Budget

The way I see it, there are three divisions in which one might spend their event marketing budget.

- Marketing
- Event Basics
- Design

Marketing is how you get registrants to sign up for your event. It might include social media ads, PR, or an email newsletter to your customers. This also includes printed materials handed out during the event.

Event basics are, I think, almost non-negotiable, but the costs can vary wildly. This includes food, drinks, photography, and post-event clean-up. Without these, your attendees will be somewhat disgruntled. And yes, photography makes people feel valued, plus nets you some excellent post-event marketing material. I consider it essential.

Event Design is the atmosphere, the vibe, and the decorative style. Your money goes toward decorations like balloons, flowers, banners, furniture rentals, and those special touches like a sushi bar or cupcake stands. These are the little things that wow people when they step through the entrance.

But before you even start divvying up your budget between the three domains, let's look at the drivers: Event Type and Customer Expectation.

Event type

A wedding is a world apart from a workshop. And a conference with multiple speakers has different needs than an outdoor fitness fair. So what event are you throwing?

Then consider what the needs of that event are. Do you need a tent and outdoor toilets? An open indoor space with heating? Will people be getting drunk, or will they need tables so they can take notes?

This list will help you figure out what the essentials are and help inform your marketing. Depending on your budget, the basic needs will define how much you'll have left for the design.

Customer expectations

I interviewed a luxury event planner and asked her what makes events *luxury*. It's not that there are flowers – there are flowers at many events. It's that at a *luxury* event, the scale of floral decor. There are tunnels of roses, and bouquet islands and walls draped with flowing ivy. It's the difference between a guest admiring a centerpiece and saying *whoa* when some places a handmade Orchid and Plumeria *lei* around over their shoulders.

So what are your customer expectations? Do they expect beer or top-shelf bourbons? Will they want dinner or light snacks? And will they expect on-trend decor or a blank brick-faced wall? Most events don't need the *luxury* label, but every event sets some expectations.

It's not that high-end equals better. All events are lovely when they meet attendee expectations. But if your attendees feel misled or mistreated, then your event marketing will be a bust.

Consider who your attendees are, what your product or service is, time of day (happy hour snacks or dinner), and what time the event ends. Write this down, and you'll be on your way to planning an event that works.

Managing your event marketing budget

Once you've set your expectations, you can begin to figure out what you spend your money on. If you use an event planner, they'll work closely with you to stretch your budget as far as possible.

But if you're going it alone, I heartily, strongly and vociferously recommend you do a little research first. Find out what local photographers charge. And look at catering costs online. A couple of hours on Google will uncover some general costs.

Too often, people have unrealistic assumptions of costs, which leads to wasted time, misaligned budgets, and disappointment.

Then it's really a matter of playing around with it. Use an [event budget template like this one](#) that David, ThymeBase's CEO, created. Or create your own budget in Excel. But it's a matter of trial and error, and tradeoffs too.

But take my advice on this. Good food, abundant booze, and welcoming vibes will overshadow ostentatiousness any day. Events, at the end of the day, are all about people.

So if your budget won't cover the chocolate fountain, don't worry about it. Make your attendees feel appreciated, and they'll come to your next event and the one after. And remember, the attendees don't know what might have been. They won't know that you couldn't afford a guest performance by Celine Dion. And they won't care.

Surprise costs in your event marketing

There are a few things you might not realize you'll need until it's too late. So I'll mention them here.

Support Staff: I mentioned this at the start of this guide. You might need to hire staff to help you make the sales or to free you up to make sales. But don't be afraid to strong-arm friends and family to help either.

Cleaning Costs: Many venues, especially those you'll find on Peerspace, require you to handle clean-up. And that's not merely loading out your folding tables. If you're renting a space, check to see if you'll need to hire a cleaning crew.

Surprises: And keep a little something in your budget for any surprises. You'll thank me later.



It's Time To Party

It's Time To Party

When your event finally arrives, it's time to let go of everything up to this point and have a good time. Or, at least, help your guests have a good time.

All your planning led up to this moment, and hopefully, everything runs smoothly. But if it doesn't, don't sweat it. Have a good time with your attendees, and they'll have a good time too. So if a vendor doesn't show, or the sound sucks, or whatever, laugh it off. Remember that everyone's here to take part in something together.

So be present with your guests and let everything else slide.

But if you're the type of person who worries about the little details, and that's fine too, then I recommend hiring an event coordinator. They'll be your problem solver and offer you peace of mind.



Turn Customers Into Influencers

Turn Customers Into Influencers

Here's a fun tip for your event, no matter what type of it is. Set up a section of your space for Instagram pics. If you take a little time to create a fun backdrop that is Insta-worthy, you can get your attendees to do some free brand awareness.

Try and add your company name in the backdrop somewhere and encourage guests to use a unique hashtag too. Don't be shy to ask the crowd to tweet and post about the event. People love to share that they're at something special, so give them visual and verbal prompts.

It's a free way to get a brand awareness boost.



Post-Event Tips: What To Do After Your Event

Post-Event Tips: What To Do After Your Event

As the event winds down, the event marketers work goes on. It's mostly about the follow-up and nothing to worry about. But it's worth taking time after each event marketing initiative to review what went well and what didn't. And confirming whether you genuinely achieved your event goals.

In my opinion, the [post-event work](#) begins as the event winds down. When your guests start filing out the door, have a final action, or ask planned. For example, make sure each attendee signs up for your newsletter list as they leave. Or make sure they follow you on social media. Maybe get their Instagram handle so you can tag them in event pictures. Whether the guest ended up *converting* at your event or not, ask permission to keep the relationship going.

And the day after the event, follow up with the vendors too. A thank you (and prompt payment) goes a long way. Assuming your event goes well, and you do more, having a list of preferred vendors will make upcoming events easier.

Speaking of payments, handle the bookkeeping as soon after the event as possible. Good books are good business, so get the expenses down while everything is fresh.

And do write up a post-event report. This should include numbers like conversions, leads, or sales, but also your impression of the event and any data. Try to get down things that will help you plan your next event efficiently.

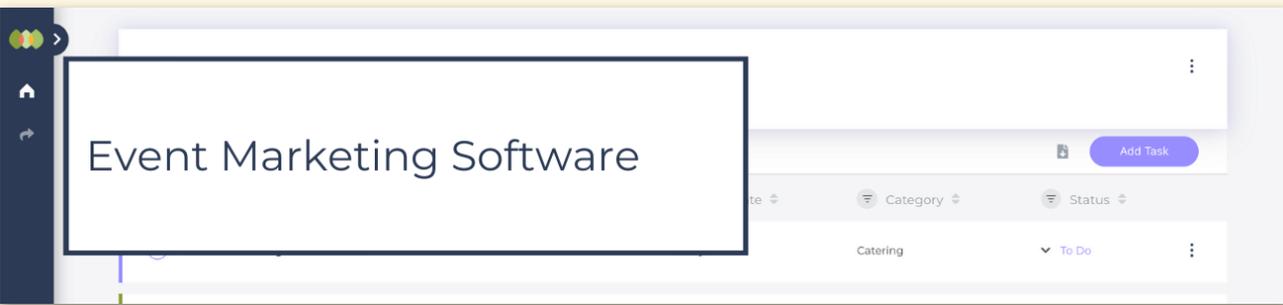
- What did attendees say about the event?
- Which foods did they like, and what did they not like?

- Did you run out of drinks?
- How many people showed up vs. how many registered?
- Which booths, tables, activities, or speakers were a hit?

And you should evaluate the vendors too.

- Were vendors on time?
- Who went above and beyond?
- Would you work with them again?
- Did their work meet expectations?
- Was the venue a good fit for your event type?

The point of all of this is to systematize your event marketing processes. After a handful of events, you'll have a report template and a list of amazing vendors. And you'll track the data that makes future events better and better.



Event Marketing Software

Okay, let's be a little more specific. This section is about software and websites that will help you with your event marketing. I've tried to look at a broad range so you can add whatever works to your personal toolkit.

To that end, this list is not exhaustive. Instead, I'll share some possibilities and leave it up to you to decide what you'll add to your toolkit.

Sourcing vendors and venues:

[Peerspace](#): An online marketplace that makes it easy to find and book unique spaces for your events.

[PartySlate](#): Another online marketplace to source vendors and venues too.

[The Bash](#): Yet another marketplace to find vendors for your event.

Event planning software:

[ThymeBase Event Planning Software](#): In case you didn't know it yet, this is us. So perhaps I'm a little biased, but I think we're the best option for event planning software. ThymeBase is free forever for up to five simultaneous events and has exceptional event timelines and task management. And we're probably the most mobile-friendly event planning tool out there.

[Asana](#): Project management software that can work for event planning. Not a bad option if you're tech-savvy and comfortable with project management in general.

Trello: A card-based project management tool. Designed for software development but a useful option if your tastes run that way.

CVent: If your events are large, or you're in a very corporate setting, CVent is a very complex, feature-rich event management tool. The downside is that it's got a steep learning curve. The upside is that it is very comprehensive.

Bizzabo: Like CVent, these guys are the big'uns of the event world. Complex, expensive but very, very, powerful.

Google Docs: Sometimes, you just gotta use a tool you know. Read about the good and bad of [event planning in Google Docs](#).

Event design software

Social Tables: Event layout software owned by CVent.

AllSeated: Like Social Tables, AllSeated is event layout and seating software. They're extraordinarily powerful and offer excellent 3D tools.

Pinterest: Not software per se, but when it comes to event design, Pinterest is the primary source of all design inspiration.

Mobile payments for live events

Square: If you're making sales at the event, Square is the leading option for taking payments on the fly.

RSVP and attendee registration

Eventbrite: Create a beautiful event listing page with built-in payment processing, analytics, and support.

Excel: Not event software, but you'd be surprised at how useful it can be to simply use Excel for tracking registrants and RSVPs. [Here are the pros and cons of event planning with Excel.](#)

File sharing

DropBox: A mainstay for sharing files, whether it's contracts, proposals, or design inspiration.

DocuSign: If your vendors need contracts signed, sometimes it's easiest to keep it all virtual.

Marketing your event

AdEspresso: An excellent tool to manage social media ads, especially on Facebook and Instagram. Much easier than using Facebook's native tools.

Google Ads: Super annoying, but if you're running a workshop and want to run search or display ads, then Google Ads is the place to go.

Yala Social: A lovely tool to create social media-friendly video ads.

Mad Mimi: My alma mater – an awesomely simple email marketing tool owned by GoDaddy. Perfect for newsletters and automated email marketing campaigns.

Buffer: If you're super active across multiple social media platforms, Buffer is a neat tool to manage all your accounts in one.

I think that's a pretty good range of apps. I hope it goes without saying that you won't ever use 'em all. If there are event marketing aspects you're struggling with, maybe some software will help. If not, save yourself the headache and keep things simple.

But if there's a single genuinely critical thing, it's the [event timeline](#). The timeline is the roadmap of your event. Every vendor, staff, and contributor needs to know the schedule. Otherwise, chaos will reign, trust me.

Last point of order, though. If you find yourself falling in love with event marketing, and planning more complex events, here's a tip. Consider the Event Canvas by the [Event Design Collective](#). [This introduction to event design](#) will give you the foundation and strategy you need to create successful events.

Keep Event Marketing Simple

Keep Event Marketing Simple

This is a lot of information to take in. And that's alright. Event marketing is a great channel, but it can indeed be overwhelming. I'll end with some more advice if you bear with me for a few more minutes.

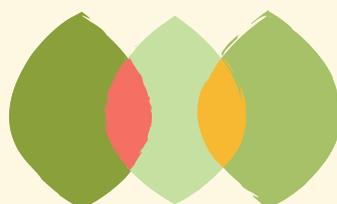
When starting out, start small. Keep it simple, easy, and functional. Setting lofty goals is great, but if you're inexperienced, there are only two ways to overcome that. You can hire an event planner, or you can risk wasting a lot of your money.

Start small, figure out your personal limits, and grow into event marketing.

Cheers,

Dean Levitt

Co-founder, [ThymeBase Event Planning Software](#)



THYMEBASE