

Your event has been in the works for months. Speakers and special guests are booked, entertainment is scheduled, venues are arranged, and you're ready to share it with the world.

But the world is full of events, from tradeshow to VIP parties and everything in between. Your attendees are being barraged with invites and ads every day, so how do you get noticed? More than getting noticed, how do you actually engage your audience's attention – and keep it – in the days leading up to your event?

"If only event strategy could be as easy as, 'If you build it, they will come.' In reality, there is much pre-promotional work to be done. On its own, an event must be alluring enough to draw in a targeted demographic, but the consumer engagement strategies leading up to the event are equally as important." - Jenn Maffeo (@JennMaffeo), Online Marketing Manager, [Moderne Communications](#)

We've identified three pre-event promotional strategies to help you reach your audience:

Push social media further

Do something crazy

Take the online, offline

Three Ways to Push Social

Whether your event is online, offline, or both, leveraging the full power of social media to engage your attendees will define the relationships between your users and your brand.

"Marketers need to integrate social media into the fabric of the event from the very beginning of the planning process. An integrated, holistic approach will trigger the best results – where social is the thread that touches all elements of the event, from beginning to end." - Alex Frias (@IAmAlexFrias), President, [Track Marketing Group](#)

Creating a unique social experience before your event kicks off creates more touchpoints and more engagement with attendees.

"Offering audiences a platform on which to socialize and learn prior to the event can create a better attended event, and an on-site experience attendees spend more time in." - Kristy Elisano (@SparksMarketing) Vice President of Marketing, [Sparks](#)

Social media marketing has moved far beyond brand name hashtags and Facebook fan pages. An effective social campaign blends three big strategies:

Creating a branded campaign

Targeting influencers

Listening

These elements, working together and woven into your campaign from the beginning, will create excitement and interest around your event.

Create a Branded Campaign

Your consumers and attendees are all over the web. Make sure your team knows the strengths and particulars of each social network you use, and then create branded, targeted content to use on each.

“By implementing a branded or customized social media hashtag, Twitter account, Facebook page, Instagram account, Pinterest account, or any other social media account, brands can effectively quench curiosity by providing more relevant event information and content for consumer indulgence.” - Jen Maffeo (@JennMaffeo)

Creating a branded, online campaign that spans a variety of social media networks will also keep your content alive and circulating long after the event is over.

Target Influencers

Influencers are going to do a lot of your work for you, so start by identifying the people who your audience trusts. These are people who have a broad online presence - a big audience on their blog, active and engaging social media channels, etc. Influencers have endeared themselves to their fans, and earned a window for promoting events, causes, products and choices. Web services like Klout make it easy to locate and engage online influencers.

Once you've found them, roll out the red carpet.

“When engaging influencers, there almost always have to be social incentives - whether they receive early access to event details, or special VIP perks, etc. It's important to show special guests that they have been thought of. We always track these interactions, and try to engage these users prior to the event to keep them excited.” - Rachel Bogin (@CityEventions), Vice President of Creative Services, City Eventions

As your influencers continue to buy-in, they will continue to talk about their experiences with your brand. Their followers will engage, and your social media marketing efforts will be amplified.

Listening: The Other Half of Social Media

Using social media to broadcast a message is nothing new. There may always be new and better ways to do it, but, eventually, one-way communication on social networks is found out and ignored. Brands and marketers that really connect with consumers turn over the microphone - and the controls - at strategic times.

“We’ve leveraged a lot of different social tactics for our event activations, including hashtag integration (please don’t automatically do #BrandName or #EventName) and live tweeting. For some of our recent concert and live stream productions we’ve been able to engage with the social communities by giving them the authority to effect the on-site event setup, run-of-show, and effects on stage.” - Alex Frias (@IAmAlexFrias)

Social media is blurring the lines between marketing and customer service, from the consumer’s point of view, and great customer service has always been about listening. Using social networks to listen to consumers and attendees prior to and during your event will foster anticipation, enhance the user experience, and develop relationships with your brand.

Do Something Crazy

In *The Purple Cow*, Seth Godin famously writes, “Stop advertising and start innovating.”

Everyone is advertising their brand, their product, their event, etc. Your attendees hear and see thousands of Facebook ads, Google banners, and sponsored Tweets every day. You need to cut through the noise. You need to be different.

“Creating unique and personalized content is the only way to authentically target event attendees.” - Rachel Bogin (@CityEvents)

When Zynga, a social games developer, was assigned a difficult Friday evening time slot for their first NewFront conference presentation, MKG helped them stand out.

“We knew we’d have to do something special to break through the clutter, and get the right type of guests. We sent out 50 custom-created VIP invitations to make some noise. Our cheeky ‘Deluxe Hangover Kit’ was sent to agency VIPs, and came stocked with hangover essentials to make sure their staff was ready to work after the effects of our party. The strategy was to be unique and make our guests smile before they ever stepped foot through the door.” - Dani Skollar (@DaniSkollar), Marketing Associate, MKG

It is much easier to plug your information into established marketing strategies than it is to imagine new outlets and develop innovative conversation-starters, but what worked yesterday is yesterday’s news. Don’t only think outside of the box – demolish the box. Give people something to buzz about.

Take the Online Offline

As you unleash your beautifully branded campaign online and start creating imaginative guerilla marketing strategies for the streets, be sure to weave the two together. Take the hashtags to the real world, and give people incentives to share your fun, pre-event perks with their social networks.

“Recently, Burger King’s ‘Satisfried’ campaign demonstrated effective online and offline integration. The campaign employed non-traditional media offerings, like chalk stencils displaying the hashtag #WTFF, and then drove the conversation through a customized Twitter account - @WTFF2013 - and branded Tumblr page.” - Jenn Maffeo (@[JennMaffeo](#))

Seeing the web on the streets is a pleasant surprise for most people. Usually, when someone experiences something unexpected or entertaining, they want to share it with their networks. Give them something to smile about, and then tell them how to share it.

Tips and Tricks: An Appendix

In addition to big, broad strategies, there are always a few smaller activities that can help give your innovative campaign an extra edge.

“Another tactic that sometimes works well is providing a sneak peek of the set-up and/or planning of the event. People become more engaged when they feel they are receiving exclusive content.” - Rachel Bogin (@[CityEventions](#))

“Other tactics that have proven to be successful are including names of special guests, celeb hosts, etc., on invitations or promotions; hosting the event at new or unusual venues; and having really great musical talent. Timing is also something people should be aware of. Fashion Week, awards season, and holidays are always great times for brands to host events or promotions, but are also really difficult times to stand out.” - Dani Skollar (@[DaniSkollar](#))

Start developing your own playbook of tips and tricks that work well for your events, your brand, your niche, etc. As you work with big strategies to engage your event attendees, the little power-ups that work with your tribe will stand out from one event to the next.

If You’re Awesome, They Will Tweet

Your event attendees are busy, and they’re drowning in a sea of marketing messages. But you don’t have to worry about getting lost in the crowd if you’re not *part* of the crowd. You’re not trying to make white-caps

among the waves - you're throwing a life preserver.

If your content is good, your event is going to be amazing. If your pre-promotional campaign is social, easy to identify, surprising, and fun, you'll engage your attendees.

"Consumers are hungry to be engaged and involved in the overall event experience. They want to participate, and they are willing to try new things. Offer them multiple opportunities to get involved, drive content development, see and/or hear their voices come to life in the event, etc. All of this drives a deeper emotional connection to the event and to the brand." - Kristy Elisano (@SparksMarketing)

Your event might kick off months from now, but the experience starts today.