MAXIMIZING ATTENDANCE

Industry Best Practices

DECISION TO ATTEND STUDY

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Are my numbers improving?

Can I do better?

Or is this as good as it's going to get?

Connections & Revenue: A Mutual Goal

Maximizing attendance fuels two goals shared by both sides of the industry — *Connections and Revenue*.

For exhibition organizers and meeting professionals, growing attendance helps more individuals connect with the host organization and its mission, while protecting and growing an important source of revenue.

For destinations, increasing attendance results in more people connecting to the destination experience — what makes it unique — and increased overall spending as attendees get 'out and about' and/or recommend the destination to others.

Thus, the impetus to work closely together to utilize every possible means to strategically maximize attendance.

To download the Decision to Attend 2 full report and the *Behavioral Profile Template,* go to your professional organization or: TheExperienceInstitute.org

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Incorporating Best Practices

Throughout the Decision to Attend research study, many best practices have been shared from both sides of the industry, as shown herein. Use them to:

- Brainstorm with your team
- Talk with others about what's worked best for them
- Grow the repository; share your best practices via the *DecisionToAttend.com* survey

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Best Practices: Brainstorming Checklist

TIME AND DATE PATTERN:

☐ *"Timing doesn't work for me."* Even if you've done it before, keep asking about their preferred time of year and days of the week pattern. Generations change. Preferences change. Don't assume.

NEED APPROVAL TO ATTEND:

☐ *"My company won't approve the cost. I don't need convincing, they do."* For 30% of Gen Y Millennials, someone higher up makes the decision. Find out what they need. Develop or strengthen your Justification Toolkit. Give them sample wording to convey the benefits to their organization.

NEED HELP WITH OVERALL COST:

☐ Some pay their own way. Trend this by generation and type of attendee.

☐ Think of ways to offer installment payments for the registration fee for younger attendees who are establishing their careers or others who are on limited budgets. They'll appreciate and remember it.

☐ Coordinate coupons, discount offers for transportation, food, entertainment, etc. If they're cost conscious, this may motivate them to attend, even if they don't use them. Work with the local CVB for ideas on what's worked well for similar groups/expos/events.

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Brainstorming Checklist, Cont'd.

ALWAYS PROMOTE THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE:

☐ *"I go to a convention to learn, not to play."* For many industries and professions, the annual event is one of the most effective ways for them to learn and stay abreast. Always promote education.

HELP THEM BUILD THEIR PROFESSIONAL NETWORK:

☐ Create ways for attendees, especially Gen Y Millennials, to build their professional network and make connections, both on-site and post-event. Networking is the #3 driver; promote connections.

FACILITATE THEIR LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER:

☐ For those who always attend, networking is their #1 driver over education and destination/location. Create ways to facilitate networking in environments conducive to 1:1 conversation.

☐ *"I attend to be with people like me."* Develop ways for attendees to stay abreast of their industry by learning from their peers. Include this as a strong part of your promotional mix to lure the less frequent attendees.

TREND THE AGE OF YOUR ATTENDEES:

☐ What's the age of your attendees? Are you replacing retirees? Trend any variations over time. Welcome the emerging attendees and thank the emeritus attendees; they're all important.

IDENTIFY PERSONALITY TYPES & LEARNING PREFERENCES:

☐ Don't just think generations, think personality type. Within every group there are introverts and extroverts. The introverts need the most care. Make a home for them within your meeting format, e.g. places they can escape from large crowds. And, ask how they like to learn, e.g. smaller workshops.

REINVENT YOUR ON-SITE SOCIAL MEDIA:

☐ This study showed that many attendees prefer to connect 1:1 to build their networks, rather than use social media on site. Always include social media at your meeting, but use it in creative ways, e.g. fuel a meet-up on topics, with speakers, or to discuss special interests.

MINE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SMALL DATA:

☐ Think small data. Mine the social media thread for intel that may tell you more about the changing profile of your attendees. Are they coordinating informal networking? Are they getting out & about together? What are their professional or outside interests? Are they changing?

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Brainstorming Checklist, Cont'd.

TREND YOUR REGISTRATION PATTERN:

☐ Trend your registration Half-Life; the half-way point from when promotion starts. Look at it by generation and frequency, as well, to know when to make adjustments in promotion and marketing.

TIE REGISTRATION TO THE HOUSING BLOCK:

☐ Consider tying registration to housing, e.g. they can't register unless they stay in the official block. While this may not work for all groups, it's been very effective for many.

PROTECT YOUR BLOCK FROM ROOM POACHERS:

☐ Exhibitor lists are often easily found on the internet, fueling the rise of room block poachers posing as official housing agents. In your advance communications, encourage your exhibitors and your board/ leadership to alert you if they sense foul play.

TRACK ATTENDANCE FREQUENCY:

☐ Categorize them by frequency of attendance. You got them there. Are they repeating? Are they 'one and done'? Is your frequency improving? Remember, getting them to attend earlier in their career is key.

PARTNER WITH THE LOCAL CVB FOR ATTENDANCE PROMOTION:

☐ Contact the local CVB well in advance to explore ways to target market to attendee interests.

The chosen destination has a tremendous influence on the meeting experience and the perception of attendees. The CVB/destination organization is the conduit to all the destination has to offer in terms of meeting support and attendee experience options. They aid your ability to enhance, impact and differentiate your meeting, ultimately driving the desire to attend.

Reach out to the CVB to start the conversation! And, be sure to use the new *Behavioral Profile Template* to start a dialogue between your marketing team and theirs. After all, the mutual goal is to MAXIMIZE ATTENDANCE!

BEHAVIORAL PROFILE TEMPLATE

Get the template: TheExperienceInstitute.org

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Ongoing Research

Moving Forward

Throughout 2017-18, the study will involve gathering and sharing best practices from both sides of the industry — meeting & exhibition professionals and CVBs / Suppliers — through chapters, presentations, articles, and webinars.

Today's discerning attendees expect experiences. The goal is to work together to MAXIMIZE ATTENDANCE through a deeper understanding of the nuances of each event — the needs, attitudes and preferences of prospective attendees.

The new *Behavioral Profile Template,* developed by industry, is the first deliverable from this study. The template captures the most important influencers for each group, from which meeting & exhibition professionals and destination stakeholders can work together to target their attendance promotion strategies.

That's the vision. We value your input and thank you for your involvement.

To share your best practices with others, go to DecisionToAttend.com.
To download the Decision to Attend 2 *Full Report* or the *Behavioral Profile Template*, go to your professional organization website or to: TheEXPERIENCEInstitute.org

DETERMINE BEHAVIORS • MAXIMIZE ATTENDANCE

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