



6 Tips to Boost Attendance at Your 'Next Event'

"Business Advantage conducted a telemarketing project for us that fulfilled three vital aims. It increased awareness among IT Directors and systems administrators of the solution; it greatly increased the number of people registering for our seminars, and it gathered a very good percentage of high quality sales leads. "

Marketing Manager,
Symantec



White Paper

How do you increase the number of quality attendees?

Executive Summary

Business events come in many forms but share similar challenges; inviting the right people, achieving maximum attendance, making the event memorable and building profitable customer relationships. Business Advantage has helped hundreds of IT Vendors and their channel partners – this white paper shares the experience we have gained.



“Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success; leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall.”

Stephen Covey



Business events come in many forms - networking get-togethers, seminars, webinars and breakfast meetings to name some. **The challenge for your business is to invite the right people, create a high level of interest to achieve maximum attendance and make the event memorable - in terms of the information you relay, the handouts and delivery - in order to build profitable customer relationships.**

Planning is key, think about:

- Why you are holding the event?
- What is your intended message and incentive for people to come along?
- Where are you going to host the event?
- When is the best time?
- What is the event format to be?
- How will you manage responses and boost attendance?
- What are your plans for post event activity?

Since 1992 Business Advantage has been helping hundreds of IT Vendors and their channel partners generate leads for ongoing pipelines. As part of our client's business development activity this has often meant working with their existing contact database or sourcing a new database, compiling lists of interested targets for attendance at a seminar, or calling directly to invite prospects to an event – from small local breakfast briefings to multi-national seminars. This requires precision, strict timescales and general organization.

We thought you might benefit from the experience we have gained and we share the following with you in the hope that these tips will help avoid pitfalls and lead to better practice.

1. WHY SHOULD YOU HOLD AN EVENT?

Even in buoyant economic times it is not easy to get busy executives to leave their desks for an external event. So why have an event?

Because:

- **you are not alone** - your competitors are also targeting your existing and prospective customers, hosting an event provides you with an opportunity to reach a captive audience
- **you will raise your profile amongst existing and prospective customers**
- **you will build relationships and gain a valuable insight into your customers' and prospects' plans** (smaller events are great for this)
- **you will generate new business opportunities.**

2. WHAT TYPE OF EVENT?

Electronics Event

Electronic events such as Webcasts or Webinars are easy to participate in and you can invite people from all over the country and beyond as long as they have a computer and web connection - they save the participant money in terms of their time and travel expenses and as venues and refreshments do not have to be organised they are cheaper to run and can therefore be carried out more frequently – your cost will consist of a subscription to the company you choose to provide the email broadcast service.

Once registered for the event, the participant is sent a link and details of the start time – simple.

Electronic events can be interactive – often generating better participation as people can ask questions discreetly rather than having to ask them in front of an audience. Another benefit is that if the invitee is not available at the start time, they can view the recording later at a more convenient time.

You can offer the webinar free initially, but there is scope to charge to attend once you have established the offering. Take care with your choice of service provider as some may have limitations on the number of participants.

A telemarketing agency can source the right contacts for you, make the initial call to them to check they are the right person to take part, or find out who is, and encourage them to register.

Face to Face Events

Face-to-face events such as Breakfast Meetings or Seminars provide a better environment to build up business relationships and are more likely to encourage discussion than electronic events. However, you do have to organise a venue and all the trimmings which can be costly and you need several members of your organisation to attend to circulate with clients which involves a time cost element.

The advantages are: you get to put a face to a name and vice versa; you can build a better picture of their business plans and really assess if there is a business opportunity.

Here again, a telemarketing agency can source the right contacts for you, handle all the invitations and generally take the hassle out of the organising process.

3. INCENTIVES, TIMING AND LOCATION

To get your target audience to agree to attend your event it must have an attention-grabbing title, a gripping agenda and be laden with clear ROI payback, supported by strong customer



“Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson





“You progress not through improving what has been done, but reaching toward what has yet to be done.”

Kahlil Gibran



references. On reading it, the invitees' reaction must be “Wow! I cannot afford to miss this!”

A suitable incentive such as a free white paper, or a renowned Keynote speaker often catches the eye and convinces those who are wavering about whether to come along. For example, if you are a Reseller or Services/Training Provider you could ask your partner Vendor to come along and do the introduction to the event, undertake a short presentation or host a Q&A session. You may find they will be happy to do so and provide you with some valuable free advertising along the way.

Provide your attendees with good quality information about the event; publishing attendee lists can encourage more people to sign up; name badges can assist networking and copies of slides will aid memory recall after the event.

Finding a convenient location can encourage greater participation. Also check that they are experienced at holding events and are fully equipped for your needs. Think about holding breakfast meetings or evening/half-day events, rather than whole day events if possible.

Practice good time management techniques, always produce an agenda and stick to allocated time slots.

Check the calendar carefully – avoid half terms, scheduled train strikes, election days, international sports fixtures and, of course, the summer holidays.

4. TARGETED INVITATION LIST

Accurate targeting ensures you invite the right people to your event, inaccurate data limits marketing effectiveness and not enough data results in low levels of attendance.

Data Cleaning

You probably have a database of existing clients and prospects - but how up-to-date is it?

If you don't have a system in place to regularly update their contact details you could unintentionally offend them as people are sensitive about receiving communication with incorrect information, such as out-of-date job titles which don't recognise their recent promotion. This type of error also gives a bad impression of your organisation by demonstrating disregard for data management good practice and/or lack of resource/skill.

Poor data also carries a financial cost; by sending mailings to people who have left, you fail to target their replacements and you waste money on literature costs and postage.

If you do not have in-house resources to manage your databases effectively, consider employing a telemarketing agency to clean the data on your behalf. Data Cleaning involves double checking contact details on your existing



“The only way to do great work is to love the work you do.”

Steve Jobs



“The Prospect Gold database has turned our business around; we now have an expanding customer base, with 50% of our new orders arising from businesses targeted from the database.”

General Manager, S2

database/mailling list. The end result is up-to-date records, in which you will have confidence sending your invites to.

Data Sourcing

You need to invite untapped prospective clients to your event to enable you to win new business - but how do you go about finding them? Your telemarketing agency can find, on your behalf, the most cost-effective source from which to obtain new contacts matching your specified target criteria.

Also, you should be aware that not everyone you invite will accept your invitation and, often, those that do may drop-out at the last minute, therefore, you need to have enough data records to counteract these rejections.

Use the 2x10x rule! Experience shows that up to half of those who register for your event will not attend on the day, so you need to achieve 2x the number of registrants to allow for this. This requires you to invite 10x the required 2x final attendee level. For example, if you want 40 people to attend your event you need to get 80 people to register and to get 80 people to register you need to invite at least 800.

It is worth asking your invitee to pass on the invitation to colleagues who may be interested in coming along, or better still to supply you with their contact details. This increases your database and possible attendance.

Using a telemarketing agency that also provides database services and event organisation will be beneficial to you here as they will have the bandwidth and relevant experience to get the best from the data sourcing process.

5. MANAGING RESPONSES AND BOOSTING ATTENDANCE

Whether your invitation has gone out as a hard copy or an email, it must have a response mechanism, details on how to register online for the event is the ideal, however, other popular methods include a printed reply card or a telephone number.

Those that agree to attend your event are demonstrating that they are already interested in its content. All acceptances should be acknowledged and joining instructions, such as directions, forwarded on to them.

Keep a note of those who couldn't attend but would have liked to, so you can send them the event information and invite them to the next event; if they are from an important prospect/client offer to run an internal event for them, again a telemarketing company can help with sending information or organisation of an internal event.



“The best is he who calls men to the best. And those who heed the call are also blessed. But worthless who call not, heed not, but rest.”

Hesiod, 8th Century BC
Greek poet



Non-Responder Follow Up Call

However well designed your invite is, not everyone will read it or respond to it. It may be put to one side for review at a later date but get forgotten about or mislaid. You cannot rely on self-registration alone, attendance can be greatly increased if a follow-up call is made to prompt their memory, highlight the benefits of the event and commit their attendance. This is another service happily carried out by a telemarketing agency with event organisation experience, they will resend copies of invitations to those who have mislaid them and can pass on additional information.

Reminder Call

People drop out at the last minute often due to other commitments or perhaps because they've neglected to put the event in their diary. Emailing the 'event' straight into their outlook calendar resolves the latter point, additionally, a few days before the event get the telemarketing specialists to make a reminder call. This is an important way of ensuring a good attendance.

Having an up-to-date attendee list will allow you to organise the correct quantity of refreshments and seating for the day.

6. POST EVENT ACTIVITY

Ensure your sales people or your telemarketing agency follows up leads and get general feedback from your attendees as soon as possible after the event. This helps find out the strengths and weaknesses of the event's activities, gain an insight into what might be of interest in the future and identify what improvements are necessary as well as capture the sales leads when they are fresh.

Providing a Feedback Form for completion at the end of the event can be successful, alternatively, it can be emailed to them the following day.

Your telemarketing agency would be happy to facilitate the above service and at the same time investigate the possibility of new business opportunities on your behalf.

You can also ask your telemarketing agency to follow up the positive feedback forms to gather testimonials for use in future event promotion.

Adding contact details from business cards to your mailing lists will enable you to send company newsletters to continue pursuing a new business relationship.

SUMMARY

Planning a successful event is a complex matter and experience is essential to a successful outcome.

Remember these words from Rudyard Kipling's poem:

*I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who.*

“To lead people, walk beside them... As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence. The next best, the people honour and praise. The next, the people fear; and the next, the people hate ...

When the best leader's work is done the people say, 'We did it ourselves!'"

Lao-tsu

Give careful consideration to your message and format, target audience, incentives, timing, location, how you manage the responses and post event activity.

Having up-to-date data gives a positive impression of your company and will enable you to achieve better results. Think about the condition of your existing data and the resources available to clean it and source new prospects. Poor data creates a bad impression and will adversely affect your brand value.

Steps in the process, essential for a successful outcome, and typically carried out by a telemarketing agency to improve event attendance, include:

- Cleaning/Sourcing data
- Sending out invites
- Follow-up calls to non-responders
- Reminder call.

Good quality data and effective telemarketing processes will make your event a success and increase your ROI.



BT Global Services need to have absolutely accurate prospect and customer contact data in order to meet their business growth objectives. They recognise that the value of their brand is at stake if they do not communicate the right message to the right contact.

CASE STUDY – CONTACT DATA

Project: Contact Data Quality Initiative – Phase II

Commissioned by: Sarah Lester, Senior Manager,
UK Marketing Operations, BT Global
Services

Business Challenge

BT Global Services need to have absolutely accurate prospect and customer contact data in order to meet their business growth objectives. They recognise that the value of their brand is at stake if they do not communicate the right message to the right contact. They must be able to drill down to key decision makers.

Scope

This database marketing project consisted of:

- a) Cleaning 18,000 data records from BT's CRM system, amending errors, removing duplications, adding missing data, identifying inactive contacts and finding replacement contacts. Business Advantage were required to check contact details without speaking to the named individuals to get an independent authentication.
- b) Acquisition of a minimum of 2,000 new contacts from within 590 named accounts across a range of 24 specified business functions.

Methodology

- a) Business Advantage were not allowed to contact the named individuals directly, therefore, a two stage approach was taken. Initially, data was gathered from public domain sources and secondly, these details were confirmed by calling receptionists, or where receptionists did not know the information, others within the relevant department.
- b) New contact information was gathered using telephone interview techniques.

BT had strict data formatting requirements, Sarah stated:

"Business Advantage were able to meet these requirements plus were able to provide the data in a ready-to-load format, thus avoiding time consuming data processing by internal BT staff."

Business Advantage also provided BT with weekly feedback via a conference call and a hard copy report. Sarah said:

"As a result of being kept in the loop with these helpful updates we were reassured that the priorities of the project remained on focus."

Another challenge of this project was to collect email addresses, where this information was unavailable Business Advantage

“We were very pleased with the new contacts Business Advantage found for us, it has made a big difference to our effective reach.”

Sarah Lester, Senior Manager, UK Marketing Operations, BT Global Services

extrapolated naming conventions of colleagues and pinged across emails to these addresses to test viability.

Why choose Business Advantage?

This project was put out to tender and Business Advantage provided a proposal along with a number of other agencies. Information from all the proposals was consolidated and comparisons made.

“The results of the comparisons went through BT’s usual procurement channels and Business Advantage came out on top, particularly in the areas of cost, approach, professionalism and flexibility.”

What impact did the result have on BT’s business?

Before the data was cleaned BT had some concerns about the quality of their data, Sarah commented:

“Now we are confident that the data is accurate and we do not have any concerns going forward.”

The acquisition of the 2,000 new contacts was also important to BT, Sarah commented:

“We were very pleased with the new contacts Business Advantage found for us, it has made a big difference to our effective reach.”

Sarah’s final comment

“All deliverables were met within agreed timescales and to agreed formats. I was very impressed by their professionalism and flexibility as well as the cost of the project. All the staff were very helpful. I have recommended them to colleagues and have used them since on two occasions for data cleaning and data acquisition projects.”

Sarah Lester, Senior Manager, UK Marketing Operations,
BT Global Services



"SGI has used data from the UK CAD User Site Database for a couple of promotional programme mailings to generate new business. We like its comprehensive nature, accuracy and its focus on the engineering sector. Our primary reason for using Business Advantage is the added value offered by their staff's specialist knowledge of the CAD and desktop markets, which enables them to supply information that is highly targeted to our needs. This has been particularly valuable to us as we enter new markets."

Group Marketing
Manager, SGI

BUSINESS ADVANTAGE – ABOUT US

If you plan to grow in a new way, perhaps by using one of the ideas above, you should have an advantage, a business advantage. We've helped many companies make their growth journey as our market research and analyses always include actionable recommendations and implementation strategies.

Who we are

Formed in 1992 by CEO, Chris Turner, Business Advantage now has a professional staff of over 30 specialists in different markets, technologies and methodologies.

What we do

Business Advantage is a B2B research, business development and marketing consulting practice operating in the global IT, Digital Broadcasting and Telecommunications sectors. We specialise in:

- Marketing and management consultancy
- B2B market research
- Data services
- Sales development services

Our mission

To out-perform your competitors, you must get key activities right: strategy and planning; acquiring accurate market intelligence and taking effective action to turn potential customers into real ones.

At Business Advantage, our commitment is to **help you create substantial and lasting improvements in your performance - a sustainable business advantage - over your competitors.**

Our Clients

Our clients include many leading international companies such as 3M, Autodesk, Canon, Dell, HP, Infor, IBM, Intel, Lexmark, Microsoft, , Oracle, SAP, Sony, Sophos, Synopsys, Xerox Engineering Systems and many small to medium sized organisations.

Additional Information

If you would like more information on this or other research, data or business development topics, please email info@business-advantage.com, call +44 1689 873636 or download other [Business Advantage White Papers](#).

Lastly – if all these tips are overwhelming please talk to us about some Consultancy to help you figure out your best approach to building attendance at your next event.