

Special Events Galore!

MONTHLY IDEAS FOR THOSE WHO PLAN,
ORGANIZE AND MANAGE EVENTS OF ALL KINDS

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STRATEGIC PLANNING

Align Each of Your Events With Institutional Priorities

By Kerry Nenn

It's not just a party. Everything has a purpose — or it should. Right down to the finest details, your events should align with the overarching strategic goals and priorities of your organization. Correan Barker, associate director of events, alumni and donor relations at The Evergreen State College (Olympia, WA), explains how to keep this focus in mind so your priorities don't get lost in the minutiae.

Start by personifying strategy. "Make your strategy feel like a member of the team," Barker advises. "I always lead with strategy in meetings. I speak about our priorities and goals so they are always present, and I show how decisions we make about events are directly connected to them. Put your *highest-level goals* on every meeting agenda — not just the goals for your department or division or for a specific event. It may seem obvious to keep these in mind, but it's easy to get distracted from these priorities in the midst of detailed planning."

Second, use event strategy to build and enhance partnerships. "Engaging and cultivating are typically top priorities," Barker notes, "so take every opportunity to create meaningful partnerships with your planning and event execution, using your strategy as your universal language. For example,

provide meaningful ways to create ownership among board members or volunteers. This doesn't necessarily mean they will plan the event. Perhaps board members send thank-yous or solicit gifts from their networks. For our 2021 Return to Evergreen Alumni Weekend, we curated seminars that featured alumni and faculty leaders in public service, working to solve societal challenges with an equity mindset. This engaged several segments of our constituency in partnerships that were meaningful to them and aligned with our goals to cultivate each of these audiences."

Lastly, invest time, resources and emotional energy wisely. Barker says, "Event planners and leaders don't need to do it all. Look to other subject matter experts who can help you put everything together. But *always make sure everyone understands the strategic goals and desired outcomes*. This will help them provide ideas that align with your strategy, and it will give you a united front, where everyone feels part of something bigger that you're doing together." ♦

Source: Correan Barker, MPA, Associate Director of Events, Alumni and Donor Relations, The Evergreen State College, Olympia, WA. Phone (360) 481-6991. Email: barker@evergreen.edu. Website: <https://www.evergreen.edu/>

Design, Decoration Tips

- Make table linens pop by placing a 36 X 36-inch overlay in a bright, printed pattern over a white tablecloth. The prints and patterns can help correspond with your theme (e.g., English garden for a tea or animal prints for a safari theme). ♦

Food-Tasting Event Ideas

- **Create unique pairings on small plates.** Make your event educational by showing guests how unconventional entrees or side dishes can complement each other. Suggest wines or beverages to serve with them at home. ♦

SPECIAL EVENTS GALORE, (Online ISSN: 2325-8586), is published monthly by Wiley Periodicals LLC., 111 River St., Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774 USA.

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Editor: Scott C. Stevenson

Production Editor: Mary Jean Jones

Editorial Correspondence: Scott C. Stevenson, *Special Events Galore*

For submission instructions, subscription and all other information visit: wileyonlinelibrary.com/journal/sep.

WILEY

FOOD AND BEVERAGE

Create Safe and Inclusive Food and Beverage Environments

By Megan Venzin

People with special dietary needs or disabilities should feel just as at home in the banquet hall as everyone else. Taking a proactive approach to inclusive environments will showcase your consideration as an organization, which can lead to better relationships with supporters.

"When you create a meal for the minority, you're able to feed the majority," says Tracy Stuckrath, president of thrive! meetings & events. "Inclusive dining means making sure that the meal function is welcoming to everyone in attendance."

Stuckrath is a dietary needs expert, food safety trainer and certified special events professional, and as someone living with food allergies, she requires a gluten- and dairy-free diet. "If you can provide a gluten-free meal that tastes great, why not offer that menu option to everyone?" She has a point — a roasted chicken dish with seasonal vegetables and spiced quinoa can check all the boxes without singling anyone out. "An inclusive menu can be better on your budget too," she adds.

Stuckrath suggests event planners extend offerings that not only satisfy diverse audiences but also keep them safe. She offers tips to foster inclusive food and beverage environments:

1. **Remember planning starts at request for proposal.** "Planning for dietary needs and accessibility should happen at the top of your planning process," Stuckrath says. "Especially due to COVID, caterers may need to know which ingredients to order 30 days in advance."
2. **Survey guests.** Use your registration form to ask guests if they have accessibility needs, special dietary needs, require vegan/vegetarian dishes and whether they have other food-related requests related to religious practices or other factors.
3. **Be consistent with labels.** "Display labels alongside dishes on buffets. Aid the visually impaired with font size no less than 18 point," Stuckrath suggests. "Labels should include the top nine allergens (or any known allergens for guests in attendance), while the banquet captain should have the full ingredient list in their back pocket at all times."
4. **Seek perspective.** "Send your buffet menu to someone with special dietary needs or ask a friend who uses a wheelchair to do a site visit with you," Stuckrath offers.
5. **Be conscious of table heights.** "Offer both high- and low-top tables so those using wheelchairs have a place to eat," Stuckrath says. "Don't force the mobility impaired to the back of the room. If you can give them early access, that's often best."
6. **Keep track of your history.** "Look to past events and note how many gluten-free, kosher or vegetarian dishes were served," Stuckrath says. Let your venue staff and caterer know these numbers so they can prepare accordingly.
7. **Educate staff.** Banquet captains and servers should be aware of ingredients in each dish, as well as how to answer guests' questions about food. Chefs should be notified of allergies to avoid potential cross-contamination in the kitchen. ♦

Source: Tracy Stuckrath, CSEP, CMM, CHC, President, thrive! meetings & events. Phone (404) 242-0530. Email: tracy@thrivemeetings.com. Website: www.thrivemeetings.com

ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

Offer More Than Just Happy Hours

A cold beer and a plate of fried mozzarella sticks might entice your younger alumni, but happy hour events rarely cast a wide net. Nonprofits should think about the segments they serve and, in addition to happy hours, explore other methods for engagement that don't involve weeknight drinking or after-work commitments.

"The happy hour is treated as a 'catch all,' but you're going to miss anyone over the age of 28," says Matt Lucerto, director of affinity and domestic engagement for Northeastern University (Boston, MA). "Alumni who are in their mid-30s already have careers and families." For these reasons, Lucerto's team planned family-friendly, virtual events for this group instead. "We partnered with a children's museum and the San Diego Zoo," Lucerto explains. "Parents were able to set their children up with the computer and give them special access to something educational they hadn't thought of on their own."

This is just one example of how exploring fresh formats helped Northeastern reach diverse groups of alumni. Here Lucerto offers some tips to help event planners to look beyond the typical happy hour offering:

1. **Talk to your constituents.** "Reach out — not to those who are showing up to the happy hours — but to those you haven't seen in a while to ask them specifically about what kinds of events they would like to attend," Lucerto says.
2. **Focus on engaging content and activities.** Fund for

Education Abroad's (FEA) Sips for Scholarships wine-tasting events are well-attended because they are informative and interactive in nature. Look for events that teach or lend access to something authentic.

3. **Involve current students in engagement events.** FEA's series of study-abroad-related presentations gave alumni an opportunity to see where students are traveling. It also encouraged them to reflect upon their own experiences exploring the world back when they were enrolled. "It's all about invoking happy memories," Lucerto adds.
4. **Utilize early or lunchtime hours.** "When planning for the virtual space, try using that 8 to 9 a.m. or 12 to 1 p.m. spot," Lucerto suggests. "People can attend events over their morning coffee or treat that time like a 'lunch and learn' session."
5. **Let presentations be the main event.** "It's fine to kick off an event with a social hour or cocktail reception, but a presentation with a noteworthy speaker or an engaging activity should be the meat and bones," Lucerto suggests. "You want people to realize that they learned something because of their connection to your organization, so build in opportunities during the presentation to remind them of that fact." ♦

Source: Matt Lucerto, Director of Affinity and Domestic Engagement, Northeastern University, Boston, MA. Phone (781) 258-6752. Website: www.northeastern.edu

CROWD-PLEASING EVENTS

Celebrity Waiters Serve Up Fun and Excitement

Celebrity waiter fundraising events have the potential to bring new supporters to your organization, especially when your waiters have lots of local fans, enthusiastic friends and family members to invite to the party.

Once you recruit your team, try a few of these ideas:

- ❑ **Choose enthusiastic participants.** Hold informal auditions to see who is sincerely interested in making your event successful by sharing their humor, charm and vivacious personality. Some may be actual waiters in your city's top restaurants who are aspiring actors or performers.
- ❑ **Ask your waiters to do what they do well.** Radio personalities, television news anchors and sports team coaches have talents they can literally bring to the table. They can share their skill (singing, monologues, dancing) as they raise tips and serve dinner.
- ❑ **Create a character.** Your celebrity waiter may come dressed as his or her favorite fictional character. This technique allows each participant to have fun, waiting on guests the way their character might do it.
- ❑ **Include a mystery celebrity waiter.** Who was that masked man (or woman)? Let guests enjoy figuring out which local personality is delivering their salads and desserts. The emcee can announce and unmask them as they are correctly identified. Imagine guests' delight when they learn their company CEO is refilling their bread baskets. Award a prize to all who effectively conceal their identities until the end of the evening.
- ❑ **Let your waiter develop a table theme.** Give participants free reign to decorate their tables as they choose and ask guests to dress accordingly. Award prizes to the top crowd-pleasers, most original idea, or most donations collected. Publish photos online after the event and let the public vote, too. ♦

HOLIDAY EVENT PLANNING

Put a Holiday-Themed Spin On Your Annual Event

When Baylor Scott & White Irving Foundation (Irving, TX) had to move their annual TexasFest event to December this year because of COVID, they decided to put a holiday-themed spin on it, inviting attendees to celebrate the holidays “Texas style.”

Sponsors at the \$5,000 level and above have the option to get a seven-foot Christmas tree to decorate that will be auctioned at the event. “One car dealership sponsor plans to decorate their tree with ornaments of the different kinds of high-end cars that they sell,” says Laura Manning, foundation senior officer. “Another is doing a Spode Christmas China theme with a tree decorated with china plates.” The decorated trees will line the walkway from the check-in area to the event space. Not everyone will opt to decorate a tree, she says, but she hopes to get at least a dozen decorated trees for the event.

Now in its 42nd year, TexasFest raised \$200,000 in 2019 (it was cancelled in 2020) and attracted 450 attendees, all of whom were sponsors of between \$500 and \$10,000. The 2021

holiday-themed event will be held Saturday, December 4, at the Westin Hotel at Irving Convention Center. It will include live music, dinner and a live and silent auction. Attendees, who are typically supporters of the hospital, doctors, community members and employees of Irving-headquartered corporations, are encouraged to dress in Texas-style casual attire of jeans and cowboy boots.

Manning recommends any organization with an annual event consider changing it up by adding something new every year, so it doesn’t get monotonous: “We try to have different activities each year. This year, because it’s Christmastime, we will have a bobblehead photo booth, where they put attendees’ heads on a little cardboard body, such as Santa, Mrs. Claus or an elf, to create a little bobble head that they can stand up on their desk or a shelf. Last year, we offered truffle-making. Another year we had stilt walkers and magicians walking around.” ♦

Source: Laura Manning, Foundation Senior Officer, Baylor Scott & White Irving Foundation, Irving, TX. Phone (972) 990-4393. Email: laura.manning@bswhealth.org Website: <https://irvingfoundation.bswhealth.com/>

VISUAL EVENT ELEMENTS

Create a Winter Wonderland With Shimmerwalls

There’s something magical about the way light dances upon freshly fallen snow. Look toward gentle drifts at nighttime, and it’s impossible to ignore the sparkly effect that comes from trillions of tiny flakes resting on one another. Now how can you bring that effect inside at your next end-of-the-year fundraising event or holiday party?

“If you’re hunting for a really unique backdrop for your photo booth or something to add excitement to your stage, I recommend Shimmerwalls,” says President of Elias Events Deborah Elias. “What they’re able to do with a simple concept is really impressive.” Elias, who works with nonprofit and corporate clients to create visually stunning events, believes that an eye-catching, sequin-panel backdrop can amplify guests’ memories of your gatherings, something that is especially important to planners who aim to please sponsors or top-level donors.

“Our Shimmerwalls help create a fun and dramatic focal point which can be used for engaging your visitors but also as a branding opportunity for events and nonprofit organizations,” says Paula Johnson-Flint, co-founder of Shimmerwalls. “We find people make a beeline to strike a pose and have fun in front

of our sequin walls, and they are a great addition to any event décor theme.”

These items can also be used to celebrate the important people and businesses that make your events possible. “If you want to create a customized setup that reflects the logos or hues of your sponsors or partners, Shimmerwalls are helpful in that regard too,” Elias adds.

Shimmerwalls is just one of many companies that provide custom services and backdrops for nonprofit galas or other types of get-togethers. For those hosting holiday-themed events, cool winter palettes can add a festive and calming touch to your venue. Unique shapes may also be integrated into the sequin designs should you want to make your room even more merry. Wherever you land, a reflective wall can add an unforgettable addition to your aesthetic this season. ♦

Sources: Deborah Elias, CSEP, CMP, CIS, President, Elias Events, Houston, TX. Phone (713) 334-1800. Email: info@eliasevents.com. Website: www.eliasevents.com

Paula Johnson-Flint, Co-founder, Shimmerwalls. Phone (646) 878-9009. Email: hello@shimmerwalls.com. Website: www.shimmerwalls.com

How to Enlist 80-Plus Teams for Your Event

What started as a parking-lot party with seven guys and a grill has grown into the World Championship Hot Wing Contest & Festival. More than 80 teams now participate in this competition that pits wing chefs against each other to win cash prizes and raise money for Ronald McDonald House Charities of Memphis.

To attract, enlist and manage this level of participation, Paul Gagliano, chairman founder, shares five key strategies:

- **Go for local flavor and fun.** “The event is still just a party, and the people here in Memphis love wings,” shares Gagliano. The event taps into this local culinary favorite and offers live music, vendors, a cornhole tournament, a wing-eating contest, a live chicken parade, face painting and the opportunity to give to a cause people love. Gagliano adds, “It’s all simple but fun. Any team can participate. Our slogan is, ‘All you need is a grill!’”
 - **Market effectively.** Due to its popularity, the event’s biggest marketing tool is word-of-mouth. “But we also promote heavily on social media, where we have over 8,000 followers,” notes Gagliano. “We also enlist sponsors and promote them as part of radio, television and billboard ads. This exposure keeps sponsors excited about our event.”
 - **Set clear, simple parameters.** The website includes a dedicated Team Information page where teams can register and find all the details about rules, prizes and participation.
- Additionally, prior to the festival, event staff host a mandatory meeting for all team cooks, to review event details and answer questions.
- **Streamline logistics and layout.** When teams register for the event, they can choose which size booth they would like, ranging from 10’ x 10’ to 10’ x 40’ and priced from \$250 to \$850. The cooking area is the only thing provided; teams must supply everything else. The cooking areas are arranged in a horseshoe, with stages on both ends. Food and non-food vendors set up between the hot-wing booths.
 - **Dedicate a staff member to team needs.** “We have created a paid, full-time position that is filled for six months of the year to handle team needs,” says Gagliano. This person reaches out to prior participants each year to enlist them for the next festival. This staff member is also responsible for fielding questions from teams prior to the event and sending thank-yous afterwards. “Our goal is to provide personal attention to the teams and treat them as partners,” explains Gagliano. “We get to know them and help them feel like they are an important part of everything we’re doing. After all, without them, we don’t have an event.” ♦

Source: Paul Gagliano, Chairman Founder, World Championship Hot Wing Contest & Festival, Memphis, TN. Phone (901) 949-2596. Email: paul@worldwingfest.com. Website: <https://worldwingfest.com>

GETTING THE WORD OUT

Get Creative When Seeking Pre-Event Publicity

Press releases and media interviews are excellent ways to attract publicity before your special event, but you may need to do more than that to truly grab the spotlight and inspire audiences to attend.

As appropriate, add these elements to your publicity repertoire:

- ❑ **Announce changes and additions.** Has the sluggish economy caused you to rethink your target audience? Tell the press. If your formal gala is now a festive family celebration with reduced ticket or table prices, that’s a human interest story. Be upbeat about providing better value for your supporters and drawing a potentially larger audience.
- ❑ **Arrange interviews with honorees.** Create a buzz around the people you are honoring at your event. Tell the public why they are worthy of recognition from the entire community. Even those who cannot attend will be more aware of your organization’s mission and services and admire those who help make it successful.
- ❑ **Invite the public to watch the event.** While most people buy tickets to help you reach your goal, look for opportunities or activities spectators can observe free of charge. For example, a competition to hit a hole in one or shoot a basket for a large cash prize or a fireworks show can generate advance media coverage and community interest.
- ❑ **Start a fun awareness campaign.** A first step might be a billboard or newspaper ad announcing only, “It’s coming.” Add details once a week like, “It’s coming August 8th,” and “It’s coming August 8th to Community Hospital,” until the who, what, when, where and why are fully revealed.
- ❑ **Offer free admission to the first 10 (or other such number) people.** A famous author is donating and signing books for you. A popular rock band is giving a benefit concert and selling CDs. All signs point to a sellout, but you can generate goodwill and positive publicity by giving away a few spots to early birds who are fans of your event’s star. ♦

Four Phases of an Emergency Plan

It's impossible to predict every accident that could occur at your next event, but it's prudent to try. Suppose a donor has a medical emergency at your appreciation dinner, or COVID-19 exposure at your overnight retreat sets off alarms? What happens when a sudden severe thunderstorm descends upon your outdoor gala? Planners must anticipate emergencies, take steps to prevent poor outcomes and activate comprehensive response plans should the unexpected arise.

"If there is some kind of incident at your event, attendees will pay attention to how the organization responds," says President and Co-founder of Emergency Concierge International (ECI) Desi Whitney. "This is a critical component from a reputation management aspect. Did it come across that you were prepared and had been thoughtful about how you would respond to all possible issues, or was it clear that you weren't prepared? Attendees need to feel safe." In the midst of a global pandemic that has upended the flow of daily life, this sentiment rings especially true.

Desi has more than two decades of meeting industry experience and formed ECI with her husband, John Whitney, in 2017. John has spent 25 years in fire service and education in emergency management and homeland security. "We bridge the gap and bring emergency planning to meeting planning," Desi explains. "We guide clients through how to identify all possible threats, develop actionable plans on how to respond and practice them." She defines the four phases of an emergency plan:

- **Mitigation.** Anticipate potential risks and how to minimize or eliminate them.
- **Preparedness.** Have the proper systems, teams and resources in place should an emergency situation unfold.
- **Response.** Activate your team and manage the situation with a cool head.
- **Recovery.** Consider what happens after the emergency to ensure your event moves forward smoothly and safely.

A capable, trained team is necessary to the implementation and execution of any emergency plan. "Preassign someone to be your incident commander," Desi suggests. "This should be someone who can function during high stress situations and remain calm." Assigning sectors on your team can also help cover your grounds and allocate responsibility. "Possible sectors are Planning, Operations, Logistics, Communications, Venue Liaison, and Accountability," Whitney offers. "Preassigning these roles and making sure everyone knows what their responsibilities are will help determine the response."

Desi admits emergency planning may not be the "most fun topic," but its importance is undeniable. "Oftentimes, planners think someone else has it covered," she says. "Having conversations with venues, DMCs, transportation companies and really anyone involved is critical." ♦

Source: Desi Whitney, President and Co-founder, Emergency Concierge International. Email: dwhitney@emergencyconcierge.net. Website: www.emergencyconcierge.net

USEFUL EVENT TECHNOLOGY

Enhance Your Event With QR Codes

The technology has been around since the '90s, but the past year has seen a resurgence of the quick response (QR) code. Fast, easy to use and touchless, QR codes have become a go-to tool for restaurants and retailers — and now event planners are taking advantage of the tech too.

Staff at Montgomery Christian School (Montgomery, AL) incorporated QR codes into their annual art auction to extend the event's reach and enhance the bidding process. Executive Director Pamela McLemore explains how it worked:

"We created two types of QR codes," notes McLemore, "to use for different aspects of the event. We put one on invitations and ads. When scanned, this code took people to the website to buy tickets." Once on the site, visitors could also view the art that would be auctioned off at the event. This provided a quick

and simple way to get people to the purchase site and encourage participation.

"We also used QR codes at the auction itself," adds McLemore. "Each painting had a QR code. Participants could scan the code to read a bio of the artist and also bid on the piece."

School staff created the QR codes in-house. "We've been using QR codes with various activities," says McLemore, "and it was definitely worth the time to create them for the auction. It was a bit labor intensive, but a quick Google search provides instructions on how to make them, and it's worth the effort for the enhancement they provide." ♦

Source: Pamela McLemore, Executive Director, Montgomery Christian School, Montgomery, AL. Phone (334) 386-1749. Email: pmclmore@montgomerychristianschool.org. Website: <https://montgomerychristianschool.com/>

PLANNING TECH-FORWARD EVENTS

Use Technology to Wow Your Guests

In-person events are back, and audiences want to be dazzled. While many industries sat on pause during 2020, technology hit its hot streak. Now organizers can take advantage of fresh developments that will leave attendees awestruck.

“Organizers are quick to spend money on items that lack any discernible connection to their nonprofit’s brand or mission,” says President of Elias Events Deborah Elias. “I suggest they take a step back and look for decorative elements that also bring out a cohesive theme and tell the bigger story of their events.”

Elias has been in the live events business for more than two decades and has watched digital advancements turn regular gatherings into spectacular affairs that constituents talk about for years after. “Back when I started, we didn’t have smartphones or apps,” she explains. “It’s phenomenal how far we’ve come.” Elias has won more than 20 awards for her efforts, and among her top passions is helping clients use technology to elevate gatherings. Here she shares a few of her favorite offerings planners can use to execute stunning, tech-forward events:

1. **Keep Interacting®.** Floral center pieces are so last century. Keep Interacting, LLC swaps petals for iPads, which can be used to highlight speakers, donors, sponsors and other program details on high-resolution screens. “This is a relatively inexpensive option that can also boost interactivity when used for auctions, live polling and more,” Elias says.
2. **HolographicEntrance.com.** Imagine being able to walk among the visual works of your event’s featured artists or to display your sponsor’s logos in a fresh, futuristic way. Holographic Entrance offers walk-through projection technology that nails first impressions and adds dimension to the attendee experience as soon as your guests walk through your doors.
3. **LytePost.** Amplify your perimeters with stanchions that feature illuminated logos and bright, eye-catching colors. “LytePost’s stanchions can be used as part of the design and add a pop of excitement at the entrance to your event,” Elias says.
4. **Pixster 360 Photobooth.** “Attendees love to see their memories captured in a 3D environment,” Elias shares. “Many 360-degree photo booths also include excellent features to prioritize branding and logo placement too.”
5. **Rindle Waves®.** Have you ever wondered what a speech *looks* like? Rindle Waves® turns captured audio into custom soundwave art. “An image of a speech from the event could make a thoughtful thank-you gift for sponsors,” Elias offers. “Or if you have a high-end entertainer, consider transforming their performance into an image for your top donors to cherish in their homes.” ♦

Source: Deborah Elias, CSEP, CMP, CIS, President, Elias Events, Houston, TX. Phone (713) 334-1800. Email: info@eliasevents.com. Website: www.eliasevents.com

BRING ON THE TALENT

Set Ground Rules for Talent Show Events

Whether featuring serious talent or drawing campy performers — such as your CEO playing harmonica — talent shows are almost guaranteed to attract audiences as people seek to cheer on their favorites.

But don’t let too much of a good thing lessen the impact of the event by being too long, boring, or even embarrassing for entrants who are out of their elements.

Set some ground rules before soliciting participants. Here are factors to consider for your specific talent show:

- **Determine number and types of acts.** Hold auditions for singers, dancers, stand-up comics, instrumental musicians and more. Limit each performance to less than five minutes. Choose only the best two or three for each category to help ensure top performance quality.
- **Make tapes of each audition.** Put them on your website to promote the event, and to allow community votes and comments. You may need to screen to prevent spam voting and monitor remarks, but the more traffic to your show link the more public interest it generates. Use the winning clips as pre-publicity.
- **Enlist celebrity judges.** Local media personalities, sports team coaches and elected officials can judge the participants and award the prizes. It also helps garner free media.
- **Hold at least two rehearsals.** Both informal and dress rehearsals will help you and performers work out any technical or logistical bugs in the program. You can even sell tickets to the dress rehearsal for those who cannot make the actual show.
- **Stagger the types of performances.** Three interpretive dancers or pianists in a row may lull the audience into complacency. Mix up the acts with singers, comics, jazz ensembles and celebrity impersonators.
- **Don’t limit your show only to the traditional.** Someone who wants to enter your show might have a truly unusual talent, like playing guitar while suspended by his ankles on an inversion table. Unique skills that are still tasteful can be big crowd-pleasers and keep audiences guessing about what might be next. ♦

Know What It Takes to Capture Editors' Interest

By Erin Sandage

Attracting the eye of an editor for your event can be a challenge in an increasingly competitive marketplace. PR Expert Meghan Ely, owner of OFD Consulting, says fresh and inspiring is the name of the game when it comes to ensuring your event is editorially competitive. She adds editors are looking for innovative details, creative themes, interesting menus, interactive entertainment and even an exotic locale.

"The level of celebrity in attendance can also impact its chances of being featured. Do you have a keynote speaker of note? Someone well known being honored? Distinguished guests? Any of these scenarios may increase your chances for publication."

Organizations need to do their research when preparing a media strategy for events. Ely suggests looking at the recent coverage of your desired publications to see what events they consider timely.

"Find more recent nonprofit events they covered and seek out any consistent elements," she adds. "This will give you a better idea of the information and details you'll want to compile to send over to the writer when the time is right."

Also, Ely advises being mindful of the photography style media outlets gravitate toward so you can hire a professional whose work will complement the targeted outlets. Give your photographer a list of anticipated details and guests to capture.

"As unglamorous as it sounds, the best way to capture the attention of the media is to pitch the right person. Don't discount the impact you'll have on finding the right journalists in a position to feature your event."

Pitching your event depends on each media outlet's submission process. Ely says offering a set of complimentary tickets to journalists is an option, but you want to treat them the same as any guest, giving them ample time to decide if they'd like to attend. If possible, invite them to any VIP components and give them insider access to either the keynote speaker or event honorees.

"If it makes more sense to pitch the event for coverage after it's taken place, time is of the essence, as events will date themselves quickly," she adds. "Gather the basics of the

event details and background prior, and be sure to contract the photographer for a quick turnaround on the photos. Have the targeted writers well researched in advance, so you can quickly email a pitch with the details they need to determine if it's a fit for publication." ♦

Source: Meghan Ely, Owner, OFD Consulting. Phone (804) 543-6400. Email: meghan@ofdconsulting.com. Website: www.ofdconsulting.com

Why Your Event Needs an Event Gallery

An event gallery is one of three essential components of any pitch seeking coverage; the other two are the event background and details from the day itself. Meghan Ely, owner of OFD Consulting, says if you're missing one of these parts, your pitch is far less likely to be picked up.

"Visual content is everything with a media pitch," she explains. "Statistics show us repeatedly that we engage more with images, so it's no wonder the media will expect you to share photographs, and even video, on top of your pitch. Not only will the right images breathe life into your event description, but they also can showcase the emotion of key moments, transporting readers back to the event itself."

An event gallery should include 50 to 100 high-resolution, professional images, unless a publication has specific guidelines in place. Ely recommends sticking mainly to color photos with a variety of horizontal and vertical images. Provide a link to journalists so they can scan or download the images they want to use.

"Of course, always make sure to have permission from the photographer to share, as well as how they'd like to be credited."

STRENGTHEN SPONSORS' OWNERSHIP

Don't Overlook Sponsors' Employees

Anytime you convince a business to step forward and help sponsor an event, it's important to involve their employees as well. Doing so builds greater ownership in the event and helps to ensure the company's participation in future years. Examples of employee participation may include:

- Selling tickets.
- Delivering drinks.
- Setting up and cleaning up.

- Hosting and greeting.
- Conducting tours.
- Transportation and parking.
- Registration.
- Answering phones.

You may even see opportunities to incorporate fun competition and prizes into employees' involvement. ♦