

METHODS OF EVALUATING AND AUDITING EVENTS

Pop Ciprian-Marcel

Babes-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca Faculty of Economics and Business Administration 58-60 T. Mihali St. Cluj-Napoca, 0264-418654, marcel.pop@econ.ubbcluj.ro

Scridon Mircea Andrei

Faculty of Economics and Business Administration 58-60 T. Mihali St. Cluj-Napoca, 0264-418654, andrei.scridon@econ.ubbcluj.ro

Dabija Dan Cristian

Babes-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca Faculty of Economics and Business Administration 58-60 T. Mihali St. Cluj-Napoca, 0264-418654, cristian.dabija@econ.ubbcluj.ro

Todt Horst

University of Hamburg, visiting professor at Babes-Bolyai University, horst.todt@dmx.de

An exhibition event should not necessarily bring benefits. It is considered an investment in terms of image. However, costs must be covered and a profit margin should exist. This would ensure funds for the next edition. A general audit of the success of an event certainly includes control of the following processes: preceding the event, implementing it and follow-up; effects generated and the assessment of the aspects of the cost-utility relation; event efficiency. In the auditing process control lists, work plans, questioning techniques and observation, and a few measurement techniques may be used, such as the silent shopper/mystery shopper procedure, the sequential events method, and the critical incident technique.

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1. Why getting involved in organizing events?

Book editing, tourism, regional specialties, old objects, food, clothing, in other words, today, any specialty area has its own trade fair or exhibition.

For some, such an event aims to improve the reputation of the organizer. A municipality wishing to gain a cultural dimension, will focus on organizing a book fair, a region that wants to highlight its tourism, should be able to organize an exhibition devoted to this sector of activity. In this case, such an event should not necessarily bring benefits. It's considered an investment in terms of image. Of course, costs must be covered, and if a profit margin exists that would assure funds for the next edition, the better. For them, an event, a trade fair, an exhibition, represents an investment that has its return measured only after a certain period of time.

For some, organizing an event is simply a job. Specialist teams are involved throughout the year, organizing several events, launching new concepts, getting in touch with exhibitors, investing their time and imagination in determining people to go and visit these events, to increase the popularity and reputation of the events. They are involved in organizing the event from start to finish and are interested in making the event noticed as often as possible. Like any other activity, there's also should be really profitable.

2. Exhibition event - theme, date, location, infrastructure

Whatever the reasons for organizing an exhibition event, the topic must be defined, the date at which it could be organized and the means available, to the firm, for the project to be put into practice.

The theme depends on interests manifested in a collectivity or in a specialized federation. Work is closely related to the activity sector or to the image that a collectivity wants to promote. A commerce chamber trying to attract businesses, dealing with the development of new technologies will be interested in retaining that theme which will bring the highest value for the institution.

The location in which events, trade fairs, exhibitions are organized is often a large city, which has the necessary infrastructure to receive visitors and exhibitors: airport, station, developed road network, enough rooms, exhibition centers, hotels.

However, the fact that a city in which such an event is being held, must be large, should not represent an obstacle. Already, when a local community decides to put into practice an exhibition event, it cannot consider doing so elsewhere other than in its area of action. If a municipality wants to highlight its cultural heritage, is unlikely to hold the exhibition in another city. There are also events which are not held in large cities, even organized in small cities, but who managed to develop, over time and with patience, a national reputation, even a European one.

If a national event has a powerful image, it would be appropriate to fix a date for the exhibition event near the date of the national event. In France, for example, many regional book events are held at a date close to that of the prestigious book event which takes place in Paris.

An event dedicated to the tourism sector which aims to develop and improve business for the tourism operators, to learn ideas from visitors, should not take place near the major holidays: what good it serves to give people ideas when they already have chosen the place for the holiday and so such ideas cannot be materialized.

Wherever possible, the organizer of an event will try to avoid organizing an exhibition or a trade fair with a theme, a place, a notoriety and date fairly similar to those of other events.

Once the theme, the place and the date is established, the only concern is in organizing the exhibition event. It is an important work that will take time. Usually, for the first edition of an event, at least one year must be allocated between the moment when the idea developed and the time it is being put into practice. Finding a right a place for receiving visitors, for arranging meetings with exhibitors, for notifying the public, twelve months will not represent such a long period of time.

3. Practical organization

After the decision was taken to create a new exhibition, before anything else is absolutely necessary to think if one could develop all the services proposed for it, or whether one will need to use outside persons for the services required.

Again, a list of essential services and necessary materials will help in the endeavor⁴⁸⁰:

- has a place for the exhibition event been identified?
- has sufficient staff been identified for implementing and designing the plan for the event, writing and designing the commercial and communication documents, ensuring the marketing of the event, ensuring the welcoming committee for the exhibitors, and for the visitors, ensuring the installation and the dismantling, ensuring for the safety and technique skills during the event, realizing the financial balance of the event?
- can one buy the essential material for the event.

After answering all the questions, it is necessary to find suppliers to complement the services so that the event could be carried out.

3.1 Services offered to exhibitors

In general, the organizer will provide support and advice in all organizational and technical issues, in particular to exhibitors at their first participation.

Because establishing contacts is one of the main purposes for participating at an event, assuming that a connection between the exhibitors and visitors is to be created⁴⁸¹, to increase rate of contacting, an event organizer must be able to provide data on the number of visitors attending the event, the geographic origin of visitors, the professional situation of visitors, the time length that visitors would dedicate, the visiting behavior, the time length that a visitor is allocating for a stand, the travel route in the exhibition center, the location of each stand.

In accordance with these factors the probability of establishing contacts between exhibitors and visitors in general can be determined, and also between different types of visitors (visitors of the event, special guests, visitors that are in various stages of consumer decision-making process - searching for information, evaluation of alternatives, buying decision). Also, depending on the target groups, an exhibitor must be able to formulate goals. In formulating these goals, the exhibitor should take into account both the visitor's consumer behavior, and the consequence of the purpose brought upon the activity during the event⁴⁸².

Together with the conditions for participation and the confirmation for the stand, the exhibitors are given the order forms for various services. In addition to support for advertising and media, services may be requested free of charge or against payment. Also in this category issuing permits for access to stand personnel (free of charge, against payment or mixed), permits for access to the parking place of the complex, other forms of materials associated with access to various facilities and / or spaces of the complex, could be considered.

4. Finding the exhibitors

The most important aspect is to identify potential exhibitors. In the case of a trade fair organized by a foundation of local traders, a list will be quickly available.

However, if it comes to a regional event devoted to new technologies one will probably need to seek scattered information, to meet exhibitors from across the region. A time of only six months for this activity (the search for exhibitors) can seem very short. That's why, once the time length for implementing all stages of the project (finding a convenient place, making the documentation available to exhibitors, signing the contract with the exhibitors, announcing the public in time for the event), is determined, one can add a month or two, to include all operations that require time, but one has not thought about them to be important.

4.1 Constructing the list

When one determines the theme for an event, a list of potential exhibitors should be constructed; particularly those specialized in that field, but also in other fields. For example, an exhibition aimed at the winter holiday season will receive with priority offers from mountain resorts and tourism offices in countries with specific winter season sports, but also from distributors of sports goods, from stores offering clothing for the winter season, and from

480 Delecourt N., Happe-Durieux L., Lespingal-Gastide V., Reussir un salon, une foire, une exposition, Puits-Fleuri, Paris, 1997.

481 F. Unger, W. Fuchs, Management der Marktkommunikation, Heidelberg, 1999, p.252.

482 M. Bruhn, Kommunikationspolitik, 2. Aufl., Vahlen, 2003, p.146.

insurance companies whose field of activity is essential for practicing some major risks sports (mountaineering, ski).

It will be also necessarily to determine the geographical area from which these exhibitors come: a project on a national or even an international scale could be initiated (telephone and mailing costs will be higher), however, an alternative for action on regional or local scale remains, with the particular financial disadvantages. Such a choice depends on the theme chosen for the event: the more precise the theme, the more difficult it is to find exhibitors or visitors only from that area.

The first thing one must do, to manage future exhibitors, is to create a credible list, which will be the basis of any relationship. To do this, one could very simple use the Yellow Pages. It could provide in one glance, the potential exhibitors present in a given region, even before the launch of the exhibition. Obviously, if there is the possibility for printing the pages, this would lead to considerable time savings. Professional sectors yearbook publications will also provide the information needed.

In this way, complete data of the target enterprise could be obtained. This is not enough: it is absolutely necessarily to know which person, within the company, is to inform about the purpose of the event (general manager, commercial director, communication manager). From a commercial point of view, it is known that an anonymous letter is likely to go unnoticed and, implicitly, to be lost. Personalizing the list, not only our information will be received by a particular person, but in addition it will be much easier to contact it by phone.

The establishment and confirmation of the participants list, whatever the size, is a forming task for a student in the commercial sector, an internship, in which it could be developing the basis of any commercial activity.

In practice, each exhibitor will likely be the subject of lists, in which will contain all the information about it: postal and telephone data, the activity of the company, surname, name and position of contact the person, and the list of contacts established (data from telephone calls, meetings, occasional meetings, discussions). Increasingly, it will become equally necessary to have the electronic address for these contacts, a large number of companies already having such addresses.

These "identity cards" will help avoid making telephone calls twice to the same company and, especially, will help not to forget, from one year to another, the quality of connection created with other companies.

4.2 Preparing a presentation document

Preparing the brochure for an event is very similar to preparing a presentation brochure for the company, because the same criteria must be taken into account from a technical point of view.

It is very likely that this brochure will be published in several thousand copies. To limit the cost of printing and mailing, it is not necessary to achieve a level of content of more than twenty pages. Because these documents will be distributed to width scale, it will be expected that a large number of these documents will end quite quickly in the recycle bin. Therefore, it is preferable to keep the document short, attractive to the person that will receive it (and this rarely happens when a document is about 40 pages long), to spark interest in that person, to determine it in learning more about the event. In general, brochures only 4 pages long, and no more than 8, will fulfill this mission very well.

Be it a simple photocopied document, with an impeccable and specialized presentation, or a brochure with photos and colors, the presentation document for the event must contain answers to the following questions:

- why this exhibition? the theme, the economic, cultural and geographical background;
- who represents the target audience? exhibitors, visitors;
- how is it organized and by who? advertising, partners;
- how to participate? pricing, participation arrangements;
- when? the opening date and hour for the general public;
- where? the location of the exhibition center.

The brochure will contain several parts. The first part will contain information about the specific of the event and also about the target audience. It will also specify the date and location of the event, it will provide important information to the participants (in the case of a first edition event, estimates figures will be provided, if the exhibition is a re-edition, it will provide participants with the previous event figures: number of visitors, number of exhibitors, number of conferences held, number of square meters available to the exhibitors).

If one has already determined what conferences will be held, and also their schedule, this information will be included in the brochure. It will also insist on communication, to attract guests (media, cards, number of guests, posters). Also the brochure will contain, eventually, extracts from journals that talk about the previous events. It will provide information about the event organizers.

The last page is often dedicated to practical information: access, geographical location, the main routes of transport, the organizer contact information (address, phone number, fax).

If a large number of photos will be used they will enrich the general aspect of the document, especially if the brochure was designed in a polychromic format. It will enhance the fact that this exhibition is visited by a large number of people, that it hosts many conferences and/or other animations events.

To make the project more real, it is very important to include in the presentation document, in a very explicit manner, the plan of the exhibition event. The plan will be constructed either in close collaboration with the location of the event, either through the company responsible for the construction of the stands, which one has already worked with. If one owns an exhibition center, it is possible that the technical departments are able to construct such a plan. Everything should be as close as possible with the reality on the ground.

4.3 "Marketing"

Around 8-9 months before the exhibition event, will start "marketing" it. To carry out this endeavor, could be chosen between sending the presentation document to the contacts list, or inviting each of the contacts, to the company, to present them the project and to propose them a more detailed document or even a meeting. It is recommended a "pre-mailing", announcing succinctly the exhibition event together with a reply coupon in order to establish an information folder. The last two solutions appear to be the best. Practically, they avoid useless brochure dissemination, they allow to measure the difficulties of the task; as more data is obtained, the easier will it be; if the data volume is small, the organizational efforts will become more important. Of course, if the list contains fewer than 100 contacts, it could be sent directly a brochure to each of them.

After numerous actions (phone calls, faxes, meetings), one of those contacted, becomes interested in participating in the event. At this moment, will be interested to the future exhibitor, in order for him to actually reserve a stand, by signing a contract and making an advance payment.

Therefore, a reservation contract must be signed, which is a more administrative document, and stipulates the mutual commitments of the organizers and clients (exhibitors). This document should be simple: in one page, maximum two, it should contain the organizer's information data and the main elements that the exhibitor is committed to (stand size, rental price).

Also, the contract will include the description of the minimum services provided by the organizer (rental space), the cost of the stand, depending on the size and the potential services provided to all exhibitors (electricity, water, a parking map for cars). It also includes other various services which the organizer may provide in addition, and the additional price to be paid. In another part of the contract, the exhibitor states what it wants (stand size, indicating the appropriate cost, particular equipment).

If a catalog of exhibitors will be edited (which is, typically, the case), additional information will be required: the name and address of the company, telephone and fax numbers, the contact person's name, a brief business activity description (maximum 20 words).

4.4 The conferences

Within a series of specialized events, one can organize, through a program of specialized seminars for exhibitors, some papers based on technical products or processes. These papers will be announced in advance. In most cases, they do not cause additional costs for the organizer.

Very often, the events days, are animated through conferences, debates, seminars, bringing an additional benefit for the events.

In fact, these moments of sharing ideas, on a theme or another, will enhance the value of certain exhibitors. Asking them to attend in a conference, to present their products and services, will offer them the opportunity to make their presence felt in the event.

For visitors, conferences can be an important argument in deciding to come to the event. They know that exhibitors will display only part of their business. Instead, the conferences are generally intended to portray a general situation. Very often, the public will join in the debate, so making it part of the event. Attending a conference is considered a complementary training for the company staff.

These conferences may be supplemented by workshops, where the exact theme will be discussed in small groups. These workshops could be integrated in an event, but will require special organization. However, beware: conferences should not overshadow the event itself. It is important that visitors will walk from aisle to aisle, from one stand to another. If not, exhibitors will be offended. Conference must complete the exhibitor's information offer and incite the public to visit the event. Also, a conference must not be too long (maximum one and a half hour, but one hour would be better), because it is necessary for lecturers and also for visitors to have enough time to visit the exhibition. If a conference takes too long, people will rush to the exit just when the conclusions are announced.

In the case of a conference - debate, with testimony and arguments, one could propose to several prestigious exhibitors to intervene in the debate. If it comes to a debate among several participants, is preferable to use a moderator, animator, to be careful that each participant can express their arguments, that the public can take part in the debate, that the conference will be limited to a certain period of time. Very often, journalists (specialists or not in the issues discussed) will be perfect for this type of task. Also, it will be necessary for the participants and animator to meet before the conference, to establish contacts among them and to prepare the main topic of the debate.

In the case when special topics will be discussed, the exhibitor can also present products. These events are organized separately and independently of the exhibitor's company.

Participation in specialized conferences, congresses or round tables, can be beneficial to exhibitors, to the extent in which they can refresh their knowledge, so the challenge, for the organizers, to identify the most appropriate topics for these animations.

4.5 Determining the budget

Once the general plan is established, it will be necessary to address the financial issue. If the costs can be determined quite easily before the event, the earnings depend on a single factor: the success or failure of the event. When an exhibition is at its first edition, the organizers hope, obviously, that it will be profitable, but they also know that they are taking a big risk. Especially when the theme is quite specific, and when the event is supported only by a local collectivity that wants to cast a certain image to the outside world, they do not expect that the event will have a balanced budget.

Then the question arises: who will pay for the event? Two possible sources of income will come into attention, not considering any grants, on which the organizers could call upon: the exhibitors and the visitors. Exhibitors pay for their presence at the stand (and the derived products, for example the catalog that is given to the visitors). Rental price is calculated based on the number of square meters occupied by the stand and varies depending on several parameters: the reputation of the event, the number of expected visitors, the commercial endeavor or the advertising arrangements. Visitors pay for their entry ticket. But also on this plan, the first edition has the disadvantage of temptations to exempt taxing potential visitors. In such context, it should be considered also as an initial investment the amount that could be obtained from the entrance fee, and only starting at the second edition, and according to first's success, could analyze the problem concerning the quantum of the entrance fee and the estimated amount that could be obtained from this source of income.

The provisional list established will take into account inevitable costs and will be based on estimates, even more important at the first edition, or as long as the event has not yet acquired a strong image into the public's conscience. Taking into account these expenditures, how many stands with an average area of 15 sqm will be necessary to lease and what should be the leasing tariff on sqm?

5. Once the event is over

An exhibition which had some success, is likely to take place each year. Therefore, one must, each year, improve the content, the organization methods, the communication means of the event.

The first edition creates, very often, more curiosity than real interest among the general public: one must determine the event's qualities, and also its defects (in order to identify trends) and to ensure a growing interest for it.

5.1 The exhibitors' opinion

The exhibitors are the determining factors of the event's atmosphere, and more important, they alone will decide whether or not to return to the next edition. It is therefore important to take into account their remarks, before the launch of a new edition. Using the results obtained by a survey, will allow to have a different view on the event that just ended and to possibly change, a point or two for the next year (the schedule for the public, the date for the event, the services that did not satisfied the exhibitors).

5.2 Using invitations

Invitations can provide first order information for the next edition of the event: the activity sector, the geographic area and the profession of the visitors will provide a vision of their image. For example, based on this image, a change in the communication campaign could occur. If one wants key people inside companies, to participate to the event, and so far they represented only a small percentage among visitors, the communication efforts will be focused in this direction. If one realizes that most visitors come from adjacent areas from where the event is being held, and one expected to come from a much larger area, one will react accordingly.

5.3 The financial balance

In order to construct the financial balance, one will need to bring together the following elements⁴⁸³:

Expenditure		Proceeds
- stands rent	- stands maintenance	
- sales of attached services (telephone	- other services: telephone	
- water, company posters)	- installations	
- sales of advertising materials (catalog)	- printing costs	
	- communication expenses	
	(postal costs)	
	- marketing costs	

Once this financial balance is established, one should not forget the proposed objective when it initiated this event. Consequently, has this event been a source of profit? Only after one has established that the objective was

483 Delecourt N., Happe-Durieux L., Lespingal-Gastide V., Reussir un salon, une foire, une exposition, Puits-Fleuri, Paris, 1997.

achieved, it could say that this was a "good" event. After this time one might think, or not, to diversify the efforts for the next editions.

6. Auditing the event

An general audit of the success of an event certainly includes control of the following processes:

- preceding the event;
- implementing the event;
- after the event;
- effects caused by the event;
- assessing the aspects of the cost-utility relation of the event;
- event efficiency;

In fact the control processes specific to an event represents the surveillance activities conducted in order to assure the proper progress of that event⁴⁸⁴. Thus, one will consider not only the efforts preceding the event, but also during the actual event, and thereafter. In addition to control lists, work plans, questioning techniques and observation the following measurement techniques may be used:

a. The "Silent Shopper" / "Mystery Shopper" procedure

As in the commerce and other fields, the management of the organizer may appeal to specialized companies that send people "incognito", to test the reaction of staff at the stand and their reaction regarding certain problems. These "mystery shoppers" simulate real situations, and are trying in a relatively limited amount of time, to build a more precise picture as to the quality of offers presentation, staff behavior and communication and persuasive ability of personnel. Also they are able to conduct a comparative analysis between the response times of the staff in question and that of the other stands.

b. The sequential events method

This method serves in determining strengths and weaknesses in the communication process specific to events. This process is divided into three phases, visitors being asked to identify for each phase, possibilities for improving the processes. The three phases are⁴⁸⁵:

- the pre-event phase - looking for information, travel planning, preparing the visit, arrival and hotel accommodation;
- the actual deployment of the event phase - information, transaction, communication, additional services and program framework;
- the after-event phase - departure, cost – utility analysis, reflections.

c. The "Critical Incident" technique

This technique attempts to reveal the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the event's visitors, taking into account especially those events that were "critical" in for the visitors – either with a positive or negative effect. Unpleasant events could be represented by the total lack of information on a specific offer or an information inadequacy of it, late invitation arrangements, no catalogs, no samples or even an inadequate catering service. The Critical Incident technique provides quantification of these events using standardized open questions, data evaluation and interpretation obtained from assessing the causes leading to failure (or success) and advice on future improvements⁴⁸⁶.

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⁴⁸⁶ Esch F.R., Eventcontrolling, in Nickel O., Event Marketing. Grundlagen und Erfolgsbeispiele, München, 1998, p.161.