How to Increase Attendance at Your Next Event

By Don Cooper, The Sales Heretic™

Whether you’re planning a monthly meeting, a public seminar or an international convention, you want to have as many attendees as possible. The more people you have at your meeting, the more exposure your sponsors receive, the more value your attendees derive from networking and the more likely you are to fill your room block. Not to mention the more revenue you generate from registrations!

So how can you increase attendance at your next event? (Without spending a fortune on marketing or breaking your budget on a big-name celebrity speaker?) Just follow these guidelines.

Select the Right Speakers

Most meeting planners select speakers they’ve seen before or have been referred to them by another meeting planner. Which makes sense. You want to know your speakers will perform well on stage.

However, if you want your event to be an overwhelming success, that’s not the only criteria. Because even if your speakers are amazing on the platform, if their marketing materials don’t effectively sell them, you’ll never get people to come in the first place. Remember, while you’ve seen the speaker on stage or on video, your potential attendees haven’t. The only thing they will have to form an impression is the speaker’s marketing materials.

When I say “marketing materials” however, I’m not talking about demo videos. Your members aren’t going to judge speakers based on them, so you shouldn’t either.

Nor am I talking about a speaker’s bio. While you’ll need to include a brief bio in your event promotional materials to establish the speaker’s credibility, most speaker bios go on and on about their accomplishments, their awards and how great they are in general. Guess what? Your potential attendees don’t care! They only care about whether the speakers will help them in their lives, jobs or businesses.

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So what should you focus on in a speaker’s marketing materials?

**Their program titles and descriptions.** Because this is what your members will primarily use to decide whether or not to attend your event.

Are the presentation titles (and sub-titles) attention-grabbing? Are they provocative, timely or enticing? Do they promise a benefit?

Are the program descriptions clear and compelling? Do they specify the results participants will be able to achieve? Do they make you think, “I’ve **got** to see this!” or do they induce a yawn? Or worse yet, do they cause you to wrinkle your forehead and wonder what the presentation is actually about? If the program descriptions don’t **excite** you, odds are they won’t excite your prospective audience either.

Also look at the speaker’s testimonials, because you can use them in your own promotional efforts. Does the speaker have strong testimonials from attendees? Even better, do they have testimonials stating the results attendees have achieved because of the program?

**Create Marketing Pieces, Not Just Announcements**

Once you’ve selected your speaker—or speakers, as the case may be—you need to put together promotional materials that will attract registrations. This is where most organizations fall short. Too many associations and other groups simply send out an announcement listing the date, time, location and speaker. That’s not **enough**!

There are more people, tasks, tools and events competing for your prospective audience’s time and money than ever before. Which means, whether you’re putting on a teleseminar, a luncheon or a multi-day conference, you must make a compelling case **why** people need to attend. You have to convince them that your event is the **best** possible use of their time and money.

In other words, you have to create **marketing pieces**.

A marketing piece is a salesperson in print or electronic form. A good marketing piece doesn’t just provide logistical information, it persuade people to take action by addressing issues important to them.
An effective event marketing piece must have all 12 of the following elements:

1. Strong Headline and Sub-Head
2. Date, Time, Location
3. Program Outline and Descriptions
4. Benefits of Attending
5. Presenter Bios
6. Special Features
7. Testimonials
8. Who Should Attend
9. Investment
10. Registration Incentives
11. Registration Information
12. Call to Action

Many people protest when I tell them all the elements they need to include in their marketing pieces. “That’s too much information! Nobody will read all that!” they say.

The evidence supports exactly the opposite. Research has proven again and again that, if it’s written well, long copy always outperforms short copy. Don’t be afraid of writing too much, be afraid of writing too little. If you leave out any of the above items, your registrations will suffer.

Want some help crafting effective marketing materials? I’ve written a special report entitled Power Words for Sales and Marketing. It shows you how to use the most compelling marketing words to create irresistible brochures, flyers, e-mail blasts and more. To get your free copy, just e-mail me at Don@DonCooper.com.

Use Several Different Marketing Channels

There are lots of different options for marketing your events: in person, direct mail, and electronic. Don’t limit yourself to just one. The more you use, the more effectively your message will get across.

Also, using different media enables you to get your message in front of more people within an organization. For example, your e-mails may go to one person, but your postcard may be seen by another.
As you plan your marketing campaign, consider using each of the following:

- Your Web Site
- E-Mail
- Brochures
- Flyers
- Postcards
- Phone Blasts
- Faxes
- Newsletters and Magazines
- Events
- Social Media

**Market to Your Audience Early and Often**

Many event marketing campaigns are doomed before they begin because they start too late. You must create awareness of your meeting before your prospective audience has the chance to make other plans. The sooner your message gets out, the easier it is to get on people’s radar.

For a monthly event, your first marketing push should go out 2½ to 3 weeks beforehand. For a one-time event, at least 3 to 4 months ahead. And for an annual event, your campaign should begin 6 to 9 months in advance.

This doesn’t mean you have to have all the details set that far ahead of time. Your earliest marketing efforts can be teasers, just mentioning the event and whatever major details you already have confirmed. You can then present the full information later in additional marketing communications.

How many times should you market to your prospective audience?

For a monthly event, shoot for 3 to 4 communications. For a one-time event, 6 to 10. And for an annual event, 12 to 18. Seem like a lot? It is. **It needs to be.** Because the more often you hit your potential attendees with your marketing, the more registrations you’ll get.

Each communication can (and should) be a little different. One marketing piece might highlight the keynote speakers, while another focuses on the concurrent sessions. A third might detail some of the other features and benefits of your event.
One could simply be a long list of testimonials. There are lots of good reasons to send out a marketing piece and as you put your mind to it, you’ll come up with plenty.

**Do These Tactics Really Work?**

You bet they do. During my year as president of the Colorado Chapter of the National Speakers Association, I implemented this approach and increased our monthly meeting attendance by more than 50%.

Since that time, I’ve helped various organizations set attendance record after attendance record, in some cases *more than doubling* their previous year’s registrations. Which translates into tens of thousands of dollars in additional revenue.

Whether your meeting is local or international in scope, members-only or open to the public, dirt-cheap or big-ticket, these strategies will work for you too.

Choose speakers with powerful marketing materials, use them to help create persuasive marketing pieces of your own, use a variety of marketing channels and market early and often. Employ these tactics and watch your registrations soar!

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**Don Cooper**—*The Sales Heretic™*—is an internationally-acclaimed sales expert who helps salespeople, business owners and professionals dramatically increase their sales. He delivers custom seminars and keynote speeches for corporations, associations, chambers of commerce and other business organizations.

*His most popular programs include:*

- **The Future of Selling**: How to be a sales leader in the 21st century
- **The Myth of Price**: Why you should charge more and how to do it
- **Never Sell Ice to Eskimos**: A practical program for powerful prospecting
- **The Physics of Closing**: How to make the hardest part of the sale easy

*To learn more about how Don can help you set an attendance record at your next event, or to request your free copy of Power Words for Sales and Marketing, call 303-832-4248 or e-mail Don@DonCooper.com. You can also find additional revenue-boosting articles, tips and more at [www.DonCooper.com](http://www.DonCooper.com).*

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