Hosting a Customer Appreciation Event that Customer’s Appreciate
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OVERVIEW

Don’t underestimate the impact of a good customer appreciation event. Customers are your livelihood and they expect some type of token for their efforts. A customer appreciation event is a “one to many” event where you can thank everyone at one time, and that is a beautiful thing. Remember though, “everyone” is not just the guy that is signing the purchase orders. Don’t forget to include the people that supported you along the way.

The most important thing to remember when hosting this type of event is, if you aren’t going to do it right, don’t do it at all. Be creative, and work hard to be sure your event is successful and remembered by all. A good customer appreciation event will bring you additional sales, guaranteed.

FIRST THINGS FIRST, KNOW YOUR BUDGET

Don’t waste your time scheming and planning until you have a budget commitment from your management. Once you have it, go back and always, always, always, ask for more. With a good preliminary plan, a vision, and your sales hat on, you can usually scrape up a few more dollars.

If your budget is not where you would like it, reach out to your partners for funding. You can ask them for a sponsorship fee in return for some type of recognition or pay to attend the event. If they choose to attend, don’t forget the “no selling during the event” discussion. A simple reminder that this is your event is usually warranted.

Consider dividing the budget into multiple events to allow for more spend on high value customer segments. Don’t forget the little guys.

WHO, WHAT, WHERE, AND WHY – WHO

Create a preliminary invitation list early on. Based on final planning and budget, you will probably have to remove, or even add invitees. Review the list to be sure the people coming add to the “positive event” feel. In other words, you may be better off not inviting a disgruntled customer, but thank that person outside of your event.

Don’t forget to invite people from your own company that can positively impact your event. Any one that is “customer facing” such as service, support internal sales folks, or high level management (it always makes a great impression to have the CEO).

Consider inviting “hot” prospects if there is room. This is a great way to help close a pending deal. If the prospect sees a room full of happy customers, this will only help your cause. One or two at the max, as your customers may catch on. Identify those prospects with an 80% or better close rate.

WHO, WHAT, WHERE, AND WHY – WHAT
Determine the kind of event you will be hosting. Put on your creative hat, and go where no man has gone before! Be sure to think about what your customer base would like to do as opposed to what you might like to do. This is a big mistake people make. Reach out to your top customers in advance and ask them if they have any suggestions. This not only makes them feel appreciated, but gives you one more customer touch point.

Determine what time your event will take place either in the evening, or during the work day. There are many that refuse to do anything after work based on family commitments. We have seen great success with afternoon events. This not only accommodates the people with families, but if there are those that would like to continue on through the night, they can! Also, we have found that Thursdays and Fridays work well for these types of events, as internal meetings start slowing down toward the end of the work week.

Always allocate time for introductions, and to talk about what is new at your company, new products, and new direction. Make it educational, but take your sales hat off. Never, have a product demonstration during an appreciation event. Your customer is there to have fun, not to be sold to.

Consider doing some type of training, keynote speaker, or something the customer can walk away with and use to be a better business person. There are some that will come to an educational event before a fun event. It is a nice touch, and well appreciated. If your budget doesn’t allow you to pay for someone, consider your most innovative customer and have them do a small presentation on what they have done with your product. Once again, no selling.

Turning a team building event into a customer appreciation event can lend to more face time with your clients. An example of this is a group that we work with that hosts high tech treasure hunts. We divide the teams up to five or six with the one representative from the host company on each team. We also recommend they place one of their top customers on each team to mingle with new customers. In the case of the high tech treasure hunt, each person is given a Garmin GPS, and a digital camera. The event takes place over a two to three hour time span, and in the end there is a rewards dinner where footage of the event is shown. It is always a great success.

If you are going to host a standard event such as a golf tournament, do something creative like a “hole in one” contest. In the case of the example above, make your treasure hunt points be trivia about the benefits of your product. There are a million things you can do to make your event more memorable. A good event planner, or even a marketing person can be a creative resource to help you in this area.

**WHO. WHAT, WHERE, AND WHY – WHERE**

When selecting your venue, make it exciting, innovative, and high class. Customers know when you are doing things on the cheap, and it is somewhat of an insult. Make sure your venue is close to your customers, and always take into consideration traffic patterns. If your event is not local, be sure the transportation you provide is nice, and reliable.

Another important thing to consider when selecting a venue is the noise factor. If your customers can not hear you, or the person across the table, chances are your event will be a flop.

If you plan on taking your clients to a sporting event or concert, consider doing an event, before the event. Face time is important. There are many wonderful restaurants that have private dining rooms. Find one close to the event venue and host a dinner or cocktail hour. Another option is to take everyone to the event on a bus, and set up a tailgate type party prior to the event. This idea also saves your customers the cost and trouble of parking.

**WHO. WHAT, WHERE, AND WHY – WHY**
You are having your customer appreciation event to thank anyone that has helped you grow your revenues. Therefore, make sure you acknowledge each and every person. This can be done in the beginning of the event by introducing each person, and if applicable saying a word or two about them. Roasting your clients is great fun too, so during the year think about something funny you might say. Pick your words wisely.

INVITATIONS

How many times have you received what we refer to as a “times romany” email invitation to some type of an event. If you are trying to create excitement around your event, this is not the way to do it. Invest a couple of hundred dollars of your budget, and have a designer put something together for you. If that isn’t something that fits your budget, use some of the invitation sites on the web to create a graphical invitation. Many of these invitations have registrations tools on the back end so you can track who is coming to your event. One “gotcha”, with these types of online invitations is they sometimes end up as junk email. If you aren’t hearing from your people, send them a follow on email from your company email address asking them if they have received the invitation and if not, to check their junk mail boxes.

No matter what format you use, always be sure to include an RSVP, and one week prior to the event, call all participants with a reminder. Many people have things come up at the last minute and forget to decline, or don’t feel declining it is necessary. This call will help you hone in on your final participant numbers.

SWAG (PROMOTIONAL ITEMS)

Do not have a customer event without a customer appreciation gift. Even better that your company name or event branding be on the item. Put your creative hat on again and look for new items. New promotional items come out everyday. Consider something your customers will use or look at every day. The items should be the highest quality available. Flimsy tee shirts or substandard pens are absolute no-nos, everyone has plenty of those. Bottom line, if you are going to give away cheap stuff, you are better off giving nothing.

Be sure you are not giving away swag that was distributed by your company at past events. Also, everyone at the event should receive the same gifts.

ADDITIONAL TIPS

- Always confirm with each vendor their tasks, times, involvement one week prior to the event.
- Involve an event planner, if possible. Because of pre-negotiated reseller relationships event planners can get venues, catering, swag and more for less than it cost you.
- If you have a “project management type” on staff, use them. Create a project management document for your event.
- Do not let your customers drink and drive. Be sure to offer a cab service to your customers. In some cases the cab company will let their cabs hang out at the venue in hopes of having rides.
- If there is alcohol, do not let yourself get out of line. Remember, you are representing your company and your reputation.
- When considering your catering options, don’t forget there are a lot of vegetarians and non red meat eaters out there.
- If weather has the potential to spoil your event, always have a back-up plan for bad weather fun.
- Do not overload yourself or your primary company representatives with event tasks. Ensure that you have interaction time with your customers.

IDEAS
• Golf Tournaments – Reliable, prestigious, great for interaction with an awards event after the
tournament.
• Racing Event - There are some great solutions out there, and great for branding. Check your
local directory, or event living for race tracks or racing vendors that can come to you.
• Sailing Event - Great for team building. Consider a cocktail party on board, or on the dock.
• Culinary Event – There are lots of great places to host these. They can also become team
building events.
• Culinary Tours – Many of the larger cities have this type of offering.
• Rent a Harley – Rent a Harley for everyone and go for a ride. Make sure the proper insurance is
in place.
• Rent a Segway – Many tourist areas now have Segway rentals, with tours of the area included.
• Host a Party – Hire a band, and let your customers bring their significant others. There are lots
of themes out there. Your internal event planner can help you with this, or use sites like
www.eventliving.com for ideas.

ABOUT EVENT LIVING

Event Living has two ways to help you with your customer appreciation events. You can use our
website for event ideas, and a list vendors that can help. Event Living also has a services group that
manage your entire event or help you find the right vendors to make you event successful. For more
information, visit us at www.eventliving.com, or contact us at sales@eventliving.com.

CUSTOMER APPRECIATION EVENT CHECK LIST

Four Months Prior to Event

✓ Secure budget
✓ Create preliminary invitation list
✓ Ask customers for ideas
✓ Create preliminary event plan
✓ Determine final date and time
✓ Plan bad weather fallback plan

Three Months Prior to Event

✓ Reserve venue
✓ Secure catering or restaurant
✓ Secure transportation
✓ Secure entertainment (keynote, band, etc.)
✓ Start branding process if applicable
✓ Meet with design person to create invitation
✓ Research swag (promotional items)
✓ Send a “save the date” email if applicable
✓ Design any posters, signs or back drops
✓ Prepare agenda

Two Months Prior to Event

✓ If mailing invitations, send design to printer
✓ Order swag (promotional items)
✓ Order décor if applicable

Five Weeks Prior to Event
✓ Refine invitation list
✓ Set up registration process
✓ Email or mail invitations
✓ Secure audio visual equipment if applicable

One Week Prior to Event

✓ Confirm attendee registrations
✓ Confirm with all event vendors
✓ Contact taxi company if applicable
✓ Meet with team to determine each persons tasks
✓ Secure everything needed for registration desk
✓ Print name tags if applicable
✓ Contact cab company and give them a “heads up”
✓ Prepare promotional items
✓ Send confirmation email to participants with directions, agendas, etc.

One Day or Morning Prior to Event

✓ Print final registration list and reconcile with name tags
✓ Print agenda if applicable
✓ Set up promotional items
✓ Finalize seating
✓ Test audio visual equipment