

Add Social Media to Your Event Strategy

Tips on how to build buzz & boost attendance

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BEST PRACTICES GUIDE | SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING



An event—be it a networking gathering, open house, fundraiser, or class—is by nature, a social affair. People attend to connect, interact, and share with their peers. People join social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn to connect, interact, and share with their peers. Sound familiar?

Given their similar natures, it makes perfect sense to use social media to help plan, promote, and build excitement for any public event you're hosting. If the goal is to get as many people as possible interested in your event, social media is a perfect compliment for spreading the word to your core base of customers, members, donors, and beyond.

With EventSpot, we make it easy for your organization to combine the power of social media with your event strategy to drive attendance, boost engagement, and generate the type of results you want from your events. Most importantly, EventSpot makes you more organized, better prepared, and more connected with your events' target audiences through social media. If you're a small business, nonprofit, or association—you've probably already seen social media transform the way you think about marketing your business. This guide takes a deeper look into the ways it can transform your event strategy before, during, and after your events.

Overview

In this guide, you'll get an overview of the three social networks that have the most to offer your events: Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. We'll tackle each of these networks from the perspective of an event organizer and will focus on how each can be used throughout all stages of your event. Most importantly, we will look at the ways EventSpot makes it easier for your organization to rethink social media and the ways it can be used for your next event.

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Adding Social Media to Your Event Strategy

How to pick the right social network for your next event

When it comes to getting the word out about your event and connecting with prospective attendees, no social networks have more to offer than Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

Facebook

With over 1 billion—yes, 1 billion—active users, Facebook is the largest social network in the world. Facebook is a great way for businesses to connect with existing customers, make new contacts, and get the word out about their products and services.

It's also the network which has the most to offer your events. It's likely that most, if not all, of your event attendees will be familiar with Facebook and have experience interacting with brand Pages. That means you'll be able to get the word out early and know you'll have an engaged audience throughout all stages of your event lifecycle.

Facebook also has the most to offer event organizers when it comes to the type of content you can share. Photos, videos, surveys, and links to your event webpage are just some of the types of content you'll want to focus on sharing on Facebook. We'll demonstrate how each of these can be used before, during, and after your event.

Twitter

Twitter is the second largest social network, with over 200 million active users. Twitter is a real-time information network that empowers its users to share and discover interesting content through status updates (or "tweets"). Twitter is often referred to as a microblogging service because it limits your status updates to 140 characters.

But the brilliance of Twitter is really in its simplicity and brevity. Twitter is one of the quickest ways to get a message out to people who may be interested in your activities, ideas, services—or in this case— events. For that reason, Twitter has become especially popular amongst event attendees, which use an event "hashtag" to generate a conversation around your event. Hashtags are used to mark keywords or topics on Twitter, as a way of organizing content.

Also, because Twitter is the most "public" of the social networks (users do not have to send requests to view the content of other users) Twitter makes it easy to generate word-of-mouth for your event. So adding Twitter to your event strategy could help introduce your event to a whole new audience.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the most "professional" of the top social networks and is most popular with business-to-business users. Businesses and organizations can create pages that outline the who, what, and where of their operations, and users can create profiles that are tantamount to an online resume.

If you host any type of professional events (training seminars, networking gatherings, or industry conferences) LinkedIn proves to be particularly valuable. LinkedIn is a prime location for users to find details about these types of events, which means your target audience will be responsive to your promotions.

LinkedIn Groups allow you to connect with like-minded individuals, grow your network, share information, and find support. Groups will be a valuable resource throughout all stages of your event process—from planning and promotion to post-event follow-up.



Adding Social Media to Your Event Strategy

Before your event: planning and promotion

Now that you've been introduced (or in some cases reintroduced) to Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn—let's take a look at how they can be added to your event strategy. We'll start at the beginning, from the point where the idea of the event first arises.

Pre-event planning

Social media can be added to your event strategy, right from the get-go. As the idea for an event begins to percolate, if you're unsure if others will share your enthusiasm, you can mention your idea on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or some combination of the three. Ask your fans, followers, and connections what they think about the idea and whether they would be interested in attending.

An open-ended question ("We're thinking about hosting a summer open house to show off our fall line of merchandise. Would you be interested in attending?") or a link to a short poll would suffice. If you get enough positive feedback, you have reassurance that the event idea is worth pursuing.

Social media can help with logistical planning as well. Use an online survey to ask potential attendees for their preferences on date, time, location, and food and beverage offerings. The URL to your survey can be posted on any of your social media networks to solicit feedback. As a bonus, the mention of the event and fact you're looking for feedback from would-be attendees can help build buzz for the gathering.

Beyond the what, where, and when details, your array of social media contacts can be an excellent referral service (word-of-mouth marketing!) for caterers, venues, photographers, musicians, or any other vendors you might be looking to hire for your event.

Use an online survey to ask potential attendees for their preferences on date, time, location, and food and beverage offerings.

The image shows a screenshot of a survey titled "2008 Annual Women in Business Survey". At the top, there are logos for "MARIGOLD WOMEN IN BUSINESS" and "Mary IN THE MORNING 106.7 WST 105.5". The survey questions are as follows:

- Which category describes your age?**
 - 15 - 24
 - 25 - 34
 - 35 - 44
 - 45 - 54
 - 55 - 64
 - 65 or older
- What is your gender?**
 - Male
 - Female
- What is your current position?**
 - President, CEO, Owner, Partner, Principal
 - Vice President, Manager, Team Leader
 - Employee
 - Retired/Not working at the time
- How important are the following factors to the quality of your professional life?**

	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important	Extremely important
Financial compensation & benefits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Flexible schedule	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employer praise and recognition of achievements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stress	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social interaction on the job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comment:

0/20 characters left

Adding Social Media to Your Event Strategy

Before your event

Promoting your class, seminar, fundraiser, or open house to customers, members, donors, and other potential attendees is the bread and butter of integrating social media into your event strategy.

Event promotion

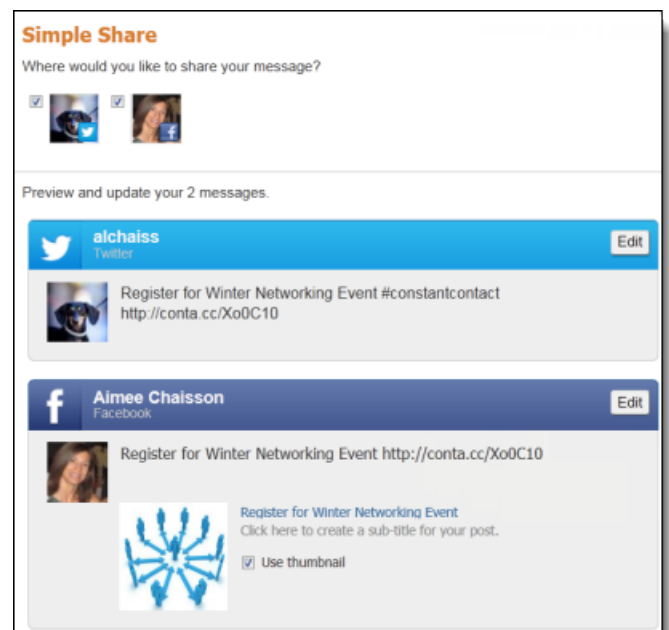
Social media lets you get the word out early by posting a save-the-date right when key details are set. If you've already built and published an event webpage in EventSpot, link to the page from your social media networks to provide more information and future updates.

Within EventSpot, creating an event webpage is not a requirement to publishing an event and accepting registrations, but we highly recommend it if you're going to be promoting your event through a social media network. There is only limited space available to tell your story (140 characters on Twitter), so an event webpage can provide greater detail before people commit to registering. If you're not ready to take registrations quite yet, you can remove the "Register Now" button from the webpage until you're ready to turn the registration on.

After opening event registration, the social media component of your event can really take off. You can continually promote your event through social media with more frequent posts than you can with email. Yes, you should send email invitations to prospective attendees, with a polite follow-up as the event draws near, but with social media the rate can be a bit more frequent without irritating fans and followers. Plus, with all the noise and continuous stream of updates on sites like Facebook and Twitter, it's good to put out reminders once in awhile to catch those fans and followers that may have missed your previous updates.

That doesn't mean every tweet, Facebook post, or LinkedIn network update should be promoting your event. We recommend at least an 80/20 ratio for all your social media efforts, with 80 percent of your updates focused on informational and non-sales posts, and 20 percent on straight sales and promotion. If all you do is promote your event, your fans and followers will tune you out and may stop following you all together.

Constant Contact's Simple Share tool makes it easy to promote your event by sharing it across all your social networks.



Adding Social Media to Your Event Strategy

Before your event

As you promote the event over time within your social media circles, varying the language and tactics will help keep the message from going stale.

Here are a few tips for keeping your promotion fresh:

Build interest through scarcity

Announce when there are only a limited number of seats left (if that's actually the case). "Only 5 tickets remain. Get yours now ..."

Fill last minute cancellations

Rather than having an empty seat, use social media posts to let people know there are a few last-minute seats available for those who still want to attend but may have originally missed out on tickets.

Promote what attendees can expect

Post short updates to give prospective attendees a glimpse at what you have planned for your event. Short posts like, "We've added 10 new sponsors this year!" can go a long way when it comes to generating buzz for your event.

Brand your event with an event hashtag

Hashtags are typically a word preceded by a # sign and can be used to unify tweets from multiple people on the same subject. Brand all posts about your event with the same hashtag (i.e., #OurBigEvent) and encourage attendees to do the same when they mention your event in their own tweets. Hashtags can be easily searched to give an overview of everyone mentioning your event, even those you're not currently following. [One tip: Keep your hashtag short—you only have 140 characters to use, after all.]

There's a calendar built into EventSpot that can be useful if you're promoting multiple and/or recurring events and want to push out a single URL to your fans, followers, and connections. The calendar lists all published public events in your EventSpot account.



To push the promotion of an event beyond your Twitter followers, Facebook fans, and LinkedIn connections, you can post a mention of and a link to your event on sites like meetup.com, and Zvents.com.

Adding Social Media to Your Event Strategy

During your event

The power of social media for your event strategy doesn't stop when people show up at your venue or buy a ticket to your event.

In our increasingly mobile world, with more than half of all American's now using smartphones, events are more social than ever, and attendees expect to be able to stay connected.

One of the things we have already mentioned—an event hashtag on Twitter—is a great way to give customers a means of staying connected, while also adding a brand new level of engagement to your event strategy.

If Twitter isn't your network of choice, go beyond the hashtag and engage with attendees on Facebook or LinkedIn. With Facebook, you have the ability to post pictures, updates, and breaking news while it's happening on the day of your event. This is particularly valuable if your organization hosts events that last more than one day.

Encouraging others to use social media during your event is particularly effective for regular classes or conferences, where you want to build interest among those who are not in attendance. If people see what fun is being had, or what is being learned, they may sign up for the next event so they don't miss out again.



Here are three things to keep in mind when using an event hashtag:

1. Think about placement

When you are thinking of where to showcase the hashtag at your event, you'll want to consider where it will get the most visibility. Put it in a central place where people will be able to see it, but don't disrupt the event in the process.

2. Schedule tweets before your event

There are plenty of things you need to prepare before any event and it's the same thing when it comes to social media. Scheduling tweets with tools like Hootsuite will let you have a presence in the conversation, without having it take up all your time. When you're scheduling tweets, make sure the timing makes sense. It can be helpful to look at your event's schedule beforehand and set up tweets accordingly.

3. Have a presence without hijacking the conversation

Your presence online should reflect your presence at the event. You want to be there to interact with your attendees, but you don't want to be the only one who's contributing to the conversation. The purpose of the hashtag is to give your guests a way to better engage, not to overwhelm them with information.

Adding Social Media to Your Event Strategy

After your event

After your event ends, social media can help extend the buzz and—if it's a recurring event—help promote the next installment.

Here are some ways you can use Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn after your next event:

1. Upload pictures of the event

Upload pictures to Facebook, or share them on Twitter and LinkedIn. Showing how much fun people had can be a great selling tool for the next time you host the same event or something similar.

2. Upload videos from the event

Upload videos—where appropriate—to a free video site such as YouTube. Depending on your event, you could post videos of speakers, demonstrations, or attendees talking about your event. Like photos, the videos could be used in future promotional efforts and by those who missed the event or by attendees who want to review what they learned.

3. Leverage your blog

Leverage your blog with posts about the event. Chances are your readers are just the people you want registering to attend future events. Share your event reactions and key takeaways, and consider inviting key speakers or panelists to write a guest post. Blog posts make for great content for your social networks and provide an opportunity to generate further discussion around your event.

4. Thank attendees for coming

Thank attendees for coming through your social media channels. When doing so, post links to pictures, videos, and other sharable material from your gathering such as presentation slides. Doing so provides greater value to those who attended and gives non-attendees a taste of what they missed.

All these suggestions are particularly effective for recurring events, as they can show customers, donors, and members who didn't attend what they missed out on. You can also link to these assets when promoting the next event to provide a visual of what future attendees can expect.

Your EventSpot webpage can be edited for up to 30 days after your event ends, so you can use it as a central place to link photos, videos, handouts, and other assets if you don't have another site available. Also, make sure to add links to your social media sites and a "Join My Mailing List" box to your webpage to ensure customers, members, and clients can connect with you however they choose.



Leverage your blog with posts about the event. Chances are your readers are just the people you want registering to attend future events.

Adding Social Media to Your Event Strategy

EventSpot and social media: a winning strategy for any event

If you've been sitting on the social media sidelines when it comes to your event strategy, now is the time to get started. With EventSpot, it's never been easier to combine the power of online event registration and online event promotion with the power of sites like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

Take time to rethink each step of your event lifecycle.

Can asking your audience for help provide a better experience for attendees? Can LinkedIn Groups help you give your event registration and webpage more visibility with your target audience? Can an event hashtag on Twitter generate the type of engagement you have always hoped for? Or could posting photos and videos on Facebook add more life to your event follow up?

Answering "yes" to just one of these questions should be enough to put your social event strategy into motion.



Take the next step

Find out how EventSpot can help bring your event registration and promotion online, so you can start getting social.

Visit www.EventSpot.com to sign up for a FREE trial!

Or if you're already a customer and just need some help getting started, call an Event Coach at 1-855-816-6508.