Top tips for event organisers

Events and festivals are an exciting and vibrant part of our society. From a village fete to the Olympic Games they offer an opportunity to share in sport, music and cultural events and have an atmosphere second to none.

Events are big business and have an incredible impact on local economies, cultural benefits and can, if conducted well, inspire people to try new activities and improve lives.

Organisers have the task of addressing a range of goals: delivering a positive enjoyable event, meeting attendance targets and keeping sponsors and concession owners happy.

Great events take into account their impact both in terms of financial return and longer-term effects on participants, sponsors and local communities. Future Thinking has a range of established techniques to capture, analyse and understand the whole value of an event.

We work with a variety of event organisers, including public sector funders, to understand and evaluate event success. By identifying and understanding the effect on attendees, participants, volunteers, press, the general public, local groups, governing bodies, local businesses and specific audience groups such as kids and disabled people we provide a holistic understanding that can deliver long-term legacy.

Tips:

1. Adapt to the development of your event brand, how it builds and prepare for the crowds!
2. Learn from event engagement to build strong levels of advocacy and word-of-mouth
3. Prove the financial return from the event, to the organiser and local economy
4. Understand the long-term social benefits and legacy
5. Action the understanding to achieve effective, sustainable and enjoyable events

Attendees:
- Volume and direct value
- Enjoyment & fulfilment

Sponsors:
- Awareness
- Reputation
- ROI

Local communities:
- Pride
- Disruption
- Backing
- Benefits realisation

Benefactor:
- Meeting inspirational goals
- Sport participation
- Cultural awareness
Event brand:

Events have their own brand, encompassing their appeal and expectation of enjoyment and entertainment. Advance engagement is critical for strong attendance. While ticketed events have an advantage for organisers in terms of planning, other event organisers may feel that they need a crystal ball to determine their likely visitor numbers.

A favourable weather forecast certainly helps, however optimising the event campaign communications, word-of-mouth and scheduling engaging content are clearly critical. The event brand encompasses the value of the event prior to the big day. The salience of the concept and expectation is key and understanding how this is developing as the event approaches gives a solid indication of attendance.

Connectors shouldn’t be underestimated; how your event is discussed online and through traditional media can draw big crowds or create a damp squib.

Getting this pre-event stage right, covering the real audience and intelligently scaling to the market can significantly de-risk events and positively impact on long and short-term planning.

Engagement and advocacy:

While not an everyday occurrence most events are unlikely to be truly stand-alone one-offs.

Event organisers need to understand how attendees engaged with the event. Are there learnings that need to be learnt, are there improvements that will take the event into the next league, what level of advocacy exists – would they return? Are they posting about their event online, talking to family and friends positively (or negatively for that matter!).

Understanding the factors which drive satisfaction on the day in detail doesn’t just provide a nice pat on the back for a job well done, they need to be actionable. There’s no point in naval gazing, the whole point is to make things even better in future.

A successful event brings people back, but also means that when the marketing emails drop into their inbox they don’t press delete, but forward them on to their mates.
Important considerations

Financial return:

Some events are extremely profitable for organisers and this financial return is relatively easy to calculate: ticket sales + income from concessions – direct costs = profit. For many others, the financial benefit can be wide ranging, and not necessarily based on direct income at all.

Many events are free to attend. Of course, they can still cost several million to put on! The financial benefit from these events often lies in the local economy. The financial benefit from the Tour de France in Yorkshire last year was £102m – this was shared across the participating regions and included spend by people travelling to Yorkshire from both the UK and overseas.

It’s a complex task to fully assess financial return in these cases, you can stop people on the day and ask them what they’ve spent, but of course they’re still out and about so considered questioning is required to get this right.

In addition, organisers will need to have inspired and informed the business community to maximise their awareness and involvement. Evaluating the amount of support and guidance provided through marketing and promotional work helps to understand the context of the event and feeds into maximising the economic benefit.

Demonstrating value to sponsors is clearly important and increasingly complex. Many sponsors are involved with events for the opportunity to engage with the audience and tell the story of their brand. It’s not enough to know Virgin Money sponsors the marathon, the desired return is just as likely to be for attendees to leave with an increased understanding of the sponsor’s values.
Important considerations

Social benefits:
Events have a range of additional benefits – some are obvious – public funded sporting events may be expected to achieve greater participation in sporting activities and their success measured against public policy objectives. Winning the Olympics requires a clear and demonstrable plan for legacy. However, commercial and smaller local events can have significant longer term effects on people’s lives, inspiring them to take up new challenges and adding to their personal development.

We should ask attendees about the level of inspiration conjured by the event and consider this alongside the financial returns. Clearly, not everyone will return from an event and change their lifestyle just because they’ve told a market researcher that they will! We need to check on their progress and discount their intentions using models and analysis – however, the clear social capital gained from events is significant.

A sense of pride can also be gained from events. The Tour de France is a case in point which clearly instilled huge pride in the regions, and yellow jerseys are still seen around the route a year later.

Action:
It’s part of the plan to survey attendees, maybe even gather feedback from participants and/or concessions. But, what do you do with it?

It’s great to prove the value of an event especially when heavily funded by sponsors; however, evaluation is most effective when it has an eye on the future. Looking for the learning, the improvement points, de-risking future events can return huge benefits across all event indicators.

Developing actions to achieve improvement in future needs to lie at the heart of all event evaluation, be a core objective and a KPI on any research undertaken.
The right tools for the job

We have a suite of tools for measuring event experience, visitor behaviours, brand partnerships and marcomms effectiveness.

BrandBox:

BrandBox is a new and innovative way for marketers to understand brand equity. It’s designed to be intuitive and easily explainable; evaluating the competitive context, emotional relationship and the role of key advocates in determining a brand’s position.

It is a transparent, robust and flexible solution that uncovers the key levers that drive success, enabling you to understand where your brand sits in a competitive context. BrandBox also identifies how to improve brand performance and consumer consideration, and the impact of communications and activity on key brand metrics, as identified by Key Driver Analysis.

Campaign Optimiser 2.0:

Re-launched in an interactive format, Campaign Optimiser 2.0 helps identify which platforms used have impacted most on campaign awareness, appeal and call to action. It enables you to (a) Input spend per platform to see which over or under index comparative to spend, or (b) Alter spend or % spend per platform to see how things would have turned out differently with a different media outlay.

With surveys tailored to your objectives we make sure we cover what we know is important to an advertising and sponsorship campaign: message tone and appeal, social media impact and fit with expectations for your brand.

See-Me™:

See-Me™ provides an uninterrupted and unedited visual narrative of consumers lives by tracking where they go, what they do and what they are exposed to through a range of different cameras, suitable to the task.

The camera’s unobtrusive nature allows consumers to carry on with their everyday activities without interference and without the presence of an interviewer. See-Me helps to bridge the gap between actual and reported behaviour to identify subconscious motivated actions. A short film provides a visual landscape of your consumers’ world where narrative, captured via specialist photo-elicitation interviews is then recorded and overlaid onto a final video montage.

Their Voice:

A successful brand is a hyper-connected brand. We give our clients tools to understand consumer preferences, attitudes and behaviour, so they can improve customer experience, satisfaction and loyalty. We design programmes to help you get to know your customers inside-out: their needs, attitudes, experiences and satisfaction, so you can drive value, target investment and gain a competitive edge.

Their Voice provides a real-time understanding of customer experience to drive engagement by incorporating all key metrics across the Voice of the Customer touch points.
About us

Neil Aulton, MD - Public Sector and Services Division

Since Neil joined in 2007 he has managed a wide range of large-scale complex projects for both public and commercial sectors, working in a variety of markets worldwide. During his career he has worked on projects across 80 countries.

Neil’s experience is both practical and broad. He recently led the project team to evaluate the Tour de France UK stages and Tour of Britain London stage. He was also involved heavily in TfL’s research programmes relating to the London 2012 Games.

Neil’s focus is to ensure that any research solutions add value to the decision-making process.

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Future Thinking is a full-service research agency that delivers competitive advantage by driving change.

We challenge ourselves to offer clever consumer and business insights to inspire action throughout your organisation. Our research prioritises clients’ needs, to add direction and commercial value, and global brands implement our insight for commercial success and growth.

Our people are the best. Combining intellect and commercial awareness we understand not just your brief, but the wider business challenges and stakeholder pressure points.

Innovation is at the heart of everything we do. We use the latest technology and scientific analysis to deliver bespoke solutions for understanding consumer behaviour.

With combined industry experience of over 40 years and offices in the UK and Europe, Future Thinking provide genuine research expertise and understanding across a wide range of industry sectors.

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