

# ■ TOP 10 TIPS FOR PLANNING A LARGE CONFERENCE

Planning a conference is a big undertaking. The good news is there are plenty of resources and tools to make conferences planning a success. From big picture decision making to zoning in on the intricate details, here are the top 10 things to consider as you begin to plan your conference.

## Tip # 1: Set your conference objectives

As a conference organizer, you are not only responsible for the details of the event, but also the big picture. Before getting caught up in your “to-do” list, develop a vision that includes measurable goals and objectives for tracking your conference success. Think about the purpose behind your event to help reveal your vision.

Some common objectives include:

- To educate by sharing knowledge and providing exhibitors
- To promote the sales of products and services and generate leads
- To collaborate and form business relationships through networking
- To profit from earning revenue from the event itself

One tool for creating a vision is to submit a survey to past attendees asking for feedback on their experience. The information you gather can be used for goal setting and filtered into the details of your event. First time conferences require careful research on your target market to zone in on their preferences and expectations.

A few questions to consider include:

- Are they current, past or potential members of an association?
- Are they located in a specific geographic region?
- Are they likely to bring their partners to the conference?
- Will employers cover costs, or will they be paying their own way?
- What is the average age group of the audience members?
- What type of venue would they prefer?
- How do they communicate? What are the best methods for communication?

## Tip #2: Create a budget

Every conference has a budget. Creating a budget helps you meet your profitability goals and stay on track with expenses that arise during the planning process. Bear in mind that attendee and exhibitor fees don't often cover all the costs or generate sufficient profit. You might need to consider corporate sponsorships to help offset some of the costs. For example, if speaker transportation costs are eating at your budget, considering approaching an airline to be a sponsor to help with your travel budget.

Here are four steps to help with your budget planning:

- Identify the funds available to spend on the event, and the desired profitability.
- Create a list of categories such as speakers, travel, food and leisure activities, and allocate estimated costs to each of the various activities.
- Calculate estimated income based on all revenue sources (i.e. sponsorships).
- Determine registration fee based on expected attendance and profit goals.

# ■ TOP 10 TIPS FOR PLANNING A LARGE CONFERENCE

## Tip #3: Set the date

Identifying a good date can contribute to the overall success of the conference. Research the ideal length of time you can expect to keep your audience at the conference. Generally, fewer people will travel a long distance for a two-day event than a longer event. At the same time, a four-day conference may be too long. Find out whether your audience would prefer incorporating a weekend day in their travel plans, or if the event should be held mid-week only. Be sure to check out other activities in the industry so your date doesn't coincide with any other major event or holidays.

## Tip #4: Choose a geographic location

Geographic location is a critical success factor because it influences attendance. Most people in the west coast would prefer not to come three hours to the east coast and vice versa. Many conference organizers rotate events between coasts or choose locations in the middle of the country. The location also depends on the time of year and the weather. Resort locations are a preferred choice for conferences that offer leisure activities or programs for attendees' partners or guests.

## Tip #5: Determine the right venue

As soon as you determine possible dates and geographic location for your conference, you can start looking at venue options. Items to consider include the size of the group, the time of year, and the proposed activities. For example, exhibitions requiring outdoor spaces need to be held in a region with a comfortable climate. Also, few hotels can accommodate more than 800 people, so large-scale events and trade shows may require a venue situated within close range of several hotels.

Make a list of "must-have" services, amenities and facilities for your event. For example, the amount of booth space you need might dictate whether you need a convention center or a hotel. Also, if attendees are required to commute between their hotel and conference facilities, find out if there are reliable transportation options, and what costs are associated. While several online resources are available for researching event space (i.e. [www.venuefinder.com](http://www.venuefinder.com)), we highly recommend visiting the venue before the conference or at least speaking with others who have held an event there.

Here are a few questions to consider:

- Do the hotels offer leisure activities?
- Do your sponsors and vendors need space for booths?
- Is catering available on site from the hotel or conference center?

## Tip #6: Secure a keynote speaker

In addition to networking and educational sessions, a great keynote speaker can be a key attraction to inspire people to attend your conference. Big names always attract more attendees. Well-known speakers also help you gain more attention in your marketing efforts. It's also important to find speakers that aren't too self-serving who are only speaking to promote their business, ideas or books. You want your crowd to feel empowered, informed and inspired, not sold to. An engaging keynote speaker can set the tone for the whole event and energize your audience.

# ■ TOP 10 TIPS FOR PLANNING A LARGE CONFERENCE

## Tip #7: Create the agenda

It's almost time to pre-sell tickets, but first you need to plan an interesting agenda. Typically, business related activities take place during standard business hours and leisure activities in the evening. This can vary depending on the type of industry and the format of the conference. For example, if the purpose of the event is team building, fun sporting activities might be included during business hours to fit in with the theme. If exhibition booths are located outdoors, hours may be affected by the availability of lighting, shelter and weather patterns. For a conference that includes speaker presentations, take into account of the timing of mealtimes and avoid lengthy meetings after heavy lunches, when people are less able to concentrate. Make sure to include a mix of activities and incorporate time for networking.

## Tip #8: Develop a marketing strategy

The success of every conference depends on the level of attendance, which is directly related to the marketing activities involved. There are a wide variety of marketing channels to consider for getting the word out about your conference. Always think about your target market and how to communicate as a base for determining the right mix of communication channels. Some ideas are: industry blogs, social media, email, PR, TV, industry publications, websites, media buys and direct marketing. Before jumping into any promotional elements, make sure the costs work with your budget.

A few specific marketing tactics to consider include:

- Invitations to prior attendees
- Ads, blogs and announcements on your website
- Mentions in industry calendars

It's important to plan your conference well ahead of time to ensure that you have enough time to promote it widely and obtain the number of registrations you need to achieve your financial targets. At the same time, remember that publicity is not only important before the event, but also during and after.

## Tip #9: Set up registration process

You only get one chance to make a first impression, which is why conference registration is so important. For many attendees, sponsors and speakers, the registration process sets the tone for the rest of the conference. Consider setting up online registration before the event to collect badge information like name, company and current position. Preparing name badges beforehand will facilitate the registration process and keep the line from getting too long when people check-in onsite.

To keep lines short and improve efficiency, use an electronic registration system that can scan barcodes. These systems keep registration time to a minimum and keep data very organized. They can also play a multi-use role as lead retrieval tools for your sponsors and trade show exhibitors.

# ■ TOP 10 TIPS FOR PLANNING A LARGE CONFERENCE

## Tip #10: Plan the logistics

Manpower, talent and experience impact the nuts and bolts of planning and executing a large conference. Think about whether you have the resources to do it yourself, or if you need to hire an experienced firm to help you with all or part of the process. If you decide to manage the entire process in-house, make sure to consider essential components like:

- Online registration
- On-site registration
- Lead management for exhibitors
- Attendee electronic networking
- CEU management

The entire process of planning and executing a large-scale conference, trade show or event can be very overwhelming. Especially, if it's not part of your everyday job requirements. Many groups and organizations benefit from the experience and talents of people who do this professionally every day, like us! Expo Logic works with organizations throughout the country to make events a huge success. Please let us know how we can help with your event logistics, registration and lead management needs.



EXPO LOGIC  
[www.expologic.com](http://www.expologic.com)  
553 Foundry Road  
East Norriton, PA 19403  
1.877.ELI.EXPO  
[info@expologic.com](mailto:info@expologic.com)