



A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO

PROFESSIONAL RSVP



Best Practices for
Email Invitations,
Online Registration,
& RSVP for Corporate Events

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The RSVP Agency offers a professional service with an outstanding track record in the management of RSVP projects. We have developed the most user friendly and cost effective Invitation and RSVP Management Solution in the industry today, making our services and software the perfect match for any company or individual that requires a full RSVP service.



“ Successful event planning requires a comprehensive email invitation and online event registration solution.



CONTENTS

Background	03
What is RSVP?	04
10 Steps to Successful RSVP	08
Events that require Professional RSVP?	13
The Benefits of Event Management Software	16
The Elements of RSVP Best Practice	20
Measuring Success and Return on Investment	25
Conclusion	28



BACKGROUND

As an event organiser, or professional involved in the events industry, are you familiar with the scenario below?



You have an event to arrange for 50+ guests. You send out an electronic email from your own email address, and manually input each of the RSVPs into an Excel spreadsheet. You have to manage a separate spreadsheet for VIP guests and their requirements. Following up with outstanding RSVPs requires manually checking the invite list against the RSVPs. You forget to save the spreadsheet and all of your changes are unrecoverable, so you start again...

If you can relate to this scenario, and the time-consuming task of managing large-scale events, then you might consider bridging the gap between manual RSVP management to professional RSVP software. These days, RSVP software can do everything for you – it's an efficient way to ensure the success of an event.

RSVP software puts all the structures in place to make event organisation run smoothly – employing user-friendly touch points such as iCal integration and event reminders to get the right people to attend, and capturing detailed guest information in the process.

What makes a successful event? Is it champagne and sushi served on silver trays, or an upmarket venue? While these factors certainly do contribute to an event's success; something much more important (yet often overlooked) actually makes or breaks an event – how many people attend.

Managing RSVPs can be difficult – some people will RSVP by telephone, some in person, some by email, and others via social media networks. Manually pulling all these RSVPs together and placing them into an Excel spreadsheet or writing them up in a notebook is a time-consuming and a labour-intensive chore.

If only there was an easier way...

Knowing the ins and outs of professional RSVP is critical to successful event planning. No event organiser should be without this indispensable eBook, which will guide you through the history, etiquette, and strategy behind professional RSVP, and how you can make it work for you.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS RSVP?

WHAT IS **RSVP?**



The term “RSVP” - sometimes also punctuated as R.S.V.P - is an acronym for the French phrase, “*Répondez, s’il vous plait*”, which loosely means, “*Please respond*” or “*Respond if it pleases you*”.



The request to RSVP is usually found at the end of an invitation (historically, invitations were written, but these days can be in electronic form), and indicates that the sender would like a response as to whether you are accepting or declining the invitation.

RSVP ORIGINS

The concept of RSVP has been around for many years; society has always hosted events which require invitations to be given and confirmations to be received. Though the practice of RSVP actually emerges out of etiquette.



It's generally thought that the French invented etiquette, but it's interesting to note that etiquette actually originated in Italy when an Italian diplomat, Conte Baldassare Castiglione, published the first book about proper behaviour amongst the nobility in the 16th century.

Etiquette cropped up in England during the 18th century. The word derives from the French “*estiquette*”, meaning “*label*” or “*ticket*”, or in some cases, “*to attach or stick*”.

It's surmised that etiquette became the norm thanks to the French court of King Louis XIV, who passed out etiquettes at his Versailles palace - reminder cards with ‘rules’ for court behaviour such as “*Ne marchez pas sur l’herbe*”... or “*Keep off the grass!*” These tickets were either signs posted at Versailles, or the invitations issued to court events with the rules of behaviour printed on the back.



HOW RSVP MADE IT TO THE REST OF THE WORLD

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, it was considered fashionable in high society to use French as a language of culture, refinement, and sophistication. As the West became wealthier, they introduced more European culture into their daily lives, even adopting French phrases.

Ironically, although the rest of the world has adopted RSVP - which became an acronym for "Response Shall Verify Presence", the French no longer use "Répondez, s'il vous plait" and instead say, "Priere de Respondre", meaning "Please Answer".



RSVP IN HISTORY AND TODAY



Historically, invitations on parchment were handwritten (writing was a sign of the host's education), sealed with royal wax, and delivered by messenger on horseback or by foot. Responses were typically returned in the same way.

Even though the use of an R.S.V.P on an invitation in today's fast-paced society might seem old-fashioned, it meets a practical need in terms of catering, seating, and other event coordination considerations.

A well-known author on etiquette, Judith Martin, popularly known as "Miss Manners", writes that an RSVP originated as a polite method of reminding people to do something that they already know, i.e. that if someone has been kind and extended an invitation to you to join their event, it's good manners to respond; whether it be acceptance, or a polite rejection of the offer.



Common sense would indicate that there has always been a standard to follow within societies which dictates behaviour and manners. Despite the practical implications of responding to an invitation, the more important point to note and consider is that it's considered good manners and a simple courtesy to respond to an invitation, even if it's to decline with regret.

In these modern days of online convenience, people rely less on the postal service for return of RSVPs and email or SMS communication is becoming more acceptable. Another modern trend when it comes to the RSVP is the "regrets only" directive. This means that unless a guest replies that they're not coming, the host will expect them to be there.

RSVP 'EVENTIQUETTE'

Whether written or electronic, an invitation requires a response. RSVP is a cue, letting the recipient know that you wish to know if they plan on attending or not. When it comes to the RSVP request, there's only one golden rule: allow enough time for guests to respond.

Etiquette exists to help all of us overcome social faux pas. Respect that there's a person on the other end of the invitation who may need a helping hand in returning their response i.e. make it as easy as possible for them to RSVP.

As event organisers, we expect people to call or RSVP if they cannot attend an event. But in people's busy lives, sometimes RSVPs fall by the wayside, and too many people confirm and then don't end up arriving. At The RSVP Agency, our 'eventiquette' involves educating clients on how important it is to RSVP on time, and attend the event as indicated.



We perform a follow-up call to "Confirm attendance for dietary purposes" - and while this does increase attendance, there is still a percentage of people that don't arrive. One way to handle this is to contact them after the fact to sensitively enquire as to why they didn't arrive. This often serves to prevent future indiscretions when it comes to RSVPs and attendance.

CHAPTER TWO

10 STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL RSVP

10 STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL **RSVP**

When it comes to hosting a successful event, there are some essential elements involved in setting up and managing the RSVP process...

1

CONCEPT

The first step in the RSVP process is to create a brief:

- What are the event objectives, i.e. what are you hoping to achieve with your event?
- What is the feeling that you're trying to create at the event?
- What do you want people to feel or take away from the event when they leave?
- What do you want guests to remember?
- Who is the right audience?
- How many people do you want to invite?
- What are the event logistics?

2

LOGISTICS

Make sure all logistics have been confirmed before you announce the event. This includes details like:

- Date
- Time
- Venue
- Travel & transportation
- Catering
- Sponsors
- Suppliers
- Guest speakers
- Theme or dress code
- Publicity
- Sporting Events

3

INVITATIONS

Once the event concept is defined, and logistics confirmed, the invitations need to be designed, keeping the following questions in mind:

- What are the graphic design requirements for the invitations and response forms?
- What are the brand elements that need to be adhered to?
- Is there artwork that needs to be incorporated into the design?
- What copy and content needs to be included in the invitation and RSVP response forms?
- Who will write the copy?
- Do the invitations need to be personalised?
- Will different groups of invitees require different invitations?
- What drop down fields and text fields are required?

4 INVITATION INFORMATION

Invitations must provide important information and details about the event, such as:

- details about the host
- the type of event - formal or casual?
- direction for dress code i.e. black tie, formal wear, or business casual
- the agenda (if there is one), biographies, maps etc
- the location
- the time (for both arrival and departure if applicable)
- specific instructions (i.e. for arrival, parking, or the like)
- whether the invitee may bring a guest or extend the invitation to other contacts
- the RSVP-by date
- instructions on how to RSVP, such as by email or online

5 WHO TO INVITE

Will there be more than one guest list? Do you have different categories of guests that need to be invited to the same event?

6 REQUIRED RSVP DATA FIELDS

What are the data fields that you need to capture about each guests? It could be some, or all, of the following:

- Contact details (first name, last name, email address, telephone number, etc)
- Partner details
- Dietary requirements
- Travel arrangements
- Accommodation arrangements
- Golf day requirements

You may want to allow guests the option of including a personal note, whether it's to explain why they are unable to attend, or to decline but request information about similar future events.

7

RSVP TIMELINES

Pay attention to RSVP timelines - invitations should be sent out early enough to allow your guest to book out that time for you, but not so far in advance that they forget. Here is a general guideline:

- 8 weeks before - send 'save the date'
- 6 weeks before - send official email invitation
- 4 weeks before - send follow-up email reminder
- 3 weeks before - all RSVPs should now be due
- 2 weeks before - follow up outstanding RSVPs by phone
- 1 week before - confirm final numbers
- SMS - two days before

8

GUEST LIST MANAGEMENT

Do you have a process for updating and managing multiple guest lists? Best practice dictates that a guest list is supplied in spreadsheet format with the minimum of first name, last name, and email address supplied. The following process should then be followed to ensure data integrity:

- Upload initial guest list
- Check for duplicate names
- Check for duplicate email addresses
- Check for critical missing data i.e. email address
- Confirm that invitations have been sent
- Once the invitations have been sent, continually check for:
 - ▶ number of bounces
 - ▶ number of accepts
 - ▶ number of declines
 - ▶ number of responses

9

FINAL PREPARATIONS

In the days leading up to the event, you should have everything finalised:

- Final guest numbers
- Seating plan (if required)
- Speakers' speeches or presentations (if required)
- Arrival times
- Printed name tags, programmes/agendas, place cards, or seating assignments

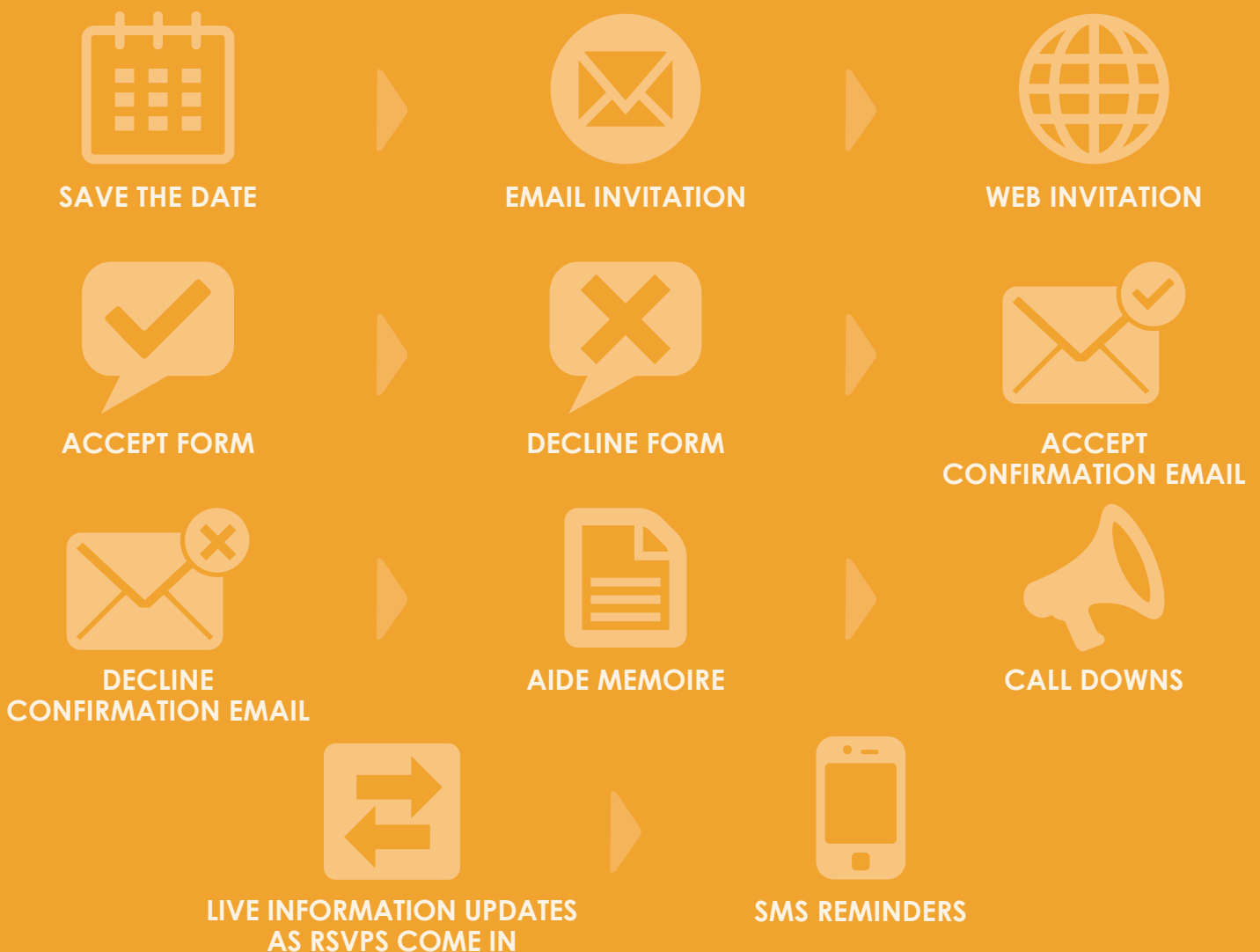
10 FEEDBACK

Follow up with attendees, evaluate the event, and report on the results of your planning - this will be invaluable in improving future events. After the event:

- Request feedback from those who attended, this is normally a post event survey form
- Send thank you notes to everyone who attended
- Acknowledge VIPs
- Compile data gathered from the event i.e. new contacts, or personal preferences of guests who attended

THE PROFESSIONAL RSVP PROCESS

Combining the 10 steps mentioned for professional RSVP with an online RSVP service is a surefire way to ensure a return on investment for your event. A typical RSVP process consists of the following:



CHAPTER THREE

EVENTS THAT REQUIRE PROFESSIONAL RSVP



EVENTS THAT REQUIRE PROFESSIONAL **RSVP**

Most events, where an invitation is sent, require an RSVP, whether it is via email, telephone or sms. Professional RSVP is required when a manual RSVP process is too time-consuming, complicated or informal.

WHEN SHOULD YOU CONSIDER USING A PROFESSIONAL RSVP SERVICE?

- When you are inviting over 50 guests to your event
- When you want your RSVP process to seem as professional as possible
- When you want to ensure the best possible attendance at your event
- When you are managing multiple guest lists
- When you are managing a number of customised logistics for each guest
- When your event involves transport and accommodation for guests
- When you don't have the time or resources to manage the RSVP process
- When you want your event invitation to go viral/when your event is open to the public
- When your event involves an entry fee

BUSINESS-RELATED EVENTS

For corporate or business events, you want to maintain a very professional impression throughout your RSVP process. You want the RSVP process to be easy to respond to, you want the right people to attend your event, you want guests to have all the right information available to them, and you want all logistics professionally managed.

These include:

- Speaker breakfasts
- Analyst presentations
- Presentation of financial results
- Networking events
- Annual general meetings
- Board dinners
- Internal and external communication launches
- Year-end functions
- Golf Days
- Conferences
- Car launches
- Building launches



SOCIAL EVENTS

For Social events, as the host, you want time to focus on enjoying the planned celebration without having the hassle of handling the guest list manually, and of course making sure that everyone invited has the date in their diaries timeously and remembers to attend the event. Social events requiring professional RSVP could include:

- Weddings
- Bat mitzvahs
- Bar mitzvahs
- Engagement parties
- Baby showers
- Bachelor/Bachelorette parties
- Housewarming
- Birthday parties



PUBLIC EVENTS

For Public events, you may want the invitation to go viral to reach as many people as possible. You may also want the invitation to give an option to pay for entry online prior to attending the event. These types of events requiring professional RSVP could include:

- Movie Premiers
- Charity Galas
- Theatre Events
- Comedy Shows
- Golf Days
- Themed/Underground Dinners
- Ladies Days
- Spa Days
- Dance Events
- Club Events
- Community Events
- Fashion Shows
- Expos



CHAPTER FOUR

THE BENEFITS OF EVENT MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

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As a professional event organiser for corporate events, you know there is little or no room for error. Events are recognised as a critical medium when it comes to building relationships face-to-face, and very specific budgets are set aside for achieving event success.

In this digital age, many event organisers are taking advantage of the benefits offered by event management software to save time, money, and headaches. An online RSVP service offers a helping hand, taking care of the details and freeing up your time for value-adding activities elsewhere.

NO REGRETS WITH RSVP

Organisation is critical when it comes to successful events - whether it be a conference, fundraiser, trade show, wedding, product launch, or networking event. As soon as an event crosses over into the territory of 50+ guests, spreadsheets and constant data updating can become unmanageable. But a professional RSVP service makes event coordination more efficient than ever before:

- Managed invitation process - from personalised email invitations to on-site registration
- Email delivery tracking, as well as SMS reminders and calendar integration
- Multiple guest lists with customised communication options
- Data is stored in one convenient location online (without the risk of losing saved changes)
- Live updating of guest list information

Gone are the days of paying a fortune to have an invitation designed and printed, only to have it get lost in the post or tossed in the bin, unopened.





WHAT ONLINE INVITATION AND EVENT MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE OFFERS

- Email invitations delivered to the right people at the right time
- Email invitation templates accommodating any design and ensuring the best first impression
- Add personal details to each email invitation, and talk to your guests as individuals
- Allow selected guests to forward invitations to their contacts
- Track invitation bounces and 'out of office' notifications to show the status of guests who have not accepted / declined your invitation
- SMS reminders before your event to maximise attendance
- Set up multiple guest lists per event for customised communication with VIPs, media, and staff
- Identify duplicates in your guests lists, ensuring no guest receives duplicate communication. Data cleansing is automatic with every list upload, and guest information can be uploaded from, and downloaded to, a spreadsheet
- The setup is quick to configure to meet the pressing deadlines of the eventing industry. Once design and copy is ready, a test invitation can be sent within hours
- Guests receive an iCal reminder with their confirmation email, and the event details are automatically added to their diary
- Use the user-friendly dashboard to see live reports on guest acceptance and decline rates, as well as those who have yet to respond
- Easily register guests on the day using an RSVP iPad application

WHAT PROFESSIONAL RSVP SERVICE SHOULD ALSO INCLUDE

A comprehensive design service to quickly and cost-effectively design invitations and response forms, such as:

- ▶ invitation headers and footers
- ▶ accept and decline buttons
- ▶ maps
- ▶ agendas
- ▶ biographies
- ▶ barcodes
- ▶ boarding passes



- Copywriting for invitation wording, using the tone and language that best suits your target audience
- Creation of name tags, lanyards, and event accreditation
- On-site registration and guest processing
- Call downs to guests that have not yet accepted the electronic invitation in order to increase event attendance

Basically, online RSVP and email invitations reduce the amount of work that falls on the shoulders of event organisers. Your workload is reduced by $\pm 70\%$, freeing you up to focus on the other 30% – the physical logistics of event coordination and preparation.

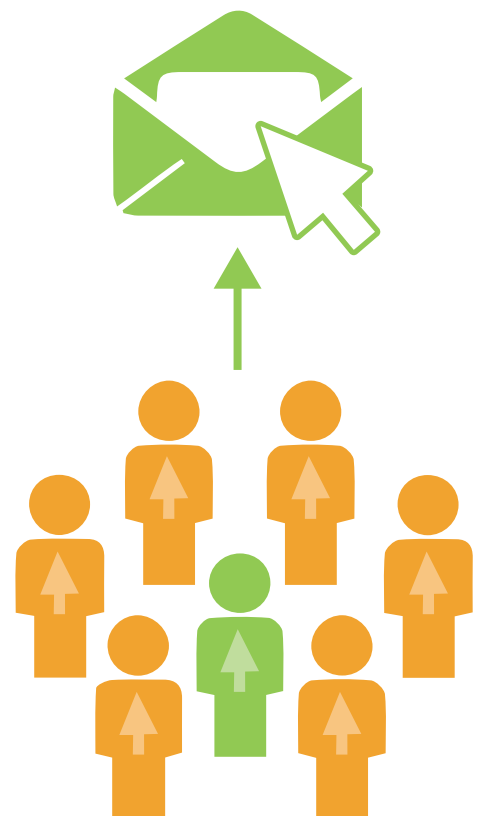
PUTTING THE 'PRO' IN PROFESSIONAL

These days, everyone's work schedules are incredibly busy. People rush from meeting to meeting, and live deadline to deadline - fitting in an event, let alone a response to the initial invitation, is a challenge...

Right off the bat, an event needs a professional image to engage the attention of a corporate representative or senior executive. The entire process needs to be clear, efficient, and easy - from the first invitation to the online registration.

Whether hosting a speaker breakfast, analyst presentation, or international conference, your time, as the event organiser, is better spent in other areas, knowing that the guest list management and RSVP follow-up is taken care of.

With Professional RSVP, all touch points are branded (adding to the event's lasting impression in terms of brand awareness), and provide an easy link back to the company or client's website.



CHAPTER FIVE

THE ELEMENTS OF RSVP BEST PRACTICE

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THE EMAIL INVITATION

These days, it's common practice to send event invitations via email - it's easier than ever to create personal and professional invitations and event announcements online. It's an efficient way to control costs and prevents wastage in the form of discarded print invites.

In order for an email invitation to be effective though, the recipient first needs to open the message. This is where good copywriting is key - the email subject line must grab the recipient's attention in order for them to be intrigued enough to read further, and once that's achieved, the email's opening line should be equally enticing. Once open, visually engaging graphics are the final hook.

Digital doesn't have to mean impersonal - invitees are far more likely to open a personalised message containing their name. "To Whom It May Concern" is definitely not the way to win over a potential guest.

The type of event (formal, informal, corporate) will determine the wording you use, but you're far more likely to be successful with: "Dear [Name], [Company Name] invites you..."

THE RSVP FORM AND ONLINE REGISTRATION



Your guests are more likely to respond if you provide a simple and convenient way for them to do so i.e. a clickable button. A good email invitation will send the invitee to the event registration page, where they will be invited to make a decision: accept or decline. The less steps it takes for a guest to RSVP, the more likely they are to take action.

Those invitees who accept the invitation are entered into a process of information gathering, where you as an event organiser can begin to build a refined database of personal preferences such as dietary requirements, and much more.

GUEST LIST MANAGEMENT

Professional RSVP service is the most convenient way to manage multiple guest lists across multiple events.

Detailed guest lists are key when it comes to successful event planning, and creating your final guest list should be quick and effortless. It's easy to manage it online, and professional RSVP caters for multiple guest lists. You're able to send customised communication to VIPs, media, and staff - making light work of staying on top of your inbox, and ensuring that important emails about your event never go unnoticed.



Guests can easily extend their invitation to their own contacts, or the event can remain exclusive - the choice is yours and can be set online. Data cleansing happens automatically upon every list upload and duplicate removal ensures no guests will be frustrated by repetitive information.

WHAT INFORMATION TO GATHER

There's no such thing as too much information. These days, requiring invitees to RSVP is more than simply eliciting a yes/no answer on the question of attendance.

Take advantage of the online registration that a professional RSVP service offers, to ensure you're sufficiently briefed to plan for every eventuality, as well as to keep on file for future events or databases:

- **Dietary preferences** - Are there any vegetarians on your guest list? Does anyone need a halaal or kosher meal to be brought in? Are there any allergies you should be aware of so you can plan your menu accordingly? This should extend to the thank you gift as well should it be a food based gift.
- **Event preferences** - Which workshops, presentations, or sessions would your guests like to attend? Who are the speakers that they're interested in? What kind of entertainment would they like to see? What should be in their goodie bag or information pack?
- **Travel arrangements** - Do your guests need assistance in booking flights and transport to and from the airport? Will they require parking permits? Does a guest need to ensure that there is wheelchair parking and access?
- **Accommodation requirements** - If any of your attendees are coming from out of town, you can assist them in finding the right place to stay.
- **Special needs** - If they're foreign, will they require a translator? Does an attendee require you to check whether they can bring their guide dog to the venue?

SAVE THE DATES AND EMAIL REMINDERS



Once a guest has confirmed that they will be attending, an iCal will be issued to block out the event in their calendar, automatically populating their calendar with all of the event details. The guest will also receive an SMS closer to the time of the event to remind them of their intention to attend. On top of that, guests will also receive reminder emails before the event to refresh their memory of all the event details. It's the trifecta of RSVP insurance – calendar integration, SMS, and email reminders.

The fact that this functionality is automatic means that guests don't have to do anything beyond RSVP - the event is already in their diaries - the likelihood of the event slipping their minds is highly unlikely, if not impossible.

REAL-TIME REPORTS

A professional RSVP service makes use of a real-time dashboard featuring live reports with up-to-date information on guest numbers, preferences, and outstanding responses. This data is stored on a secure server, accessible from anywhere as long as you have access to an Internet connection.

PHONE CALL FOLLOW-UP (CALL DOWN SERVICE)

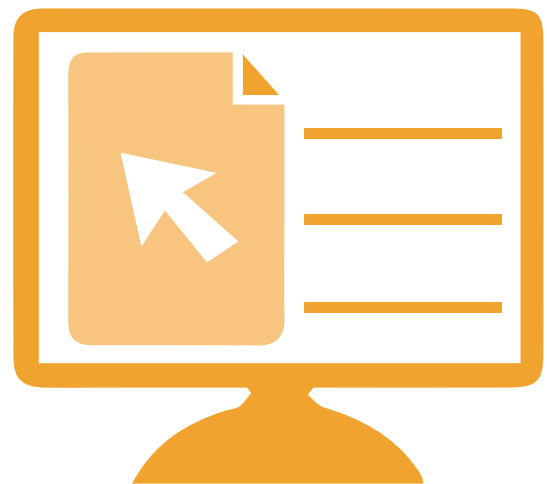
Some invitees need a nudge when it comes to providing their response. A professional RSVP service provides a team of consultants who are at your disposal to call invitees that have not yet accepted the electronic invitation. The consultants are typically fully briefed on all of the event details and able to answer any question the prospective guest may have. At the end of this process, event attendance will be boosted.



ON-SITE REGISTRATION

Professional RSVP includes the organization of all aspects of on-the-day event management - including name tags for all of the guests who will be attending, as well as on-site registration. Guest processing takes place via an RSVP iPad application, ensuring a professional image for corporate guests and fast-tracking of the traditional 'queue to find your name on the sheet'.

Events provide an opportunity for guests to network. It's helpful to supply name tags with company information - in order for other people to be able to visually ascertain whether or not this person is someone they should engage with.



THE FOLLOW-UP

If you were successful and got a crowd of the "right people" to attend your event, chances are you will probably want them to attend another event at some stage in the future. Retention is one of the more difficult steps in eventing - and the area where a professional RSVP management service is very valuable. The software stores all attendee information, preferences, and communication - making it easy to follow up with attendees after an event, and keep in contact should another event crop up which fits their identified interests.

CHAPTER SIX

MEASURING SUCCESS AND RETURN ON INVESTMENT

MEASURING SUCCESS AND RETURN ON INVESTMENT

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

Corporate events are often quite expensive, requiring a lot of resources – not only from a cost point of view, but also time out of the office for staff and sales people. This all adds up... It's therefore vitally important in most corporate circles to ensure that there's a definite return on investment (ROI).

Events are held with a purpose in mind – be it brand awareness, sales, relationship building, or lead generation – and an event is often measured against this. When evaluating an event, the objectives should be clear and measurable, for example:

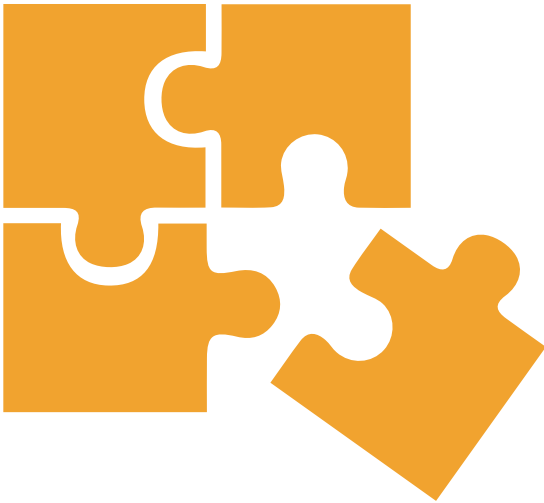
- Did the event stay within budget?
- Did the right people attend the event?
- Were the attendees followed up with?
- Were the attendees satisfied with the event experience?
- What business impact did the event generate?
- Were new relationships cultivated?
- Was the relationship with existing clients or customers grown or strengthened?
- Did the event generate sales or new leads?
- Did you gather the right information to extrapolate value from an individual?

With an effective online RSVP system, it's easy to collect the data necessary to determine the value of the event in terms of return on investment. It's possible to track an attendee's personal information, interests, and more.



THE VITAL PIECE OF THE EVENT PLANNING PUZZLE

It's said that you must *"fish where the fish are swimming"*. Professional RSVP is about getting the right people to your event, through cleverly designed emailers, an easy RSVP process, scheduled follow-up reminders, and a well-managed registration process at the event itself.



As an event organiser, you spend months preparing for an event – from the big logistics like venue and catering, to arranging speakers and sponsors, down to the finer details of gifts for VIPs – but there's one thing that can make or break an event and it's often out of your hands – the guests that attended and (often most noticeably) those that did not.

Getting the right people to the event is the ultimate measure of an event's success. And when it comes to this measure, it has less to do with quantity and everything to do with quality – the who.

IT'S WHO, NOT HOW MANY

Would your ideal guest rather network with 200 random guests from a variety of industries, or 20 senior representatives drawn from the leading firms in their own industry?

If the objective of an event is to make sales, there is no value in attendees who don't have the authority to make purchase decisions.

If it's a corporate event with the objective of launching a product or raising awareness, then the right guests must attend, for example media representatives. If it's an event that's requesting financial support, then the decision-makers need to be present, upper management and financial directors for example.





CONCLUSION

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Every event is important in the life of an event organiser - everything needs to run smoothly and professionally, and an online RSVP service can change the dynamic of an event in an instant. The better you service your guests, the more they will enjoy the event experience, and the more likely they are to attend a future event.

RSVP management is a time-consuming and complicated process - guests are critical to the success of the event, so keeping track of their changes, requests, and preferences is crucial. A professional RSVP service handles everything from the invitations through to event reminders, bringing clarity, efficiency, and organisation to the process.

With so many details to attend to, seamlessly managing RSVPs from one location is every event organiser's secret weapon.



We hope you found this practical guide to professional RSVP helpful. Get in touch with us if you would like a demo of The RSVP Agency's software and service.

CONTACT THE RSVP AGENCY FOR A DEMONSTRATION