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Which Is It? Marketing, Promotion, or Publicity?

Chris Brown, CEM, CMP

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Today's meeting, event and exhibit planning means a number of things to different people. Some say it's a combination of good negotiation skills and logistical know how. Others would say it's whom you know, not what you know. I say meeting and event planning is a thorough understanding of marketing, promotion, and publicity. Couple that understanding with solid implementation and chances are your meeting or event will thrive in our global economy. Let's define each term and show how each fits into our daily lives.

Marketing is a process of identifying individual needs and wants, and developing a plan to meet those wants and needs. During the course of action we're looking for challenges and identifying potential remedies. Marketing provides the framework for developing an event that attracts the right attendees and fulfills their expectations. Examples of marketing include:

Permission marketing – sending email broadcasts to attendees and prospects to encourage them to register for your upcoming event, but only with their permission.
Offline Marketing – leveraging direct mail, advertising, and promotion to drive people to your site.

The marketing plan brings the wants and needs into sharp focus, and should minimally include a target market analysis, competitive analysis, goals and objectives, marketing budget, promotional strategy, and measurement of success. Marketing costs often range from 10 to 20 percent of total costs.

Integrated marketing may include advertising (print, broadcast, indoor/outdoor), internet (email mailing lists, newsgroups, Web sites, banner ads), promotions (direct mail brochures, flyers, postcards, contests, give-a-ways), publications (magazines, newsletters, newspapers, directories), publicity (media relations, press kits/release/rooms), sales (telemarketing, direct sales), and sponsorship (events, organizations, publications).

Promotion is the act of getting the word out to the right market place. Choosing the right mix of media (radio, TV, printed materials, automated voice mail, email) along with opportunities such as sponsorship, direct mail, or trade shows, as well as testing and analyzing makes all the difference between OK results and extraordinary events.

I like to define publicity as the method of perception persuasion. Often managed through media relations, press kits, press releases, and press rooms, publicity should be directed to each market segment separately, and with repeated follow up to achieve the goals and objectives of a publicity plan. An example of publicity is content syndication – giving other Web sites the right to post your news. In return the site has a link back to your site. According to Yarissa Reyes, Communications Manager for Association Headquarters, "Public relations are interested in relationships, reducing conflict and improving cooperation."