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insights



Making the Most of Industry Events

eBook

Content comes first: reviving the lost art of storytelling



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We all know content plays a critical role in your PR and marketing strategies – forming the foundation for audience engagement and ensuring the right messages resonate with the right audiences. But what about when it comes to events?

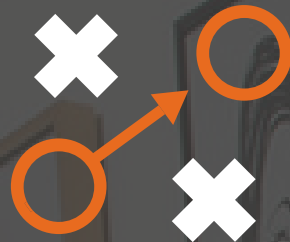
Do you consider a content strategy to be vital here? Does it influence your tactics?

The answer to both questions should be yes.

Events are not isolated instances. They should be tied together by an overarching strategy that supports the marketing and PR goals of your business. In the same vein, you need to ensure your content strategy does the same thing; joining all events together with a unified theme across the visual representation, presentations, collateral and event communications.

Whatever that may look like, **by developing content in advance**, you can use it to feed into activities, guide sales teams on the ground, provide insights for spokespeople to deliver during presentations, and supply valuable information to customers and prospects pre, during and post-event.





Strategy: setting the tone with theme and narrative

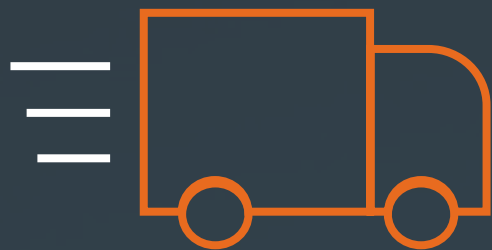
A good starting point is to review the objectives for the business and the marketing strategy for the year – and develop a theme aligned to these goals and the audiences you need to engage and influence. The theme then helps you develop your narrative, what you want to say and how you want to say it. In its simplest form, **this is all about storytelling**; taking the audience on a journey by capturing and keeping their attention with a valuable message that resonates.

The narrative will inform the tactical selection and determine what types of assets are needed and what they need to accomplish. Importantly, it's not just about setting the scene at the event with the right messages, your **narrative needs to stretch across the lifecycle of the event**.



Relevance: the heart of your assets

The permutations of content are endless, from **social tiles, infographics, blogs and emails, to eBooks, whitepapers, guides, top tips and video snippets**. But what remains the same is the value they bring to your end audience; the content needs to be relevant, demonstrate that you understand your customers, their industry, their challenges and have the solutions to address those issues. More than that, **your storytelling** needs to engage readers and be less about selling to them and **more about helping them solve their business problems**. This in turn will build trust with your brand and keep it front of mind when an opportunity arises.



Tactics: delivering the content

Your content assets will vary from event to event, dependent on the aims of each. To illustrate an example, for the **launch of a piece of proprietary research**, you could use a news release to generate industry coverage. This would be supported by interactive social tiles to create awareness across digital channels and select statistics in a direct mail campaign to prospects, to tease the upcoming launch and drive registration to the event. The research report could then be **exclusively launched at the seminar** during speaker presentations and interest captured (a lead generation opportunity) to receive a full copy. Finally, **post event** you could stage a webinar based on the key findings and support with a series of blogs to continue to recycle the asset.

If the aim of your event is to further amplify your messaging, increase awareness and win share of voice at a busy show, you could use your narrative to create hype based on what you're doing on stand and use interactive pieces of content like live demos and video, supported with social promotion, live tweeting, and blog content. **Post event**, you could release an exclusive eBook based on solving an industry challenge that's linked to the key concerns for prospects.



Follow-on: moving beyond the event

The **great thing about the assets you create as part of your content strategy is that they can be used before, during and after the event.** They can be repackaged and re-purposed, and used for related (or follow-on) marketing and social media campaigns. Whether that's giving prospects access to a hero piece of content, such as an eBook or whitepaper, or inviting them to a webinar or podcast and carrying on with a blog programme, your event content strategy can help you achieve the results you're after, reinforce your messaging and guide prospects through the sales funnel.

Turning an event into a prime media relations opportunity



Events are an excellent way of reaching your customers and your prospects — that's a given. But they also represent a prime opportunity to engage with journalists and play a crucial role in the media relations mix, enabling you to build relationships and generate positive coverage.

That's not to say you need to move away from the traditional tactic of setting up interviews for key spokespeople. **There are a number of alternative creative approaches you can use to interact with the media**, introduce them to your spokespeople and brief them to ensure your business is getting the right messages in the right publications read by the audiences you need to influence.





Make it compelling

Much like how a content strategy guides your narrative and approach to events, your media strategy should dictate what you do at an event. **Engaging with the media can be a powerful tool** for your business, but the key thing to remember is that **you need a reason to get them there.**

If you have major news with significant industry impact such as an M&A announcement, for example, then going down the route of setting up exclusive pre-briefings with top-tier press is absolutely the way to go. Briefing key contacts in advance ensures the journalist is well prepared and they can develop their story to publish as the news is launched at the event.

You could take that further and host a press conference live from the event, with an interactive media Q&A facilitated by a leading industry commentator, to generate immediate interest and coverage. You could also host a roundtable event structured around a key industry topic or the release of a piece of research, bringing in not just your own spokespeople but independent influencers and customer advocates.

Providing media with access to independent speakers gives an additional hook to attend and a greater pool of opinion for the journalist to access.



Make it creative

A company's own flagship event can sometimes be ruled out from a media perspective, with clients concerned about mixing customers and prospects with media attendees. However, **creating a dedicated press track gives journalists access to the most compelling content**, for example, keynotes, customers and future-looking technology updates. Arranging an exclusive lunch with the CEO or a site visit to a nearby customer creates a chance to see a real-world implementation in action.

Of course, if you're not going to have strong news for every event, you need to find creative ways to get that engagement and ensure you're **getting the best mileage out of your PR budget. The question is, how?**

Consider hosting a breakfast briefing, taking place before the event, close to the venue. Make it easy for journalists to attend and **give them something of value** once they are there. This could include views on upcoming trends, strong opinions on the industry or commentary on the future of the business.

Then of course there's hosting casual drinks on stand or inviting journalists around for a 'swing by'.

The value from these sorts of engagements is two-fold; first, while you may not have news to share, you're still getting your spokespeople in front of journalists for an informal chat about the show, the industry in general and upcoming trends. Second, the conversation goes both ways. Just as journalists are discovering more about your company and your take on things, even on an informal level, your spokespeople gain an understanding of the journalist's view of the industry, the future and what topics they are currently writing about or interested in.

These **types of meetings** are not likely to yield immediate media coverage, but they **can help shape future engagements** and provide ideas for future content and thought leadership opportunities.



Make it count

The success of your event is a culmination of months of hard work, but it doesn't end there. Regardless of the engagement, whether a formal interview, a meet and greet, informal chat or a press conference, **it's important to follow up with journalists**, thanking them for their time, checking if they have all the information need – and you'll be investing in that relationship for the future.

Getting the most out of your social media strategy at events



Whether it's your annual flagship event where you own the agenda, a leading industry expo where you will be exhibiting alongside competitors, or you're attending a small local seminar, planning your social media strategy from the start will help give you a greater chance for success.

Engage, engage, engage

The **first guiding principle** when developing your **social media strategy for events** is focusing on how to **engage** with your target audience and not just broadcast what you're doing. While the latter certainly does play a role, overall it's about **using content that will resonate** with customers and prospects to drive engagement, much like you would in your content strategy or in the material that you pitch to the media.

The **second guiding principle** is **understanding the digital lifetime value of the event** — this will always be greater than the duration of the event itself. Consider the size of what's being announced and who's attending. You also need to look at which platforms you own, when they should be introduced to your content, and what features you can take advantage of.



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Strategy, narrative and your audience

Your **social strategy** should be designed to help you **meet key objectives**; get signups to an event, drive footfall to a stand, generate interest, or a combination. The key is to define the objective upfront, create a narrative and key messages that need to be incorporated in all your efforts throughout the lifecycle of the event.

Knowing who you're targeting plays a crucial role when considering **your social media strategy**, so take a look at your existing social media following and determine whether you've built up the right followers for your event. If not, it's not a problem, just be prepared to put extra effort and spend behind your social media tactics potentially with a hyper-targeted paid social media campaign to reach your desired audience(s).



Different support layers, different objectives

Of course, there are different levels of social support depending on the objectives for the event. For an **intimate roundtable** of invited clients at your own offices discussing industry challenges, for example, a pre- and post-event campaign isn't necessary. You could tweet full anecdotes or quotes from the evening as an awareness-building exercise with some supporting images to bring the conversation to life.

Whereas for a **major exhibition or tradeshow** you'd need a comprehensive strategy that covers before, during and after the event. Again, there are various levels of support that can be included here; from building momentum and interest in the event as part of a larger content market campaign, to live tweeting with key takeaways to engage with any of your target audience who aren't in attendance, to promoting assets after the event that visitors to the stand (customers and prospects) would gain value from to amplify your message and continue the dialogue.

Social media checklist:



- Formulate the **objectives, narrative** and **key messages**
- Drive **awareness** and **build talkability**
- Feed your **key messages** with **content** creation which can be actively promoted across social channels
- Create branded and interactive **social media tiles** to promote pre-event content
- **Brief** your **team** and **external speakers**, providing social media guidelines to help them amplify content



- Talk with people attending, at the event and on social platforms
- **Blend** your **offline** activities with **online**, run Twitter polls alongside speaker sessions for on-demand engagement
- **Share the event** with those who couldn't make it
- Include **key insight** from other **presentations** and **what's trending** at the show
- Create extra **content live** from the show to generate interest
- Highlight big announcements with **live social media** coverage or a **video Q&A**



- **Promote content** from the show and afterthoughts **for follow-up** activity
- **Create content assets** linked to the interests of the attending audience to use for **post-event promotion** and continue the dialogue
- **Report back** to the business on **key social metrics** aligned to business objectives and **new lead opportunities** that have come from social media



Use your best ambassadors

There are always opportunities beyond your company's own social media channels. For example, **do you have any employees attending the event whose social media channels you can tap into?** If you do, it's a good idea to clearly brief your employees with how they can contribute to the social story, include key messages, event hashtags and a few gentle social media reminders on best practices. **Do you have any customers or guest speakers with a good social media following** that you can leverage as part of your PR, digital and social media strategy to further amplify your message?



Have a plan - but be flexible

When it comes to events, large or small, never underestimate how many minutes there are in a day. The majority of **your event's social media success will be down to how much planning you've done upfront** for each of the three stages, but also be prepared for the unexpected and be ready to jump on that next social opportunity as it arises.

Watch our webinar

Redefining event marketing: plan for success



Tune in to learn:

- How to plan, deliver and measure events so they improve relationships
- Integrated marketing best practice for event planning
- The best approach for measuring the impact of events



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We're always here to help. If something in this guide sparks a question in your mind or makes you re-consider your approach to any upcoming events, do give us a call.

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