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The Plan's the Thing

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By Carolyn B. Thompson

Professional Development Forum Online, March 2002



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It's the day of your regional seminar, and from the moment the registration desk opens, more members *and* nonmembers crowd in than you ever dreamed possible. Ninety-five percent of the people who registered show up--and you get walk-ins, too. The rooms are full of people laughing and taking notes. At lunch they're talking excitedly about how they can put what they've learned to work back at the office. The meal goes off without a hitch. At the end of the day the facilitator speaks glowingly to you--and as the attendees head out, everyone clamors for more.



Carolyn B. Thompson

You can get this kind of reaction at your next regional seminar with the help of a simple four-letter word: *plan*. The right plan will help you come up with the right place, promotion, and price.

I remember reading a study indicating that we save two minutes for every minute we spend in planning. Whenever I plan, I realize this truth. And yet, when a project comes up, I often want to jump in and just do it sans planning. The fact is, detailed planning will make the difference between a so-so seminar and a great one.

XII. Review the deadline dates by which you and your colleagues need to carry out this plan.

--Carolyn B. Thompson

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To make planning easier, I've provided two resources. The first is a detailed list of books from ASAE and elsewhere to help you with everything from writing a plan to creating better meeting promotions. The second is a [marketing plan worksheet](#) for your regional seminars.

So get out your pencil, or save the worksheet to your computer. You'll have more members and nonmembers at your conferences than you ever dreamed possible, and at the end of the day, they'll be clamoring for more.

Great resources for great meetings

For creative strategy ideas *and* help with implementing them, check out the following books. Then, to mine yet another rich resource, network with colleagues to trade and study other associations' marketing plans for regional seminars.

Books and kits available from [ASAE](#)

- [*Finding and Working With the Right Speaker*](#) (ASAE Background Kit, 1999)
- [*The Law of Meetings, Conventions, and Trade Shows: Meeting and Facility Contracts*](#), by John S. Foster III (1995)
- [*Professional Meeting Management*](#), edited by Edward G. Polivka (1996)
- [*Planning Accessible Meetings: A Guide to ADA Compliance*](#), by Bill Scott (1998)
- [*Planning Small Meetings*](#) (ASAE Background Kit, 1995)
- [*Proven Ways to Generate Thousands of Hidden Dollars From Your Trade Show, Conference, or Convention*](#), by Jack Levitan (1993)
- [*Themes, Dreams, and Schemes: Banquet Menu Ideas, Concepts, and Thematic Experiences*](#), by G. Eugene Wigger (1997)
- [*Winning With Diversity: A Practical Handbook for Creating Inclusive Meetings, Events, and Organizations*](#), by Donald Norris and Joelle

VI. List 10 ways in which the seminar will affect your market.

VII. Give 10 reasons that potential participants will turn to your association for this experience instead of getting it elsewhere.

VIII. Who are your competitors for this seminar?

IX. Marketing strategies for attracting your target market to the seminar.

On a separate sheet of paper, make a list of general marketing strategies. Then put on your thinking cap, and give the strategies a twist to fit your seminar. Next, feed that information into the structure below in an attempt to develop strategies to attract your target market, creating as many strategies as necessary.

Response/goal/outcome:

Action steps:

Person responsible:

Start-end:

Cost:

X. What are your costs? You'll want to consider planning, marketing strategies, registration, educational and event resources, facility rental, meals, equipment, coordination, and so forth.

XI. Determine your registration fee.

Figiol Lofton (1995)

(Call 202-371-0940 for more information on these, or any other, ASAE titles.)

Books from other publishers

- *Conducting a Needs Analysis*, by Geri McArdle (Crisp Publications, 1998)
- *How to Run Seminars and Workshops*, by Robert L. Jolles (John Wiley & Sons, 2001)
- *One-Minute Designer: Over 200 Before-and-After Tips and Ideas for Better-Looking, More Effective Ads, Brochures, Newsletters, and Training Materials*, by Roger C. Parker (IDG Books Worldwide, 1997)
- *Strategic Marketing for Not-for-Profit Organizations: Program and Resource Development*, by Armand Lauffer (Free Press, 1995)
- *Writing and Implementing a Marketing Plan*, by Richard F. Gerson (Crisp Publications, 1991)

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Planning a Regional Seminar

For best results, write so specifically that if you were to leave your association, your successor could follow your plan.

Start by copying down the mission, vision, and values of your association as well as your strategic plan's goals for the year. This will give you a point on the horizon on which to focus. Any member service will succeed if it serves your association's overall purpose.

Mission

Vision

Values

Your strategic plan's goals for this year:

- I. Who is your market for this regional seminar?
- II. What do the specific people you identified as your market value and need?
- III. What location serves this market? *(Remember, we're only talking about the people you identified for this seminar in Point I above.)*
- IV. What topics, other events, and teaching methods does this market need? In what order?
How long should sessions be?

Order

Topic/event

Method

Length

- V. Based on what your market needs, who will design, teach, and facilitate each of the educational portions and the events?