

## PROMOTION

“I don’t care what they call me as long as they mention my name.” – George Cohan

There are many aspects of a program that can make or break its effectiveness. If you hold a dance without first listening to the band’s demo tape, your attendees may leave after the first song because they cannot figure out how to dance to the accordion/kazoo mix. If you sponsor a well-known speaker and sell 150 tickets for a room that holds 25 people, you are going to have some disgruntled guests.

Regardless of other aspects of program planning, chances are it will not succeed if one element is not addressed: Promotion. Effective promotion is critical to the success of any event. There are some basic concepts to consider when you are brainstorming ways to publicize your event. Reflecting on the following questions is a good place to start:

- What type of audience do you expect? Increase the effectiveness of your promotion by gearing it towards the audience you expect. Consider the different approaches you would use to sponsor a carnival for children as opposed to a formal wine and cheese party for distinguished alumni.
- How much time do you have? Whenever possible, plan in advance. A month of promotional activity will lead to more positive effects than one week.
- What is your budget? Costs associated with promotion should always be included in the initial budget figures, never “whatever is left over.”
- Where can you reach your target audience? Decide how many people you would like to attend and organize your promotion to reflect that goal. You might hand out flyers on the Quad or send personal invitations to a select group, depending upon your goal.

Once you have settled on the basics, it is time to focus on strategy. When brainstorming with your committee, do not take budgetary limits into account. Allow a free flow of ideas and if you decide on one that is out of your budget, consider ways to alter the idea to work within your boundaries. Following are a few ideas to get your brainstorming process rolling:

- Posters-When you have a month to promote your event, keep in mind the following general rule: 15% of your posters should be distributed the first week, 25% during the second week, and 60% the final two weeks. Avoid nailing your posters to trees or hanging them in places that are not very visible.
- Flyers-Distribute your flyers during prime traffic times on campus, such as over the lunch

hour or between classes. The number of people passing by the Quad at this time can be phenomenal!

- Banners-It is difficult to pass by a decorative banner without taking a moment to see what it is advertising. When designed appropriately and placed strategically, a small number of banners can attract a large number of people.
- Professors-Send memos to departments that are related to your program and ask professors to mention it during class. Write notes on the chalkboards in these classrooms.
- Public events-Informing 10,000 people about your event may sound like a dream. Turn it into a reality: Ask the athletic department to make an announcement during a time-out of a sporting event.
- Buttons, t-shirts, hats...On what other wearable items can you place your ad? Think of all the people with whom you come in contact during an average week. If you wear a button promoting your event during that week, most likely everyone with whom you communicate will notice it, which will increase their chances of attending.
- Press releases-If you want to involve the off-campus community, be sure to include them in your promotional approach. Notify radio and television stations, newspapers and other mass media to advertise your program.
- Go big time-Hire a skywriter. Have someone attach a banner to his hot air balloon. Get a loudspeaker and drive around making your advertisement heard. If you think some of these are too expensive, check them out – you might be surprised. Maybe someone in your group has connections or a skywriter will give you a discount since she has been hired to do another announcement later that afternoon anyway.

Last hint: Be creative! We've all seen the popular places to hang posters – certain bulletin boards and poles are so cluttered with posters that we cannot distinguish one from the other. Hang yours where they are visible but not crowded out by other advertisements. Consider parking lots, bus shelters and other high-traffic locations. Also consider places where people are often located but have nothing to do but read your poster: Inside buses, bathroom stalls, waiting rooms. Let your imagination go!

### **Reference:**

Maki, R. M. How students can publicize a campus program. Campus Activities Programming, p. 36.

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