## Green Paper

How to create and grow a

multi-million dollar events division

# A step by step guide for local media companies





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### Introduction

Local media companies are uniquely positioned to develop event divisions, and some are developing millions in new revenue streams.

Events also open up new customer categories and add “share of customer” to existing accounts.

The investment is minimal – the addition of one to three people, with help from a local media team, can handle a schedule of 10 to 12 significant events.

This report gives a step-by-step ‘how to’ create an events division, not just one big event, using information gained from LocalMediaInsider case studies on, and interviews with, top event producers including MediaOne of Utah, the Chattanooga Times Free Press, the Denver Post and others.

About some of the core companies we looked at:



For MediaOne of Utah, non-traditional revenues are the fastest growing category in the company. Of those new revenue streams events are growing fastest both percentage-wise and in whole dollars, doubling in 2014. Events include monthly business awards at Utah Business, Salt Lake Comic Con, Utah Governor’s Summit, and the What a Woman Wants expo.

LocalMediaInsider estimates revenues from events at this company in 2014 are higher than $3 million.



The Denver Post events division launched in 2013 with an Amazing Aging Expo, then added a slightly smaller event, the Amazing Adventures Denver in June 2014, with only one full time manager.

LocalMediaInsider estimates their two events will clear $800,000 in profits.



The Chattanooga Times Free Press built an events division, Signature Events, from scratch over the last several years. It now produces ten plus expos and banquets with a staff of three and revenues in the multi-millions. Events include Bridal Affair; Kidz Expo; Enchanted Evening, a smaller bridal event; Life, a boomers and seniors expo; She, a woman’s expo; and the new ManXpo, launched in 2014.

Events in this report generate 50 to 82% in margins on revenues that range up to the high six figures per event for “traditional” winners. Although some local mega events are in the $2 million range, we focused on the best of the old and new ideas that will work in most local markets.

For company executives considering or engaging in a new division who need to sell the concept internally, here are some key benefits:

• 30% of a major events budget is spent on advertising and promotions. This means that events stand to earn 30% more if hosted by the local media.

• Trades for advertising can also significantly lower hard costs for food, venue, flowers and day-of entertainment, again, increasing margin.

• Event production has lower barriers to entry, typically leveraging people already on staff. Programs can be produced in-house with no organizational stress.

• Even first year events have high margins.

• Once established, events are formulaic annuals that tend to grow, with capacity for 10x revenue from the same staff via creating new events.

• Greater share of customer and new categories leads to larger market share in general.

• Editorial tie-ins with niche products help both increase market share.

One of the most convincing arguments for starting to host revenue producing events, is showing the size of revenues going to third party event producers in the market.

“The staff of local media don't understand their full value - or how much revenue is taken out of the market by both local start-up and out-of-state promoters,” says Jason Taylor, President of the Chattanooga Times Free Press and leading events evangelist.

He makes the case that local media already own the high ground if they choose to pursue the category.

The major objections internally within media companies include worry that events will distract focus within organizations already stressed from other changes, lack of confidence in being able to produce a profitable events and concern that revenues won’t “be enough” to justify the effort.

In general, using existing staff increases organizational stress while lowering costs. So this report addresses personnel issues with examples of options for integrating the division, or running it separately with minimal staff.

Not all revenue producing events - or divisions - succeed. Main reasons efforts fail include:

• Under-resourced; typically, lack of a full time dedicated manager.

• No business plan and/or P&L.

• Insufficient project management tools and organizational skill.

• Lack of commitment from the top.

• Wrong market and concept.

Below are the main concepts and tactics that work to avoid these critical issues. Key elements begin with looking at an events division as a well-resourced start-up. Even with minimal investment, local media companies already have a bigger, better events company out-of-the-box, by virtue of what they can leverage: An office, accounting, relationships, sales staff (if desired), credibility, graphics and marketing know-how, editorial tie-ins, in-house production of programs and, of course, the powerhouse of a dominant promotional vehicle.

**1. Running events as a business**

While many local media have promotions and marketing departments that sponsor advertiser events and hold some promotional events, a revenue producing division is significantly different.

The three models looked here have varying degrees of integration with the core media company, but all run events as a separate business unit with the following minimal characteristics:

• A full time separate staff, even it is a one person events manager.

• The events manager is compensated on profits, not just gross revenues. They are not salespeople but general managers.

• A P&L for each event and for the department as a whole.

These are qualitative issues that cannot be skipped over if the division is going to attain the level of revenues at stake, which can be in the millions. The biggest mistake in launching a revenue producing event is to use the promotions manager without changing the job description, compensation, and role.

**2. Banquets and Expos – Choosing the right models**

A common successful start-up strategy is to use the first franchise event to pay for the first full-time salary and establish the viability of the division. Selection of the right event is critical, so use this list of known winners and best new ideas.

There are three basic models for revenue producing events: Expos, banquets and conferences.

Expos are higher volume, lower margin events with thousands of attendees and dozens to hundreds of booths. One expo can pay the annual salary of the first hire, so this has been the choice of many local media with a large general audience.

Just to ballpark the opportunity, case studies have covered expos with 8,000 to 12,000 people for a female-based expo in a mid- to large-size market. Female audiences are one key to the “proven winner” formula.

The typical big local expo may have $150,000 to $600,000 in total sales, of which 60% may come from booth sales; with the rest from ticket sales and sponsorships.

There are also a few exceptional mega-expos with a national draw, such as the Salt Lake Comic Con produced by MediaOne of Utah, the second largest one of its kind after the original event in San Diego, and an event where all the numbers from attendance to sponsorships are mega-sized. Comic Con now boasts 170,000 attendees and $2 million in revenues.



These events are unique opportunities to draw a national audience, while this report focuses on local events applicable to most markets. However, stay aware of mega-opportunities and keep them in the “bucket” for the future.

Banquets, on the other hand, are small, higher-end, higher margin luncheons and dinners with a few hundred or so attendees. Profits can run $30,000 to $50,000 per business awards luncheon, and some publication have one per month - so it adds up.

Typically, banquets are recognition events driven by table and sponsorship sales. They can tie-in with niche magazines or other editorials. A business magazine like Utah Business may hold monthly luncheons with ticket sales of $75 each, or $1,500 for a table, that pays for the lunch, plus five to 20 sponsors who pay $2,000 and up.

Once ticket pays for the food, these sponsorships have a 100% margin.

Local conferences are much like banquets, with additional programing.

[Capital city events](http://localmediainsider.com/stories/Governors-Summit-yields-high-margines-for-Utah-newspaper,1235), so-named because they incorporate partnerships with the top local officials in a state capital, are a fantastically profitable model for media in state capital or influential city. These are day-long events with 1,000 or so attendees, sponsorships from $2,000 to $30,000, and huge net profits for the day. Content is provided by the Governor’s office so there are also no speaker’s fees.

Banquets and conferences are easy to integrate with editorial and could be produced with in-house staff. However, all three of the companies with successful divisions started with a large, profitable expo and at least one separate events manager, responsible for the P&L.

### Selecting the first expo

As mentioned, the largest audience for expos is female. Known winners in the women’s expo category include bridal fairs, home and kids expos.

If these categories are taken by strong competitors, additional “known winners” are categories that attract older people and, secondarily, women - aging, health and wellness. A locally-produced She Expo now hosts a wellness expo in an adjacent ballroom.

Both MediaOne of Utah and Chattanooga produce multiple women-oriented events, [“She Expo”](http://www.timesfreepressevents.com/she/2014) and “[What a Woman Wants](http://www.whatawomanwantsshow.com/)”, respectively.

 

Chattanooga also produces a “[Kidz Expo](http://www.timesfreepressevents.com/kidzexpo/2014/)”, their largest show in overall revenues.



Chattanooga Events Manager, Angela Doggett said that she, personally, would at least consider a smaller, higher margin bridal fair as one of the first expos if she were starting a division in a new market.

“They can work well with even a small number of brides and are easy to sell,” she says.

Her team took on a more competitive out-of-state bridal show competitor after a phone survey of local exhibitors confirmed they would support a new event from a local promoter. The Formal Affair, a February event, rebranded as the Bridal Affair, was so successful that a second similar event “Bridal Affair, Enchanted Evening ” is now held in August.

For detailed information on starting a bridal expo, see LocalMediaInsider’s original case study of how it all began in “[Bridal Expos](http://localmediainsider.com/stories/Bridal-Expos,856)”.

Besides looking for a proven concept and formula, the second factor to consider, of course, is competition. 60% of revenue comes from booth sales and if the top vendors are already committed, they may not attend a second event.

If the “known winners” are taken by entrenched competitors, look for open spaces from other events ideas that have been tried and tested elsewhere.

A few ideas for secondary events include Amazing Adventures Denver; HoHo, Chattanooga’s holiday gift expo; and Man Xpo that attracts a variety of vendors, from breweries and metrosexual grooming services to chainsaw art.

To analyze a category, look at event competitors in the area and research their size and strength. Most will list their vendors and sponsors on the website. So if an event should have hundreds of booths and only has ten, that’s a sign that the opportunity has not been fully tapped.

An easy way to test the strength of event competitors is attend their events, if the timing works, and conduct a phone survey of potential vendors to see how they feel about signing up for a different show, one hosted by and promoted by a media company.

Given competitive conditions on the ground – and on the advice of the sales team – the Denver Post launched Amazing Aging as its first expo.

Event Manager Sarah Weiss identified and attended a number of smaller, under-financed senior expos in the market, but analysis showed they would not be an obstacle considering the significant advantages the Post brought to the table.

Weiss even traded booths with competitors. And while some of competitors charged for entry, she allowed seniors to enter her event and park for free. The payoff was huge; the event sold 150 booths and yielded high six figures from booths and sponsors, according to LMI estimates.

The Chattanooga Times Free Press also holds a “[Life Expo](http://www.timesfreepressevents.com/life/2014),” a similar health-oriented event for boomers and seniors, acquiring significant top dollar sponsors in the hospital and health communities.



There may also be unique opportunities due to the size and characteristics of the market and existing relationships.

C2SV, a music and technology festival launched by the alternative weekly in Silicon Valley as its first revenue producing event, worked because it leveraged the area's status as a national technology hub, the city weekly’s street credibility in the entertainment space, and the passion of a highly engaged entrepreneurial owner with key contacts in the technology universe. This event will fall into the “mega event category” if it succeeds long term – it is now on its second year.

Amazing Adventures, ([case study here](http://localmediainsider.com/stories/Amazing-Aging-Expo-wraps-of-a-key-opportunity,1232)) the Denver Post’s second show, takes advantage of the area’s status as a popular destination for outdoor travel. The concept sprung organically out of the Amazing Aging show; many of those attendees were requesting more travel information.



So look for this winning combination: A large and/or high-end local audience, preferably women; a phone-tested market of numerous, higher-end vendors and sponsors, and lack of significant competition.

### Banquets, luncheons and conferences

The “known winner” in the banquet category is business recognition events.

Like some business weeklies, Utah Business, a monthly, now hosts monthly events that dovetail with editorial content: CEO of the Year, Best Companies to Work For, Top 40 under 40, 30 Women to Watch, 30 Women Who Really Make a Difference, 50 fastest growing companies in the state and CXO of the year, which includes all C-level executives except the CEO. The events run every month, see full details in the [case study here](http://localmediainsider.com/stories/Learning-from-Utah-Business-Leverage-a-business-journal-magazine-or-section-into-a-money-making,1236).

The formula is consistent: Events start with cocktails at 11a.m. until noon, followed by an hour and a half lunch and program. Tickets are around $75, or $1,500 for a table – plus sponsorships, which range in the thousands and are pure profit.

Table sponsors are often B2B companies who receive the list of attendees with phone and email as a perk, and extra advertising.

We estimate this kind of luncheon, in a successful program, clears $30,000 to $50,000 in profit per lunch. There is typically a strong editorial tie-in, so much so that some business journals, technically, could be considered events companies.

Another type of business events are conferences. At MediaOne of Utah, the "Governor’s Utah Economic Summit" and the “Governor’s Energy Summit” are day long capital city conferences sponsored by the Governors’ office, which supplies the high level speakers from government agencies and contacts. The governor is the keynote speaker. This year, the team added the “Governor’s Health Summit.”

See all details in the full case study, “[Governor’s Summit Yields High Margins](http://localmediainsider.com/stories/Governors-Summit-yields-high-margines-for-Utah-newspaper,1235)”.

As noted above, if a media company is located in a state capital city or a city which has a strong political and institutional interest in energy or economics, health or other political issues, consider this model.

Sponsorships range from $2,000 to $30,000, so ten to fifteen sponsors can equate to hundreds of thousands for the day, including advertising. See a full copy of the [package here](http://utahsummit.com/assets/2014_sponsorshippacket.pdf).

LMI estimates these events are one of the simplest and highest margin to produce (if you are unsure about which event to start with MediaOne of Utah can identify the best opportunities with about four hours work in market, and will partner to help set up a program. See contacts below).

Banquets, however, can also be community-oriented and family-focused.

The Chattanooga Times Free-Press’ uber-popular awards for top high school athletes, [Best of Preps](http://www.timesfreepressevents.com/bestofpreps/2014/), and the Readers Choice Awards, are examples of for-profit banquets.

**3. Staffing an events division that generates millions**

In spite of big profits generated, all the companies in this report took a conservative, "crawl, walk, run" approach to building the department’s personnel, starting with one person and one major event that "pays for the first salary," and then a second person supported by a second event. This team can then run numerous events before a third person is required.

Check internally to see if there is a potential events evangelist. Test candidates’ interest by asking them to contribute to research, attend other events, collect leads lists and report back ideas.

Event producers don’t need any specialized technical skills. However, they do need to be highly organized, responsible, energetic and detailed. They also need to be team leaders since most will work with the sales team, and business minded, since they will be wrangling with trades and selling sponsors. Beyond these requirements, the skill set is trainable, and a talented administrator within the company may jump at the opportunity to advance.

Once managers have one or two events under their belt, two people can add more events, adding a third person as the division grows and becomes stronger.

There are a variety of ways to organize the department. Key responsibilities are: General manager responsible for the P&L; booth and sponsorship sales; securing venues and vendor contracts; promotions and day-of management.

At MediaOne of Utah, where the retail sales staff does not sell booths or sponsorships at all, the event team includes one general manager with responsibility for the P&L - the VP of events - and two events sellers who also manage day-of execution.

At Chattanooga Times Free Press, on the other hand, events are more integrated. President Jason Taylor utilized the existing marketing manager, Lyndsi Sebastian, a former intern who had worked her way up, to serve as the GM of the department overall.

Then he hired an experienced expo producer, Angela Doggett, who had worked for him before, as the events manager. Between the two, they could run 9 to 10 events, split between banquets and expos, before a much needed third hire was included to grow sales.

The initial set of roles were refined as the events calendar grew:

**a. Marketing manager**

• Primary responsibility for creating the budgets and monitoring the P&L’s.

• Leadership responsibility for four annual banquets, and sponsorship sales of same.

• Oversight of other events.

• Secures celebrity hires.

**b. Events manager**

• Leadership responsibility for overseeing the five annual expos.

• Oversees expo booth sales, coordinating with the sales department.

• Oversees vendor contracts and relationships for all events.

The events manager initially coordinated with the sales department on the booth sales. The phone number on promotional materials went to the marketing department, with the events manager pre-closing leads and turning them over to the ad staff to follow up.

As the department grew, a third person was hired to help sell and handle new account call-ins and the account rules changed.

The core sales team was given up to two months to close their own leads, after which the events department could contact them.

The three person team can produce major events about once a month, in addition to scheduling house ads, charitable sponsorships and other marketing.

At the Denver Post, a new division, a single events manager assists the sales team on closing all booths, 70% of accounts are advertisers, 30% call ins. With this support she has been able to run two large expos without an additional hire.

At MediaOne of Utah, where events teams are separate, most incremental booth sales are new accounts, and two of the three person department are sellers. This company has an overall policy in which retail sales reps sell a limited number of digital products, but is not all products, so it has special teams of sellers. The event team has produced 150 events, including expos, awards luncheons and conferences, in the last eight years.

Our take is that a dedicated seller for events is necessary long term. Otherwise, events act like “special sections” with one huge push towards a deadline, in direct conflict with the consultative sales model. Best case scenario is a hybrid approach in which the core sales team has the ability to include event packages in the sale, but a separate team is responsible for additional sales and goals.

Thus, there are four possible solutions to handling sales to core advertisers: A separate seller who can call on legacy accounts after a cut-off (two months prior to the event), paying double commission if a core account is upsold by the event team; a totally separate team with a referral bonus to core sellers; and paying all event sellers on the overall profits of the event, no matter who sells it, rather than a direct commission on sales.

**c. Involvement from the rest of the company**

Even for companies with separate division, all models require leadership at the C-level. However, at a few companies, events are a companywide opportunity to mingle with potential advertisers and lead sources.

As the president of the company, Taylor is the lead evangelist for the events team and the company-wide model.

“My staff would tell you that I am marketing-oriented and the ideas for the events come from me. Whoever is in charge (of the company) has to provide top-down ownership,” Taylor says.

“Sometimes another publisher will seek me out to ask about a particular event and starts out saying 'I didn’t go but ...' I know right then where the problem starts,” he says.

Staffing on the day of, can be company staff, outside contractors or a combination. But at Chattanooga expos are companywide events with most of the staff attending, from the editor to the sales people, so that 30 people are always working.

To create this engagement, Taylor gives compensatory days off and relies on both volunteers and voluntolds. As events grow, more of the staff has chosen to attend key events voluntarily, an unusual circumstance.

“The editors enjoy it, they pick up new stories talking to people at the events.”

At the Denver Post the sales people are also “on the floor” providing additional concierge style support, since most of the vendors are clients, with outside contractors to supplement.

At MediaOne, on the other hand, the two VP’s of event sales are responsible for day of management, using support from a variety of outside contractors.

### Partnering with other events

If an event promoter is already too entrenched to compete with in an important franchise area, some events divisions have partnered.

“It needs to be an event that is important or relevant to us - and not watered down with other media sponsors,” says Taylor.

His team considers events that are strategically aligned with a significant vertical such as real estate, automotive, or SMB’s, or a key demographic the newspaper is targeting, such as women, young families and minorities.

An example of this was a home show, in which Chattanooga sold booths and received $100 per booth sold, by either the promoter or its own sales staff, in return for promotional marketing.

Mega-events such as Comic Con, also pose opportunity for winning national event, local media partnerships. Look for opportunities to move the event to your area and the expo producer may be interested in a partnership that offers the resources of a major local media.

**Event turn-arounds**

Another place to look for events is to simply review legacy events that are currently money losers.

Taylor has turned around a couple of major events, starting with the Readers Choice Awards. Three years prior, “it was not a coveted award, and not everyone voted.”

To give the awards a face-lift, Taylor changed the logo and created a “stringent list of rules” that added to the credibility.

The awards party was also transitioned from a small, money-losing event to a large event that broke even, “plus a little” on ticket sales.

The former Awards party was free, and did not include food, plaques or other things to make the party feel special.

The new party includes a full menu, appearance by Miss Tennessee and a well-known “DJ from Atlanta”. Winners still get two free tickets, but everyone else pays $50 to $60, accounting for about 1/8 of the $300,000 in mostly advertising revenues the Awards now earns overall.

Another turn-around was the high school sports banquet, Best of Preps, that once lost $26,000 per year.

The event recognizes the best players in each sport from 96 local high schools, then awards a “Player of the year” at a banquet. Taylor amped-up the program one year by inviting Michael Phelps to speak.

The new formula - celebrity guests, better food and promotions - resulted in sold-out table sponsorships. The program itself now has 24 pages of advertising, including banks and insurance, several auto dealers and telecommunications companies, an allergy clinic, fast food and sports store chains.



"Everyone wants to give back to high school sports," Jason says.

Another simple, revenue maker was a "Movie Opening" event. The Times found a movie with a tie-in to Chattanooga (movie was made there or referenced it in some way), then invited town leaders to a red carpet grand-opening where they could dress-up and walk the carpet in front of paparazzi - that is, the staff photographer. Sponsors included a high-end auto dealership that monetized the event.

**4. Setting financial targets**

Top event managers are the GM, responsible for creating the overall budget and managing to the P&L.

MediaOne of Utah bonuses the manager not just on the revenue target, but also gives a substantial incentive for achieving a 50% margin.

When sales are integrated with the core sales team, the core sales managers also have accountability for the events goal.

At Chattanooga event revenue targets are included as a line item under “advertising” and the sales director is accountable for a specific percentage of the sales, originally 70%.

“Some papers have messed up because no one is really accountable for the revenue goal. It has to be treated the same way as advertising and circulation,” Taylor says.

Here is a sample event [P&L](http://www.localmediainsider.com/stories/Use-this-Event-PL,1243) to use in event planning.

**5. Booth sales – pricing and packaging**

Many large local expos expect to sell at least 100 to 200 booths. Pricing of booths typically starts with at least three simple tiers.

The basic package can include an add in the program, opt-in contact lists of attendees, additional tickets, signage to post at store locations, giveaways at the event and the option to add promotional items to swag bags.

Pricing for a single booth package at local events in case studies ranges from $350 to $1,800, depending upon a number of factors, the strength of the event, size of the market, vendor type and competition.

At the Chattanooga Times, for example, all booth vendors receive:

• A full color 1/8 page ad in the program distributed prior to the event to the full circulation of the paper and at the event to attendees.

• A banner ad and link on the event website for a year.

• A listing on the website with a description of their company.

Bridal Affair booth pricing is:

• Package A (10 x 10 booth space) $ 700

• Package B (10 x 20 booth space) $1,250

• Package C (20 x 20 booth space) $2,225

• Package D (20 x 30 booth space) $3,000

• \* Corner booths are an additional $50 each

But not all Chattanooga’s events are priced that high; the first year Man Xpo single booths sell for just $400 including print and online, and the HoHo Expo, a holiday gift event, sells for just $350 for a 10x10.

On the other hand, The Denver Post, a larger market, launched the Amazing Aging with booths pricing that started at $1,800, and included five of tiers with increasing amounts of space in the program, such as 1/8, 1⁄4, 1⁄2 and a full page with a full page editorial for premium sponsors.

If the attendee list is not part of the package, a single opt-in email can build a list to include or upsell.

See more strategies in ‘[Packaging for event booths and sponsorships](http://www.localmediainsider.com/stories/Packaging-for-event-booths-and-sponsorships,1310)”.

**6. Sponsorships**

The trade show floor and program of expos are crowded! So sponsorship of expos allows companies to co-brand with the whole event, directly participating in thousands of dollars in external promotions, plus exclusive or semi-exclusive signage at the event.

Sponsorship packages also more booths and better placement, additional advertising, and other opportunities.

Just about anything can be “sponsored” so make a list of all items – badges and lanyards, chair covers, rest areas, green rooms, pre and post event parties, the stage, kids play areas, and so on. The number one opportunity that national events we looked at utilized and local events did not, was the ability to build-out more sponsorship value, and offer it “a la carte” as smaller upsells to booth vendors.

Sponsors may also pay to provide content. At Chattanooga expos, for example, a large hospital sponsor received a larger space to provide free health screenings, providing hard leads and a popular event. McDonalds, a sponsor of the Kidz Expo may be interested in a kids play area at all the shows.

Major trade sponsors can also lower the costs of the events - the same as cash dollars on the bottom line. Flowers, venues and food can all be traded.

For its bridal fairs, for example, Chattanooga originally traded for the venue, a hotel, and catering for the hospitality suite and cocktail party; new restaurants were interested in ways to network with brides and high-end spenders.

### B2B banquet, luncheon and conference sponsorships

At banquets, tickets pay for the event, but sponsorships are the stars, driving incremental 100% margin revenues.

Typically, “table sponsors” get a number of tickets and a list of attendees as part of the price, plus advertising in the program. Tiers also include other opportunities to have a greater presence.

Here are some perks to include in tiers:

• Introduction of speakers.

• Seats at key speaker tables or with influential such as CEO’s and politicians.

• Placement of information packets on tables and in packets.

• Logos on signage.

• Extra advertising with good, better, best placement.

• Attendee list with contacts.

• Show/sports tickets (some kind of tie-in, and procured on trade)

Sponsors pay $2,500 to $30,000 for the opportunity to rub shoulders with potential B2B clients at a Governor’s Summit. Table sponsors we talked to have bought a table primarily to obtain the attendee list and/or the extra advertising package, which they knew they could use later in the year.

Other benefits are status-oriented (relative size and position of logos, better seating) and provide the opportunity to be seen as a business leader at the right table and rub shoulders with people that is it otherwise difficult to meet in-person.

Here is a great list of inclusions from $2,000 to $30,000 [packages](http://localmediainsider.com/stories/Vendor-packets-and-information-for-events,1311). For more pricing and packaging ideas see our [overview here.](http://www.localmediainsider.com/stories/Packaging-for-event-booths-and-sponsorships,1310)

**7. Ticket sales and why content is king**

Up to 30% of some expo revenues came from tickets sales, although not charging for entry is also a strategy for quickly building attendance at new events, such as Amazing Aging and Amazing Adventures, both first time expos produced by the Denver Post.

So it’s a balance.

Here are some typical ticketing strategies from our reports:

• Seniors expo: Seniors are free.

• Bridal fair: Brides are free and everyone else pays $5.

• Women’s expos, adults are $5, kids get in free, seniors are half price.

• Tiered ticket prices including a separate line, and “all access” to VIP areas and parties.

• Free parking with ticket.

• Adding value to high ticket B2B luncheons by matching a show or sports ticket obtained on trade for every luncheon ticket purchased.

Some events that sell tickets also build attendance by giving booth vendors 50 or more free e-tickets to email to their customer list. With 150 vendors, that’s up to 7,500 free tickets given out to the right target audiences – all of the vendors’ own customers. This rewards booth vendors and builds attendance, while the media keeps the opportunity to sell their own tickets. A great combination.

For extra publicity, give signage to each vendor, asking them to post the signs in-store.

But the best way successful promoter drove ticket sales and attendance is via celebrity appearances and fun activities at the event. Content is king.

Celebrities’ can speak, judge related contests, or just sign autographs make a big difference. Make sure to keep the requirement specific. Is it one talk or 2? How long? What time?

The Chattanooga team goes all out to bring in celebrities, paying Betty White to make an appearance at a senior-oriented show. Other popular draws are reality TV stars, especially in related categories, such as the Cake Boss judging a wedding cake bake off, etc.

The two-day She Expo, held in July, included appearances from Cheryl Burke and Mark Ballas of Dancing with the Stars. Michael Phelps was tapped to speak at – and turn around - the high school athlete awards banquet, Best of the Preps.

For the Amazing Aging event, Weiss hired Discovery Channel’s travel guide Rick Steve, to speak twice and sign books twice during the day.

The new Man Xpo tempts men inside with a Nascar simulator, bass tank, golf simulator, fitness obstacle course – and appearance by the Titans Cheerleaders. Special guest is ESPN’s Kirk Herbstreit, the lead anchor on College Game Day.

On the inexpensive side, a free way to find celebrities is to use authors, who typically will appear in return for the promotional exposure.

In Denver, Weiss put together a team of 45 experts on health, finance, travel and housing for seniors, all of whom spoke for free in simultaneous panels, after submitting an application. As such, speakers also serve as social promoters of the event.

Other content ideas used successfully include fashion shows, pet fashion contests, and second expos inside or adjacent to the show, such as a wellness expo at a women’s expo, or a photography expo inside a travel oriented expo. Kidz Expos have all kinds of activities for children set up around the showroom.

Finally, this is a great time to run a related contest with the giveaway promoted in advance. An example could be a full wedding giveaway promoted in advance, but announced on site to one of the ticket holders.

**Creating premium and VIP tickets**

For incremental revenues, Taylor notes, just about any VIP treatment, real or perceived, can result in tickets upsells, even a velvet rope or shorter line.

Pre-parties, after parties, backstage passes to meet celebrities, are also ways to reward VIP ticket holders.

And at banquets and conferences, ticket sales, like sponsorships, are the star. A cost of $75 or so per person, not only pays for lunch, but also turns a profit and is the second source of revenues after sponsorships. Value includes the ability to “meet the most influential” business leaders, and the contact list.

**8. Getting organized**

Events seem straight forward, but actually compress a dizzying variety of logistical details into a very short period of time. Here are some organizational strategies from the leading producers:

**• Event Websites**

Most expos have a unique brand, URL and website that stays live all year to show photos of prior events, promote the next one and provide a year long live profile for vendors.

While a website is promotional address, it is also an organizational tool – it can house all the materials needed:

- Title, description and image of event.

- Expo ticket pricing and contact information.

- Bios on celebrities.- Master schedule of activities.

- Booth pricing and email capture form.

- Email capture for ticket sales form.

- Maps and direction.

- Ad units.

- Photos and videos from the prior year’s event.

- Vendor information should be in one area: the contract, sales packet, information packet and show floor. ( [See examples here](http://localmediainsider.com/stories/Vendor-packets-and-information-for-events,1311))

- Contests.

**• The Master calendar**

Best practice is to hold a fall meeting to plan out the events for the following year and post them on the master calendar.

If the events department is also responsible for advertiser events, creating one master calendar can be tricky. Most departments allow event producers to spontaneously request sponsorships all year long disrupting the workflow of a lean department.

The Chattanooga Times Free Press’ integrated team, where the marketing department also runs other sponsorships, came up with a simple solution. They create a Master Calendar of events - both for their own events and for event sponsorships - one time per year.

Every September the marketing manager sends an RFP to all external event organizers, who then have one month to make a request for the following year.

In November, the manager compiles all the requests in a notebook and meets with the publisher and CFO to review which ones to take on, based on profitability and strategy.

”If you want money or a sponsorship, you get one chance a year. Otherwise, it is so wasteful of time, and you are (agreeing to do things) on a whim,” Taylor said.

In fact, the time-suck of marketing directors spending all year vetting new opportunities is one of the main reasons most local media are too understaffed to produce revenues from their marketing departments.

### The events timeline

Each event needs a timeline.

Each staff produced event takes six months from start to finish and once the division gets going, multiple events are underway at any given time.

Important dates to include:

- Six months out – contacts with venues and other major suppliers secured.

- Six weeks out - promotions start with a heavy push at the end.

- Two weeks out - some expos invite vendors to a pre-show cocktail party where they can walk the floor and receive their info package. When show-time comes, they know where to go and what to do.

- One week out, a team meeting reviews roles, reposted to everyone working the event by email.

- Two days out – Huddle to review roles.

- The day before the event - Vendor set-up, including credentials for the next day, taking careful notes on which vendors will give credentials to their own staff.

**• Day of checklist**

Since the challenge posed by events is detailed logistics that take place in new locations, a day-of planning checklist is an indispensable tool. It should be organized around all the physical areas of the event.

There are numerous of these areas: The entrance for vendors, different ticket lines, green rooms, the floor, the stage, backstage, and rest and snack areas.

So for the day-of checklist, start with a list of every area. Then list every item, from lighting, signage, tables and chairs, to pens, name badges and packets underneath each area. This is a key management tool to get the event to a smooth rolling start.

A editable template for a [Day of Checklist](http://www.localmediainsider.com/stories/Formal-Affair-CheckList,1240) from Chattanooga is available at LocalMediaInsider. Download it to create one for each of your events.

**• On the floor – Organize to treat booth sponsors like royalty**

A soft detail that makes some events better than others is literally how booth sponsors are treated by media staff at the event.

So have enough people on the floor engaged in "giving vendors whatever they want." For vendors, running a booth at an event is hard work – and they need support. Some media companies staff up with outside contractors. Others use their own staff.

Taylor believes using company employees is an important way to build relationships. His staff at events are heavily engaged in helping merchants set-up and break down booths, as well as bringing them bottles of water during the show.

As many 30 people from his company are at an expo that may have 150 booths – an outstanding 3 to 1 ratio.

“Think about it, they are going to pay you to spend the day with you. When you help them load and unload their booth they are going to thank you and feel like you are in it with them," Taylor says.

"All day that day their ad reps are there and the publisher is there. It is so powerful to spend the day with them."

**• Post-event reviews**

A last piece of staying organized is to create and file a working review after the show, while everything that happened is still top-of-mind.

After each event hold a team meeting to talk about what worked, what didn’t and any new ideas. The review goes into the file to be used in planning the next year’s event.

### Other resources

Please see the list of resources linked below:

• Copy of a high end [corporate sponsorship](http://localmediainsider.com/uploads/files/edf254d888.pdf) package.

• A downloadable [P&L](http://localmediainsider.com/stories/Use-this-Event-PL,1243)

• Day-of [events checklist](http://localmediainsider.com/uploads/files/3197826732.pdf).

• [Pricing and packaging](http://www.localmediainsider.com/stories/Packaging-for-event-booths-and-sponsorships,1310)

Also see these websites:

[Signature Events](http://www.timesfreepressevents.com/) at Chattanooga Times Free Press for links to:

[Formal Affair](http://www.timesfreepressevents.com/enchantedevening/2014)

[Kidz Expo](http://www.timesfreepressevents.com/kidzexpo/2015/)

[She](http://www.timesfreepressevents.com/she/2014)

[Life](http://www.timesfreepressevents.com/life/2014)

Several sample floor plans, vendor contracts and various vendor welcome packages are available in “[Vendor Packages and Events](http://localmediainsider.com/stories/Vendor-packets-and-information-for-events,1311)”.

Many thanks to Brent Low of MediaOne of Utah; Jason Taylor and the team at Chattanooga Times Free Press and to Sarah Weiss, Events Manager at the Denver Post, for sharing their expertise with our members.

For more information and individual case studies go to the [Event channel](http://www.localmediainsider.com/event/?multiple_categories=narrow&search_filter=&category_id%5b%5d=176) at LocalMediaInsider.com.

To partner on an event or division contact Brent Low at [brent.low@mediaoneutah.com](mailto:brent.low@mediaone.com). They can assess your market for the right event in about four hours and partner to produce it, include use of their ticketing app.

Finally, don’t forget to enter your own best events in LocalMediaInsider’s [Best of Local Media Awards](http://adcampaigncontest.upickem.net/engine/YourSubmission.aspx?contestid=73867) or send them to us directly at alisacormer@localmediadinsider.