

Standing-room only?

From invitations to getting the content of your presentation spot on, Karl Hartey continues his series on how to organise an enjoyable and rewarding seminar



You've decided upon your target market and worked out your catchment area. Now you need to finalise an invitation list. Think about the age and wealth of person you want. Isolate the types of property they are likely to own and you have the beginnings of a list (which can bolster your client roll).

Data companies:
BRG Direct – 01736 351681
Boulder Marketing – 01424 210099
Wegener Direct Marketing – 0207 8719103
Right Sort Mailing – 01948 831000

Enlist the services of a data company (see left). Telephone a range of these firms to ensure you are getting the best price, the right information and the necessary quality of service and support.

Ask the data company to supply names that meet your criteria within your locality. Experience shows that you need 10,000 names to generate a 1% return of 100 people.

Once you have sufficient addresses, it is time to contact the mailing company. When I first started running seminars my big fear was "how am I going to put

10,000 invitations in 10,000 envelopes, lick 10,000 stamps and lug them to the pillar-box?" Answer? There is no need to do this if you are willing to pay someone else to do it. All you have to do is supply the data and invitation for them to send out on the dates you suggest.

Have the responses sent to your office. Don't worry: only 100-odd people will reply, not 10,000. If you get more than 100 responses, that's good news, not bad.

What about the invitation itself? Remember the rule about not having a second chance to make a good first

impression: the invitation is going to be the first thing the prospective client sees, so it has to be right or it will end up in the bin. Use a simple invitation with a letter explaining who you are and what you do, perhaps with endorsements from existing clients.

You should send the mailing four to five weeks before the date of the seminar. Ideally, you want them to arrive on a Friday or Saturday, when people may have more time to look at the post. So post one or two days earlier, depending on whether you use first or second-class post. Enclose a prepaid reply card, a free telephone number and/or a website address so they can book.

When you receive a reply, pick up the telephone and make a courtesy call to confirm to the client that you have received their message and booked a place for them. When on the telephone, ask a series of questions such as:

- Do they have any special needs (such as mobility/access);
- Are they vegetarian;
- Would they like to reserve seats at the front;
- Do they have any impairments such as visual or hearing.

Next, write to confirm and send their admission tickets along with a map of how to get to the venue. We send up to four additional tickets to allow them to bring some family, friends or work colleagues. Sometimes people enjoy safety in numbers, but more importantly this might just provide us with some additional guests free of charge.

The next item is support material – the stuff you give out on the day. First, ensure that you have decent pads and pens. If you put these on their chairs they will take them away. A pad with your brand and details will probably cost anywhere from 50p to £1.00 but every time they use it, they will think of you. Pens cost much the same. You should also assemble a welcome pack to tell the client the following:

- The history, achievements and constitution of your company;
- Your mission statement;
- What type of clients you deal with;
- What types of business you handle;
- Client testimonials.

Three days before the seminar is due, call to confirm attendance. This is a courtesy call to remind them, check they have directions and see if they are bringing along any other guests. This allows you to finalise catering and accommodation requirements.

You also need three days to confirm with the hotel that everything is as it should be: room, seating, presentation material, food and drink and staffing levels. Remember: if the hotel or any other supplier makes an error, it will reflect badly on you.

Before the event, visit the venue to get a feel for the room. Make sure the seats are properly positioned and that tables are provided. Remember: a few chairs rather than too many so that you look to be in demand. Have as much light as possible, but check that all wires are hidden or taped down. Background music can help the atmosphere – but choose carefully. Go for something classical and well-known rather than Kylie or Busted.

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Presentation points

When devising your presentation, ensure you cover the basics: what are you going to talk about and what title are you going to put to it? When you've decided this, stick to your plan. You will suffer if you stray from your prepared material. The talk is about showing that you are confident in your knowledge and able to share it.

There are a number of steps you might follow:

- 1 Brush** – when you are talking you need to have a broad-brush approach. This means that you should be speaking about a broad range of subjects - not too much detail, because this can be boring. You need to be able to touch upon subjects to arouse interest and then move forward.
- 2 Fish** – don't be a fish out of water. Don't talk about things you do not know about or you risk blowing your credibility. If you want to cover something you are not fully aware of, do your homework first.
- 3 Rocks** – do not be hard on your audience. You are not there to tell them that they have done anything wrong with their investment decisions in the past. You are there to win trust and show your confidence. Do not take on challenges, do not try to win battles; if there are questions that come from the floor that you do not like, simply pass and move on. Do not become confrontational.
- 4 Yacht** – a yacht has sails and you pitch the sails according to the direction that you wish to go in. Know where you are going and talk and be confident. Use your slides or use your script to keep you on track and make sure that your timing is correct.
- 5 Hook** – the purpose of the seminar is to get clients to come and see you in your office – give them a hook. Show that you care, show that you can help.
- 6 Golf Club** – to get the best out of your golf game you need a smooth shot and to get a smooth shot you need to practise. Before the presentation, practise, practise and practise. Perfect preparation prevents poor performance.
- 7 Steps** – when you climb steps you climb one step at a time; when you are giving a talk, take it one step at a time.
- 8 Egg Timer** – in an egg timer, the grains run from the top to the bottom at a certain pace. When you are giving a talk, pace yourself: not too slow and not too fast.
- 9 Bus stop** – buses know when to stop. With regard to the talk, work within a time frame. If you are giving a one-hour talk, make sure that it is one hour long. Practise your timing. Keep monitoring the time, as you do not want to overrun. Have a clock in the back of the room, or a colleague that gives a 10-minute countdown. Don't rely on your wrist-watch, because there is no way to look at it without distracting the audience. Take it off and put it on the lectern in front of you.
- 10 Laurel & Hardy** – even a serious talk should have room for humour. But don't try to be a stand-up comedian – and remember the tastes and sensitivities of your audience. Steer clear of religion, sex, gender and other common taboos. Never use bad language and don't insult anyone.
- 11 Chop sticks** – chop sticks are used for picking up the minutest grain. In your talk, give attention to the detail of your language. Choose your words carefully. If you are talking about £1,000, for example, use the word 'pounds' and not the word 'grand', as it will devalue what you are trying to say. When you practise your speech beforehand, get feedback on the clarity and appropriateness of language you use.

Next month's article will focus on delivering a first-class presentation