

The Successful Business Seminar

The business seminar is becoming an increasingly popular way for companies to educate customers on the benefits of their products. The seminar offers an true opportunity because those in attendance are experiencing the product in an environment completely controlled by the company, while the group dynamic serves to create a positive environment. The potential of the seminar has proven too much of a temptation for many less than ethical companies that use the tactic as a way to mislead people, create groupthink like situations, and generally engage in unfortunate practices. These people, have to some extent, weakened the appeal of the seminar, because they conjure up images of medical man road shows. However, for the ethical among us, the seminar offers genuine benefit to both company and customer, and should therefore be considered in your company's tactical mix.

Some of the components of planning and executing a successful business seminar may seem trivial, but in almost every instance of a failed seminar, it is within these fundamentals that the cause of failure can be identified. Tudog focuses on 7 key elements that constitute a successful business seminar. They are:

1. **Topic** – while seemingly apparent, the topic of the seminar goes a long way in determining how successful it will be. In many cases there are a number of topics to choose from because the broader area of interest and expertise has a great many components. The selection of the right components has to do with a key understanding of the needs of the targeted market. The more you are able to ease a burden or reduce a pain, the more meaningful and relevant your seminar. The more it hits the spot and provides information the market needs and wants, the more successful it will be.
2. **Timing** – the timing of your seminar could refer to the relevancy of your seminar, as in being lucky enough to have a seminar scheduled on tax law changes two days after a new tax law is announced. This kind of timing can not always be planned. The other side of the timing issue is focused on the actual time of the conference. For example, Mondays and Fridays are bad days for seminars. People have to get back to work after the weekend on Mondays and finish up the week before the weekend on Fridays. Similarly, all day seminars aside, when planning a half day seminar it is better to begin in the morning rather than noon. People will come straight from home in the morning. Noon seminars often lose attendance to work related emergencies and people getting too wrapped up in what they're doing to leave for the seminar.
3. **Location** – where to hold the seminar is always important because the extent to which people are forced to be inconvenienced to attend will directly influence the number of attendees. Location has two connotations, as in what sort of place to have the seminar (hotel, school, office conference room) and a geographical location. The sort of place is a function of the type of seminar, the anticipated number of attendees, the targeted market, and the fee you are charging. The geographical location should be as close to the center of the targeted market as possible, and as close to most peoples general path of travel (as in along the way most people travel to work).
4. **Awareness** – marketing the seminar is critical to its success. The more people within the targeted market that are aware of the seminar and find it compelling and important, the more people there will be in attendance. Typically awareness for seminars has been raised through direct mail and limited radio spots and to some extent these tactics have proven effective. Others are also promoted through promises of a gift or a free meal, although these are often the seminars with the most ethically questionable behavior.

Another way to promote a seminar and gain credibility is to partner with an industry association, a publication or an institute of higher learning.

5. Fee – charging for the seminar is a critical decision. If you are hoping to sell product at the conclusion of the seminar, it is best not to charge so people will not think they paid to witness a 3 hour commercial. On the other hand, if you want your information to be perceived as having great value (and you are not selling your product at the end of the seminar) then it is a good idea to charge a reasonable (market accepted) fee.

6. Content – the content of the seminar is where all the value lies and the relationship you develop with the attendees will be earned or burned. If you deliver on your promise to educate and enlighten you will find that the attendees will return to future seminars and also seek out your company for other purposes. However, if you fail to deliver on the promises made or make people feel as if they were duped into attending, you will lose any chance of getting them to return to a future seminar. The content needs to be directly correlated to the information you promised to deliver.

7. Materials – it is customary to distribute materials at the seminar, either to allow attendees to follow the course of discussion, or as take-home material to expand further on the topics discussed. The materials need to be professionally prepared so that they properly reflect the quality and expertise your company seeks to communicate. The materials must also be well organized, easy to use, and highly relevant.

Using seminars as a marketing tactic can serve to increase your perceived expertise and offer a chance to demonstrate your knowledge and products to an interested audience. If you over-do the product demonstrations and go too light on the dissemination of relevant information you will cross the line from seminar to live infomercial. The difference between the two is the achievement of your original objectives and the alienation of a portion of your market. Seminars are great when done properly. Make sure you do yours right.