

The making of a memorable corporate event

SARAH DRYSDALE of ASM in Belfast shares five great suggestions for organising the ideal corporate workshop or event.

I've been involved in organising a number of successful business events, but have learnt over time that you need to be methodical in your planning for everything to work. Here are a few of my top tips:

Make sure you have a clear objective

What is the purpose of your event? It clearly needs to be something of relevance to your target audience and have value for your company too.

You also need to know exactly what you're aiming to get out of the workshop. Are you informing existing customers about changes in your market place or is it an opportunity to convert prospects? How much of a sales element about a specific product or service is appropriate?

Whoever your audience is, remember that only 10 or 15% of the people you invite are likely to attend, so you may have to reach out to a much wider group initially.

Get all the key staff involved from the start

Good communication is essential. You'll almost certainly need to draw on the support of colleagues and people with particular expertise, so get them involved from the beginning. Brainstorm everything that will need doing and create an action plan with a clear sense of priorities, responsibilities and deadlines. Getting this kind of buy-in at an early stage will be important.

Focus on timing

You'll need to decide the best time to hold the event. Breakfast meetings often work well, as people can stop off before work and it's not too disruptive to their day. You might feel that something after office hours – perhaps accompanied by a glass of wine – is more appropriate.

Whatever you choose, the timing of the invitations is just as important. I recommend sending out your first emails four weeks before the event and then following up with a couple of weeks to go. If you contact people too early,

they can easily put it to the back of their minds. But equally, it's fatal to leave it too late. Make sure you have a clear deadline for RSVPs.

Keep things on track

Hold regular meetings in the run-up to the event, so that you can monitor progress and take action to boost attendance if necessary. It's also a chance to plan for the practical arrangements on the day, as everything needs to run smoothly if you're to give a good impression of your business.

Be prepared on the day

There will always be potential glitches – that microphone that doesn't work or the last-minute catering hiccup. It's no problem, provided you're on the case and prepared. If you've followed all the 'to-do' instructions on your action plan, the chances are that you'll have contingency plans in place for most things.

Remember that the event needs to be engaging, so discourage speakers from 'Death by PowerPoint' and make the session interactive, with the use of visuals and the opportunity for questions and answers. You may even want to introduce some kind of ice-breaker at the start. Make sure you ask for people's feedback and – most important of all – follow up with a thank you for attending.

Good luck!