

Cadillac Area Festivals & Events – TIDBITS

Written by: Joy Liptak VanDrie, 2017

Special Events & Festival Marketing

Most events are not planned by professionals, so here is a list I recommend for those events being organized by a non-profit with volunteers. We love our volunteers and they are often very eager, so here is a check list to work from that will reap great success for the non-profit, and your volunteers will feel great and gain a few marketing skills along the way.

1. Your event **MUST** at least have a **Facebook page**. Even if it doesn't have a website. This is **FREE**, you can share to all of your friends, your volunteer's friends and grow your 'fan' base pretty quickly.
2. Make sure you have **at least 2 Admins for your page**, this will help you keep the posts fresh - maybe brainstorm topics, or set up specific days of the week each of you will post. Admins are managed in the 'page settings'.
3. Create a **Facebook 'Event' on your FB page**. Go to Events page and create one. The title of the event should have the year in it, because each event in the future will have their own new 'event' as well. You can launch both the Facebook page with a new event at the same time. If you do this, make sure you remind your 'fans' to like both the page and the event. The 'event' also will show up on their digital calendar (most phones have calendars that allow the FB apps to be added to their calendar). These are **AWESOME** to ensure people who are interested are reminded of your event not only by your posts, but when they review their upcoming weekend plans.
4. On Facebook there are types of posts: **Organic posts** (those you fully create) are great with the FB algorithms, while **'Sharing' posts** from your feed will help build your share value with sponsors, etc. Also, while you are **'acting as'** your FB page (use the ^ at top right corner of the post screen), you should like various other FB pages - relevant to your event like media, sponsors, location...etc. This will help fill your 'home' feed when you are having a hard time coming up with something to say. (this will make sense when you are looking at your facebook page.)
5. Event printed materials: **Posters** are still a great way to get the word out, and **Handouts** (small versions of the poster, 1/4 cut of 8.5x11 is typical) are even better since many will pick them up and take them home or pass to friends. Posters should be in color - either colored ink/font, or one color ink on colored paper. I recommend handouts in one color ink on colored paper. The ink and paper should correspond with the brand of the event - earth tones or winter tones.
6. **Digital event listings:** So you've created your FB event on your FB page, right? You'll need to reuse that content to **build other listings...** if you have, copy/ paste that description from the 'About' section into notepad or a word document - this will allow you to copy/paste it into other websites, rather than having to type from scratch. You should also have a digital picture in a smaller resolution format (considered a thumbnail size photo). If you can't find that event photo on your computer, pull up the FB event again, and save the photo to use elsewhere (FB resizes it's photo for optimized performance). **Where should you post your event?** All news outlets have websites - newspapers, TV, Radio - post your event on all local and regional media outlets as early as you can - many news companies use their event lists to help their reporters create news/ announcements. You can always submit an edit if things change - but to get the general description of your event, dates and a photo out on the web early (3-6 months prior) are **KEY**. Also, check with your community Visitors Bureau or Chamber to see if their websites offer free listings as well. **SOME** niche events, like car shows have industry pages that car owners go to, to check out what's coming up, make sure you talk to your perspective participants to see where they would go to get information on an event like yours.
7. **E-mails:** it's still relevant to send notifications via e-mail. If you have a list of people you know less than 100 just use your own e-mail system, if larger than that consider looking into Mail Chimp or Constant Contact - both offer free services up to a certain number of e-mails. Now, if you have an event where people **HAVETO** register or enter to win - **PLEASE** make sure you are collecting their e-mails. It's free to send an e-mail, and if it's relevant information for the recipient they will open it. Some e-mails for niche markets get over 50% open rate - that is unheard of in big marketing campaigns and **HUGE** success for small events! Send Date Announcement, Call for Volunteers, and major updates. No one wants irrelevant information, so if you want them to continue to open the e-mails, make sure it's good information.

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8. **Networking:** check to see if your local service organizations such as Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, etc. would let you speak about your upcoming event. You might even get lunch out of it :) this is also a great avenue to solicit sponsorships and volunteers.
9. **Press Releases:** now, just because you've uploaded your event to all of the media websites, does not mean they have seen them. So, take your event description, and format it with 'For Immediate Release', your name and contact, at the top and help them write about your event. Start the release with a short catchy headline. The first paragraph should be concisely what you want them to know if they don't read any more - so stick to the facts - who, what, where, when, why? The second paragraph should be a quote from you or your Committee Chair, or well known committee member. Then the third paragraph should further describe what they will do/ see when they participate in your event. And the fourth paragraph should explain where the funds are going, or about the non-profit you are raising money. Always include your event Facebook URL (www.facebook.com/eventname) or website address, e-mails, etc. as well as the non-profits digital links too. All media outlets have space set aside for Public Service Announcements (PSAs) but they have plenty of people to allocate that space to, so make it easy for them. Also include links to other digital property such as photos or video, these are especially good for second year events.
10. And finally, once you have done all of that FREE stuff... then look at your **paid Advertising:** There are two ways you can approach traditional media (**Radio, TV, Newspaper**) - purchase outright, or leverage it with sponsorship of the event. Bearing in mind if you leverage it, you need to make sure the media outlet banners, logos, etc. are used well throughout your promotional process to give them value as well. **Facebook** and **Google** advertising is great too - they can help build your digital fan base, and offer very targeted options for reasonable costs.

So, there is your check list - do all of this and many people will know about your event. Combine this with a grass roots guerilla marketing push and you'll have great reach. I hope this helps you and your event - one more thing... if it's a success the first year, keeping the similiar weekend/ date every year REALLY helps your target peeps activity plan. When they have a great time the first year, they will make sure they plan to attend the second year!

Greater Cadillac Area Media snapshot:

Make sure to write down your website address, blog, YouTube channel, facebook address, and any other social media addresses, or have them copy/pasted to another word document so you can quickly copy/paste to the websites below.

Promote your event by placing your event photo, description, etc on these websites for free. The earlier the better, just because you've uploaded to their website does not mean they will cover it, you still need to send a press release, news editors change so you'll need to go to their website and verify who, but they typically have it listed:

- Cadillac Visitors Bureau** – if your event is open to the public, is not political, is not religious in nature, is not primarily a fundraiser, and advanced ticketing is not required then go to www.cadillacmichigan.com upload your event, and if you have photos, e-mail them to visit@cadillacmichigan.com but be sure to include your event name & date. It is recommended to post your event at least 2 months prior to allow the CAVB the ability to push it out to the traveling public. Also consider: www.michigan.org and www.wmta.org
- Traverse Magazine/ MyNorth** – create your account at www.mynorth.com (remember to capture your login)
- Cadillac News** – accepts all events, pick your category once you log on to www.cadillacnews.com go to community link to create an account and upload your event, if you upload it at least 15 days prior to the event date, it may show up listed on the Ticket Page of the newspaper the week of your event.
- TV 9&10** – www.9and10news.com
- TV 7&4** – www.upnorth.com
- The Bull Country** – www.mix96cadillac.com is open to on air interviews
- CDY Radio** – www.1079cdy.com is open to on air interviews
- NW Michigan Radio stations listing** – <http://radio-locator.com>