Digital Event Manager: Driving Numbers

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I.   INTRODUCTION

With the myriad of conferences, meetings, trade shows and social events hosted all over the world, event management has evolved into a multi-billion dollar industry. Given the fact that there are tens of millions of events taking place every year, it is not surprising that it has become one of the fastest growing sectors today. Being ranked in the top 50 careers among all professions and having an annual revenue of $5 billion, this industry has already become marketers' Mecca.

Unsurprisingly, with the event management evolving at such an astounding pace, the challenges for community and event planners are rising as well. Today, the fundamental factor determining the success of an event planned is how effectively event managers are able to coordinate their efforts with each other.

As planners' demands have changed over time, they need to have reliable tools for every task they perform. Directly correlated with the success of an entire business strategy, this approach requires the integration of hardware, software and platform elements that would help them organize workflow more successfully, facilitate administration, enable fast information transfer via multiple channels, improve productivity and enhance communicational needs for both clients and staff.

Initially requiring notable capital investment, the implementation of such sophisticated technologies was considered the privilege of large businesses only in the past. However, the fast growth of advanced tools replacing traditional ways of communication and data transmission has changed the event management landscape once and for all.

It is not surprising that such solutions have cut the cost of events dramatically. Namely, the statistics show that companies today are able to greatly simplify the process with event management solutions by lessening costs by an estimated 20-30% and increasing attendance up to 20%.
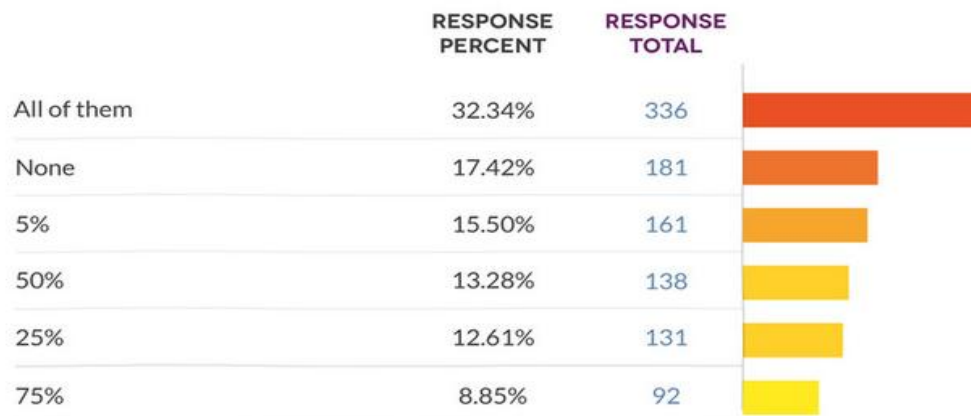
Additionally, apart from money, by implementing the right strategy, planners are able to save their time as well. The studies show that by integrating the latest IT solutions with their regular workflow, community and event managers are given an opportunity to save approximately 10-20 hours per event.

Based on previous case studies and statistics, this white paper aims to address the most critical strategies and challenges regarding the event planning industry. Additionally, it gains an insight into the need for the integrated event management platforms and points out what the main tools, applications and platforms used by event planners are.

II.   THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

With the astonishing figure of 2.206 billion active users, social media has become the backbone of the event planning industry. The number of people using the internet tools to learn about events, buy tickets via online channels and post on social networks is constantly rising, making social media marketing and event management always go hand in hand.

It is obvious that the marketing of events via online channels has a consistently immense importance within the event industry. The researches show that about ¾ of the event organizers interviewed see social media as a tool of vital significance for their event planning strategy. The number of those stating the opposite, however, keeps plummeting. Namely, merely 10% consider social networks totally insignificant for their marketing concept.
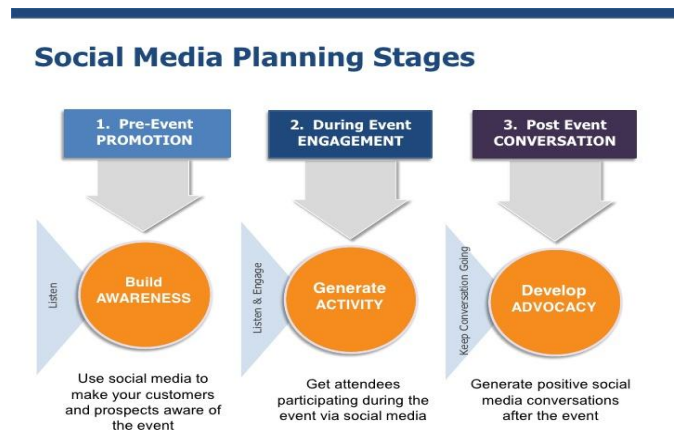
	RESPONSE PERCENT	RESPONSE TOTAL	
All of them	32.34%	336	
None	17.42%	181	
5%	15.50%	161	
50%	13.28%	138	
25%	12.61%	131	
75%	8.85%	92	

Source: eventmanagerblog.com

By integrating effective social media marketing in their event planning strategies, it has never been simpler for marketers to build direct relations with customers, accurately approach target demographic and, most importantly, build solid online community.

Obviously, social media marketing is already having a profound effect on the event planning industry. Additionally, the growth of its advanced technologies will help the planners handle greater bandwidth and increasingly complex software over time.

II.I. Planning Stages: The Importance of Social Media Platforms Before, During and After Events

When it comes to the application of social media marketing in an event promotion, its role is not just vital prior to an event, but also during and after it. The first one improves the communication with target demographic, while sharing relevant content during the event serves as a perfect real-time feedback. On the other hand, using social media after an event helps event planners leverage influence, deliver information on the

Social Media Planning Stages

1. Pre-Event PROMOTION	2. During Event ENGAGEMENT	3. Post Event CONVERSATION
Build AWARENESS	Generate ACTIVITY	Develop ADVOCACY
Use social media to make your customers and prospects aware of the event	Get attendees participating during the event via social media	Generate positive social media conversations after the event

Source: LeadTail

event, as well as promote the next one.

As for the sole effectiveness of online channels, statistics show that it varies a lot. Some of the recent case studies prove that Facebook is considered the most powerful social media platform in the pre-event phase, while Twitter is the most compelling during the event. The most effective post-event online channels are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

II. II. The Effectiveness of Social Media Productivity Tools

Today, social media marketing can be described as the foundation of successful event management strategy. However, sometimes the mere utilization of it is not enough. Namely, in order to make their social media strategy effective, event marketers need to find a way to integrate all those platforms in order to spread the word about a particular event more effectively. Precisely because of this, there are numerous software pieces designed specifically for those purposes.

- **Buffer for Multichannel Sharing.** With tools like Buffer, one does not have to be in front of their computer in order to share relevant content via multiple online channels. Here, the user only needs to connect their online social

network profiles with the platform and it will spread the post throughout the day or week. Such tools help attract more traffic, increase fan engagement and, most importantly, save the time one spends on posting information on online channels.

- **Tagboard for Hashtag Management.** As a hashtag-based search engine, Tagboard helps event planners see mentions and related content across the majority of social platforms. In other words, it collects text, video and image posts in order to provide a user with the complete information about what has been said around a particular hashtag.

- **Quill Engage for Automatic Google Analytics Reports.** Google Analytics offers an impressive figure of invaluable information, but sometimes there is too much data to keep in mind. By using Quill Engage, one can have the summary of all weekly data. The program helps website owners save a lot of time by informing them about their site's growth or decline, where the most of the traffic came from or which post got the most of their traffic.

- **Meshfire for Simplified Collaboration.** This task-based system enables teams to cooperate as they engage in social media marketing and community management. The tool operates by using the Twitter platform in order to manage how a user logs into the program itself or links Twitter handles with missions and team member roles. In other words, Meshfire can be linked to different Twitter accounts that are used in different capacities.

- **HootSuite for Measuring Campaign Results.** HootSuite is one of the most popular social media management tools that is designed to enable managers to build and maintain successful relationship with every customer. The platform offers instant analytics, manages social media and notifies a user about their brand mentions.

- **IFTTT for Automate Recurring Tasks.** The last, but not least, IFTTT is the software that saves a lot of time to every community and event planner, giving them an opportunity to focus on some bigger projects. By connecting an application one uses with practically any other application, the tool is designed to do all the repetitive tasks and synchronize the entire publishing process. This web-based service empowers users to create chains of simple conditional statements, called

"recipes" that are triggered in accordance to changes to other web platforms like Gmail, Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest.

III.   HIRING VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY

Time is a relative concept, but for one to utilize it to the fullest, they need to be able to entrust some minor tasks to a reliable assistant. For this reason in particular, hiring a virtual assistant is rapidly gaining ground in the event management industry. The Alliance for Virtual Business defines virtual assistants as *"independent entrepreneurs providing professional administrative, creative, managerial, technical, business office and/or personal support services."*

Some of the key traits of virtual office assistants are that they work from their own home-offices and are highly skilled at utilizing industry-relevant technology. The majority of them is backed up with years of professional experience and has advanced degrees. They can perform specific assignments, secretarial services, conducting research, presentations, bookkeeping, data processing, desktop publishing, email services, writing services, marketing services and many more.

Not only can virtual assistants help an event manager lessen the number of their daily obligations, but they can also help them grow business. Most importantly, virtual assistants only answer when they are needed and operate solely on their own resources. This form of work organization is also, therefore, highly cost-effective.

Parallel with the increasing need for migration to the digital ecosystem, the demand for hiring in-house assistants has been challenged. Modern technology makes almost any administrative task easy to manage virtually at a distance. Today, all documents made by or used by a virtual assistant can be quickly transferred via email attachment or cloud software in a matter of seconds.

III.l. The Utilization of Project Management and Collaborative Platforms

Once one gathers a team of qualified virtual assistants, they need to find the way to organize them most effectively. With an impressive rise of progressive software solutions, this task is made a lot simpler for event managers. Namely, there are numerous project management and collaborative platforms, including Asana, Basecamp, Trello and Insightly, which could help them synchronize their team and establish consistent workflow transmission.

IV.   SELECTING THE RIGHT CRM PLATFORM

Covering a wide range of software solutions designed to help businesses manage customer data, improve consumer interaction, access business information, manage employee relationships and automate sales, the CRM industry continues to grow at a staggering rate. Namely, the studies show that 87% of businesses resort to cloud-based CRM, at the revenue making up almost 50% of the 2014 projected $24 billion CRM sector. According to some estimations, it is about to increase to a $36.5B worldwide market by 2017.

This system forms the nerve center of an event management industry, enabling external activities, incorporating sales, marketing strategies and client-services in a mutual attempt to provide an exceptional customer experience. Therefore, by synchronizing efforts, CRM enables a stable reflection of a company, building solid brand image and client loyalty. Through the enhanced efficiency achieved with the automation of some of its most vital procedures, CRM increases productivity, enabling event planners to manage greater volume without increasing the number of employees.

Initially, CRM software was used by large enterprises solely. However, today businesses of any size have started shifting to it. Now, it is highly scalable and customizable, enabling companies to gain invaluable insights in a back-end analytical engine, view business opportunities, measure streamline operations and personalize customer service based on the prior interactions with consumers.

- **Nimble** is designed to simplify the CRM, which is primarily focused on placing all customer data in a single place. The tool is effectively integrated with Google, which is an amazing opportunity for all businesses that use Google Apps for their email. The main reason why the number of event and community planners that are resorting to Nimble is rising is the fact that it is most valuable to those with a great deal of customer interaction via social networks.

- **Highrise** follows the famous Goldilocks principle, where the volume of information and features it provides are offered in the optimal amount. The platform is also beneficial for those teams that rely a lot on collaboration since the CRM makes it easy for one to see everyone's interactions with any given contact. Alternatively, Highrise contains the plethora of apps that can be used to extend the basic CRM functionality. The tool is most commonly popular with those businesses that are already using Basecamp.

- **Salesforce** is undeniably one of the world's leading CRM platforms. The software is highly customizable and, more importantly, has the widest range of application marketplace. Because it is cloud-based and affordable, Salesforce is popular among small businesses. However, one of the biggest issues for SMBs

using this software is that the pricing increases dramatically once some additional features are added.

V.   THE INTEGRATION OF TIME TRACKING TOOLS

The importance of time tracking and scheduling in the event management industry simply cannot be emphasized enough. However, in the 21st century something like this is usually entrusted to powerful, web-based software. Although the choice of time tracking solutions highly depends on the nature of a particular business niche, the truth is that the implementation of some of the most innovative practices can improve the overall level of one's operations. In other words, what was before possible only to international conglomerates is now available to anyone, provided that they are armed with the right virtual tool.

One of such tools is *Toggle*, which has justifiably become one of the most prominent time tracking applications. What makes this software user-friendly is its sleek design, long list of integrations, as well as its companion applications for both desktop and mobile. Its desktop version allows users to auto track time, detect idle times of a computer and use reminders. Another popular software is *Everhour*, with features that are mostly team-focused. Apart from its Chrome extension, the software has a handful of integrations like Xero or Freshbooks that help one to successfully invoice both their times and projects. Eventually, the *Hours* application is designed to provide a visual timeline, accompanied by renders and reports that can easily be exported to PDF or CSV.

VI.   WORDPRESS: THE BIG PICTURE

Online presence is an invaluable part of any successful marketing campaign and it heavily rests on one's website. Furthermore, the studies show that WordPress is by far the most popular content management system that is used by over 76.5 million websites. When it comes to the event planning industry in particular, WordPress can be an immensely significant factor for both design and optimization, with an adequate plug-in for every industry specific requirement. The main reason for this trend is the fact that, today, WordPress can be easily integrated with project management tools, CRM software and social networks.

VI.I. Choosing UI and UX Friendly Design

Believe it or not, website design is still one of the most critical factors when it comes to customer conversion. What all event planners need to keep in mind is that their event website sets the tone of the events they provide and acts as a hub for their visitors, where they are supposed to find all important information about an event and later on, purchase tickets. For this reason, the entire event website needs to be presented in a simple, comprehensive and ultimately user-friendly manner.

Everything about the design of a website can have effect on its visitors, from colors to the website layout. This is why minimalistic design is always a safe bet. Another immensely important factor that should never be underestimated is the website speed and loading time. Namely, numerous reports emphasize that 40% of people will abandon a web page if it takes more than three seconds to load. For this reason, WordPress themes that make a website slow, as well as any image, file or animation larger than 400Kb should be definitely excluded from a website.

Even though WordPress theme can already do a lot, adding another digital tool like Visual Composer, Themify Page Builder or ZOOM Builder to the mix might be a sound idea. Namely, having a professional WP page builder provides one with a great variety of pre-modified templates. The most important thing is that all of these templates are quite user friendly and highly efficient. After all, simple yet aesthetically appealing patterns outperform and thus usually meet more positive reviews than some complex designs.

VI.II. The Focus on Event-Specific Content Management

Managing content is the first issue that every event planner needs to address, thereby adequate software can be of an invaluable assistance. Choosing a prominent plug-in such as Custom Post Type Maker and Custom Post Type UI saves a lot of time and effort, making it easier to focus on some more complex aspects of the job.

Since scheduling social and website posts systematically is not always enough, one should also have a clearly defined purpose and monitor KPIs of every post they publish. Apart from some highly efficient editorial and content calendar plug-ins such as Editorial Calendar, Edit Flow and CoSchedule, there are also social analytics applications that help tracking the performance of the content published, such as AddShoppers, Justno and Hubspot software integrations. Not only are now views, followers, social engagement tracked with stunning precision, but all of this is done within only one platform.

VI.III. Management of Attendee Registrations

The issue of event registrations is another crucial detail in the event management industry and any mistake here can have grave consequences. For these reasons precisely, most event managers decide to go with WP based event ticketing sales plug-in such as [Tickera](#) that includes a number of the most renowned payment gateways: PayPal Standard, PayPal PRO, 2Checkout, Stripe and Braintree, and assume direct control over both sales and distributions of invitations.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Finally, seeing how event management industry grows at such a rapid pace, technology walks hand in hand with it, trying to match its needs. Apart from modifying the way community and event planners handle workflow organization, the systematization of hardware, software and platform elements also helps event planning efficacy by improving the transfer of massive information, simplifying administration and strengthening communicational efforts. Considering the aspects given above, it can be concluded that the time when investing in sophisticated IT solutions in the field of event management was optional has long since passed.

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