

Create a Buzz

event marketing strategies



Christian Retreats Network

Your Partner in Effective Off-site Ministry

Product - Price - Promotion - Place
Step by Step Promoting
Creating Events People Want to Attend
Registration Strategy
Templates to Help Your Next Event



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A CRN Resource

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A little about us...

The Christian Retreats Network began almost a decade ago with a full-service Christian conference center that was fanatically committed to offering the best possible Christian off-site event hosting at truly affordable rates. As a 50-year veteran in this ministry, Lake Williamson led the industry with a host of best practices, extraordinary service, and all-inclusive event packages that had strong appeal to event planners. In time, other Christian conference & retreat properties began to join with Lake Williamson to form the network. Each property became a champion of winning brand promises and combined their strengths to market their ministry services. The network concept thrived for all partners and was a great example of the power of collaboration.

The Christian Retreats Network is committed to being your partner in effective off-site ministry. We understand what it takes to execute a successful off-site event and look forward to providing you with the highest level of professional service in a Christ-centered atmosphere.



Expertise When You Need It!

Would you like help planning activities for your next event? Contact our retreat planning team at 877-833-2272. We'd be glad to point you in the right direction, coach your planning team, and explain how to use our downloadable resources.

Our team includes the expertise of pastors, event planners, team building consultants, and all around fun people! Tell us about your event at: info@christianretreatsnetwork.org



So many people think that marketing is all about making something look good. To some extent, they are correct. That's just part though...

Product - Price - Promotion - Place

Product is kind of an ugly word when used in the context of the church. In no way is Jesus or Christianity a product. It is so much bigger and more important. However, you can think of your event as the product.

Product = Event

Your event must meet a need. Meeting the need becomes the event's mission and all the activities (location, date, time, etc) should be centered toward meeting that need.

Take a decision like venue selection. We'd love every planner to hold their event at a property in the Christian Retreats Network, but it's not the right location for every event. If your goal is to reach out to the community, the right venue might be a city park or the high school auditorium. You need to make a decision on what's best for your event.

Price = Value

The statement of, "It costs too much to go" should set off red flags to every event planner. If your event is priced 10-20% over other similar events, yes, it probably does cost too much. However, if your event is priced in line with others or especially if your event is below average, it's probably due to the perception that the event is valuable enough to invest money in attending; and that's a tough pill to swallow.

So what do you do next? You need to collect some real feedback. Too many planners get stuck with people saying it costs too much and then they use that as an excuse when they have low attendance. Find out if people understand everything that is included. Do they find that appealing? Maybe you've included too much. For some people, a long list of keynote speakers is very appealing because they like the variety. But for others, they like hearing one person unpack the topic from start to finish. You need to get into your attendees' heads and find out what they like and need, and put their preferences first.

Promotion = Promotion

These are the items that are at the top of your mind when someone says marketing. The pretty stuff. The following articles focus on how to share information about your event in a way that moves people from potential attendee to registered guest.

Place = Strategy

Strategy is everything! Having a poor strategy will lower attendance and the overall greatness of your event. The following articles will teach strategies to maximize your promotion materials in getting the most guests to attend. Our team has found these to be very successful. As social media has come of age and the amount of media that people consume on a daily basis has increased, the best way for people to remember the information about your event is to share it in small chunks. This strategy allows you to begin promotions before all of the fine details are planned for your event. And largely employs low cost promotional mediums.

Events People Want to Attend



A CRN Resource

Have you ever planned an event and had trouble getting people to commit to attend? Let's be real - as a planner you have to be a realist. You have to be careful. Your name is on the dotted line. You've committed the church's funds to pay for a venue, a speaker and a band... AND you're responsible to be a good steward of all those resources. So you have reached the point of no return - either you cancel the event and save the funds to be used for something else or you take a leap and hope that the commit-o-phobes will show up.

The decision to attend or not attend an event is a value decision. Your potential attendees will look at what you're offering and the price tag associated with it and say YES that is worth it or no I don't think so. If you encounter an issue where you do not have enough attendees, you must weigh your options carefully. Put everything into the context of the issues your organization is facing at that time and then decide. There is not a formula that will help you decide go, no go. You have to pray. You have to seek God. He will encourage you to take the leap or show you a better opportunity for those funds.

It costs too much - isn't always a price issue. Sometimes it is. An event that is \$100 for two nights lodging, transportation, worship sessions, education seminars, meals, and recreation activities -- is NOT expensive. In context of the marketplace and what it costs for a get-away per person, \$100 for an entire weekend away is not expensive; in fact, that's cheap. For someone living on a budget it certainly might be a stretch.

It is a value issue. Let's say you identify an issue where the men in your church aren't very active. So you want to have a fellowship weekend to help them build relationships and encourage one another. It can be a tough pill to swallow, but sometimes people don't want to spend \$100 to attend a fellowship weekend. The gain your potential attendee perceives they will receive from the event doesn't always make them want to open their wallet.

You have to adjust the content and the message you're communicating to match what your potential attendees want. Sometimes you'll find they just don't want to go anywhere right now. The guys might be a lot happier doing a work project in the community. Another example, the 20 something group might be a lot happier waiting a month or two to go on the retreat so they can help plan the event rather than going along with something that was planned for them.

Invest in getting to know your potential attendees' needs and wants for the event. You can never evaluate your event enough. Keep in contact with your potential attendees. As the team adds activities to the schedule of events, always refer back to your event's goals to be sure that each activity contributes to the mission and purpose. It is also a good idea to have a pool of people to help test out ideas.

Test your ideas from the beginning... a small test group can help you double check for conflicts with dates and let you know if the decisions you're making for the event add appeal or take away. The test group, when they are happy with what your team is creating, can be your biggest advocates and assistants when it comes time to promote.

Testing your ideas will help you create an event with meaningful content at the right time, right place, and right price for potential attendees to see it as a valuable experience and commit to attending.

Step by Step Promoting



A CRN Resource



1. **Create a registration form.** This can be done as a paper copy or online. Either way, it will help you stay organized when signing people up to attend. Just don't make it a general signup sheet in the foyer. Making your own form ensures that you get the information you need and guests can know what to expect.
2. **Use a guest list.** After making your form for people to sign up, you will need a list to keep track. We have created a rooming list for each of the CRN properties (found under the property's download page). These lists include contact information, rates, payments and rooming sheets that visually put guests' names into the appropriate rooms, making it easier than ever to keep track of everyone. There is even a 911 list to bring with you to the venue in case of emergencies. But if you'd rather make your own, a spreadsheet is sure to help you stay on track.
3. **Mail and/or email informational flyers, brochures or newsletters.** Make sure to include the sponsoring organization, dates, place, speakers, contact information, and event name. Check out page 7 of this document to learn more about creating your own promotional materials.
4. **Create an event page on social media.** This is a great place for promotion, announcements and reminders. Some of the pros of this form of marketing are that it is quick, saves paper and mailing, is updatable, and possesses a discussion based aspect. BE INTERACTIVE! Add polls, quizzes, contests, photos and videos to bring guests into the mix before they even get to the event.
5. **Personal invitations.** Personal invitations are very effective at this stage. The planning team should make face-to-face invitations to their friends and other church members, phone calls to all potential attendees are really effective.
6. **Set deadlines.** In order to get things organized in a timely manner, deadlines must be met. Those who don't meet the deadline are probably not that serious about going to the event anyway. Your goal should be to have enough registered attendees to cover your financial obligations four to six weeks before your event.
7. **Post-event follow up.** It's time to find out how attendees thought your event went. Get feedback, distribute material that coincides with your event, and share stories with the rest of your church or group.

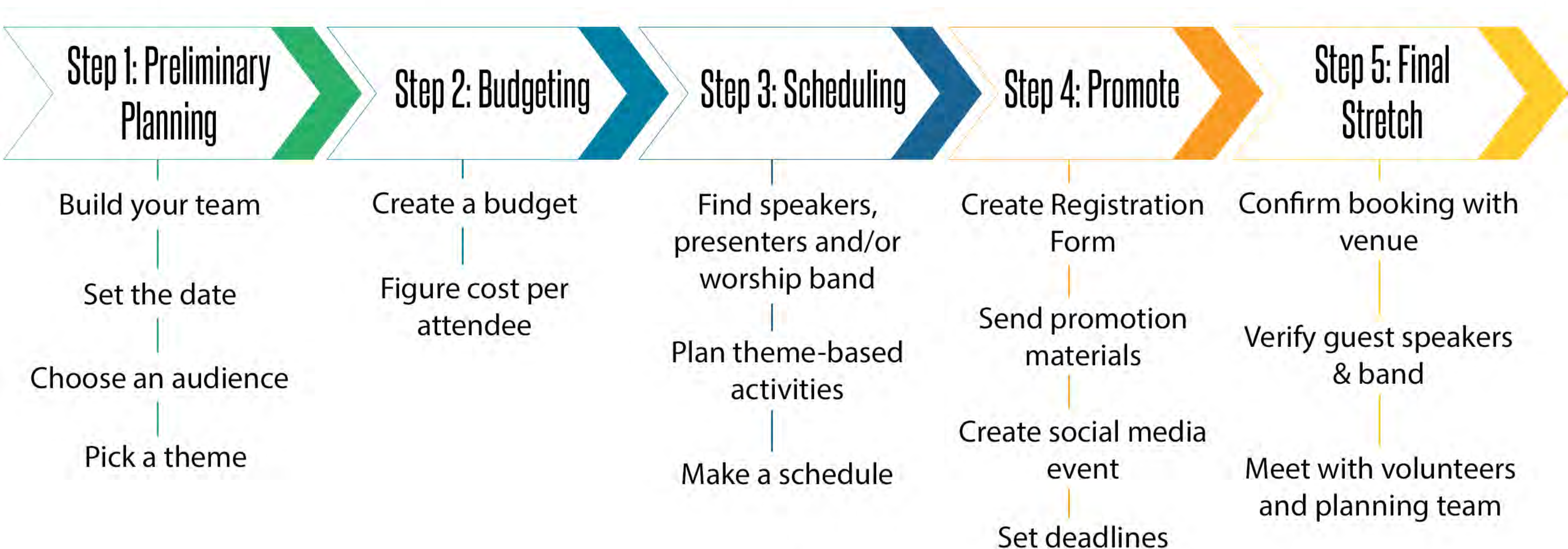
Event Planning Timeline



A CRN Resource

Below is a recommended timeline for multiple event types. Good marketing is only effective when executed over a period of time. An established group that meets often (e.g. youth group, or a small group of 10 families) doesn't need as much time as a new event that doesn't have an established track record in your church. A convention needs more time than a church event because event leadership needs to connect with multiple churches who will then connect with their individual attendees.

Task	Established Group	New Church Event	Convention Event
Begin Planning	6 months prior	9 months prior	12-18 months prior
Focus Testing	Finished 5 months prior	Finished 8 months prior	Finished 11 months prior
Collect Interested List Release Basic Details (save the date)	4 months prior - <i>pass around sign-up sheet for those interested</i>	6-8 months prior - <i>pass around sign-up sheet for those interested</i>	11 months prior - <i>connect with church leaders & get dates on calendars</i>
Prepare Registration & Set Deadlines Continue Event Planning	4 months prior	4 months prior	10-11 months prior
Early Bird Registration	4 months prior	4 months prior	9-11 months prior
Begin Detail Distribution	4 months prior	4 months prior	10-11 months prior
Regular Registration	3 months prior	3 months prior	6 months prior
Start Late Registration	4-6 weeks prior	4-6 weeks prior	4-6 weeks prior
Event Follow up/Event Evaluation	1 week after	1 week after	1 week after





“Who” is probably the most important question when deciding to hold an event. Your promotions towards the “who’s” will largely determine the success of the event.

Collecting a list:

This step is not important for small groups, however it is critical for large events.

For example, a large convention event would possibly appeal to every church youth group in a 250 mile radius of the host property. Collecting a list via your event website or through phone calls to each church will help you narrow the interest list from thousands to a more manageable hundreds.

Another example: your local church is hosting an event for families. Your church has 3-400 in church on Sunday morning. The simple action of passing a clipboard through the pews during announcements will allow families who want more information about the event to sign up and you’ll know who to target with your promotions.

Focus testing:

No matter the size or length of your event, focus testing is critical.

It is simple: you’re planning a fall back-to-school retreat for the youth. Pick out three possible weekends, and ask four parents after church which weekend would work best for their family. You find out two weekends have major conflicts with school activities and now you know the best weekend for the event.

Who should go?

Half of the decision is to go, the other half is who will go. The key here is to know your group. Do you do lots of activities that separate ages/genders or is everything open to everyone? If the group is always whole, a little separation could go a long way. If you already have groups within the church, maybe just one of them wants to go.

When deciding to go on a retreat, also part of it is what you want to accomplish. This could be a message or theme you want to embed in members. If you have the topic before picking the group, then figure out which one could benefit most from it. For example, talking about marriage to the entire group is wasted on the many who are widowed or not looking at marriage for many years. You could target this topic at a couples retreat. The main idea here is that everyone is at their own stage in life and at their own path in their walk with Christ.

Inviting everyone on a retreat has many benefits, too. While there are loads of topics that are more specific to certain people, there are still plenty of things that the Bible teaches for everyone. These retreats also help those in the congregation really get to know others they may not connect with much on Sunday mornings. The tricky part in planning this kind of retreat is the activities. Not everyone is into the same thing. Scheduling only highly active recreation can mean nothing to do for older or less active people. Make sure there are choices for all. However, once everyone comes together to worship, it can be a truly amazing experience.

Example Promotion Plan



A CRN Resource

The following is an example promotion plan for a family event planned by First Church, Anytown USA.

Begin planning:

Anytown church identified a need to connect new families with the church. New people began to attend because of their children's involvement in the after school program and the church wants to connect those families with the members who have been around for a while. About nine months out they decide to go on a retreat.

Focus test basics:

John and Jane Doe are leading the planning team along with three other couples. Each couple asks two other families for three summer weekends that would work best. They also bounce the idea of the retreat past these couples and find out what activities would be meaningful to them. The result is June 20-22 as the best date and the big desire is for each age group in the family to connect with God and their peers.

Release basics:

Using the theme the team put together, they branded a postcard and a social media post to release their first announcement about the event. This 'save the date' was in November, 7-8 months prior to the event.

Create media:

During the busy Christmas holiday the planning team went to secure details such as venue, keynote speakers, and worship leaders for each age group. Using the templates on the ChristianRetreatsNetwork.org site, they created a flyer and email template they will use to announce early registration opening in January and emails to drip out the details. They saved their flyers and emails as images and will post them on social media as well.

Begin detail drip:

When school was back in session in January, First Church sent each student home from the after school program with a flyer about the event with a registration form printed on the back side. Then once a month they sent an email and posted to social media:

January: event basics one more time

February: the keynote speaker & registration instructions - the early deadline ends February 9

March: activities (they wait to send this until the first spring-like day to get people really excited about summer) & registration instructions & deadlines

April: the worship band & registration instructions - reminding the late fee kicks in May 1st

May: anyone who hasn't registered yet, receives one more reminder because the church is Families who are already registered receives an email encouraging them to invite others

June: All registered families received directions to the property, packing tips, and pre-event prayer points and scriptures to study as a family.

Event follow up:

3 weeks after the event the pastor continued to teach on topics that were introduced at the conference. The whole church received an email with next year's dates and a report of this year's activities and ministry results.

Promotion Materials

Email

Emails are a handy promotion tool, because they are easy to distribute to a large audience and have a quick response rate. We always recommend following up with a phone call or conversation to make sure the person received their email. A good place to start would be the church's email list.

You'll need a few things assembled to make your e-mail effective.

Event Basics: Who, What, When, Where, & How Much
Registration Form: attached or in a link

You can create the e-mail in a desktop (Outlook/Apple Mail), web-based (G-mail, Yahoo!), or email marketing program (MailChimp.com, Constant Contact).

Using a header image, like the one below, is a great way to grab attention in a person's inbox, and can also be used in social media posts.



Postcard

Postcards are great for a "SAVE THE DATE", "YOU'RE INVITED", or "DUE DATE REMINDER". A good strategy is to mail a postcard to everyone who previously came to the event. Split up that list among a few volunteers and call each person to let them know you'd love for them to participate in the event again and that a postcard with information for the next event is on the way.



<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Event Name• Short Description• Dates• Cost• Register By• How to Register	
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Auditorium at Lake Williamson

Flyer

Flyers are a great way to promote an upcoming event, because they are easy to hang up, pass out, or put in a newsletter. Make sure to include the important information, specifically dates and how to register. If your flyer refers to a website, make sure it is up-to-date.



- Event Name
- Dates
- Featuring
- At Lake Williamson
- \$Cost
- Register by...
- Register at...



You can download customizable promotion templates at christianretreatsnetwork.org/downloads/promotion-tools

Registration Strategy



A CRN Resource

When an event is short on attendees, the planner is much less likely to be focused on providing effective ministry because they are stuck on "HOW DO WE PAY FOR ALL OF THIS?!" Your event will turn out mediocre at best if you're not focused on providing quality ministry. In turn, that can domino into people being unwilling to return for a future event.

Give yourself plenty of time.

Set a date where you expect to have registered at least half of your expected attendance.

Plan early. Plan conservatively.

Book conservatively. If you think you can get 100, guarantee space for 60 or 70 people. By using multiple registration deadlines, you can monitor your progress to see if you need to upgrade the guarantee later.

Collect names.

If you're not ready to start registration when you begin to promote your event, at least start collecting a list of people who are interested. Pass a clipboard during announcements at church to get a list of who is interested in coming.

Many people feel the pinch of a tight budget and schedule. It is very important to keep reminding your potential attendees of all the benefits of attending throughout all of the registration periods. A list allows you to focus your efforts on an interested audience.

Offer incentives to register EARLY.

The name of the game is volume. The more people attending, the more people you have to defray the larger fixed costs, such as a keynote speaker, band, etc.

Reward attendees for early registration.

EARLY EARLY bird registration period that is discounted significantly off the "regular" rate. Run this period until about eight months before the beginning of your event.

Early Bird registration isn't as discounted. Run that six months before the event. Try to be at least halfway to your goal attendance by the end of this period.

Regular registration offers no discounts and should continue through about six weeks before your event. Generate enough people to break even and meet the minimum required attendance during this period.

Meet your financial obligations at least 4-6 weeks before your event.

By the end of regular registration, seek to generate enough income from registrations to meet all your financial obligations for your event. In the last few weeks leading up to the event, pull in the stragglers and boost your attendance. A late fee encourages people to be registered early, but you can choose to waive it.

Payment Plans

Planners tend to cringe at the added difficulty and logistics of a payment plan for their attendees. Sometimes it is the best option for people on a budget. A family really wants to send their two or three (+) students to your church's summer camp, but writing one check for all of their students is tough for their family finances.

Benefits of payment plans:

- Perceived as easier option for the attendee
- Gain commitments from attendees earlier
- Better predict registration

Coordinate payment plans:

- Use an event planning software, such as RegFox or Eventsbot. These systems allow users to sign up and make payments, so planners have less work.
- Excel spreadsheets are an organized way to keep track of attendees. To make your own payment plan sheet, list attendees and their information in columns. Then make a column with their total price to be paid. Use the next few columns to track each payment and a final column for the balance. While in the "balance left" cell, take the cell with the total and subtract the cells that will include the payments. Each time a new payment is put in, the "balance left" will update. *Ex. If C5 is the total price and the payments are in D5 through F5, then the formula in G5 would be "=C5-D5-E5-F5"*

Retreat Themes



A CRN Resource

A theme is a big deal when planning an event. Actually everything that is tied to your event revolves around your theme, but don't let the word theme scare or deceive you. Your event doesn't need to be planned like a party; Hawaiian birthday, 50's prom, or undersea banquet. It's more tied to the 'why are you having this event in the first place?' idea. So you need to defeat bullying in a youth group or take the weekend to give the ladies a reprieve both physically and spiritually... these can be your theme! That's not to say you can't develop a themed tagline or image that you use to promote and decorate your event with. Remember it is always a good idea to have a group of people when you brainstorm. Below are some tips on how to come up with a theme for your event.

Who's your audience?

Come up with a one line description of who the retreat is for. Many themes are universal. An example would be a theme of "God's Love". If your target audience is mothers, you may want to have a theme of "Fitting it all together" that would focus on how to fit devotion into their busy schedules.

Outline your retreat

Now you can start to outline your retreat. You don't have to have every last detail planned. Take your one word or one line and come up with ideas for how you want your attendees to spend their free time.

Find the tag line

Most retreats have some sort of promotional materials. You will want to have a phrase or statement that will catch your attendees' attention. Include this phrase on all your printed materials and on the web and social media outlets. An example would be *Event Name: Saturday in the Park, Theme: Meeting New People*



Not feeling creative? Just do a quick Google search...



Make it your 'brand'

Base everything around it from speaker's messages, games and competitions, apparel. Even develop a cool logo or image as well as some of the terms/lingo around the theme to use throughout the event.

Stay away from fads

Unless you know 100% of the attendees like Hunger Games, then I would stay away from it. Using a fad theme could actually turn off potential attendees that despise that specific fad or feel it is childish.

Back your theme with scripture

It doesn't have to be an entire chapter or psalm, just something simple and meaningful to the purpose of your event. If done right, the theme should stick with the guests well after the retreat, so wouldn't it be cool to have a theme and scripture stuck in their heads? Especially if you have several non-church guests attending.

Don't be afraid to steal

No, God won't care about this one, I promise. If you're stuck and can't think of a good idea then hop on Google. Use blogs, camp/ministry sites, or other events to get ideas. They've done the creative thinking for you.

10 Social Media Mistakes



A CRN Resource

1. Not Having Someone Dedicated to Social Media

This is the origin of all the following mistakes. Having someone on your team that 'gets it' will avoid social media blunders and upset attendees.

How to Fix it: The key is to find someone who gets social media and enjoys it. Do yourself a favor and find a Millennial. A Millennial is someone who is right now between 18 and 34. This person belongs to a generation that has grown up with digital media for most of their life, so they will find it second nature to manage your social media content.

2. Begging

Each post should start with the question 'what value am I adding to the end user?'. Begging does not usually add any value whatsoever. It's like a child begging for the latest toy. They may eventually get the toy, but it won't be for the right reasons.

How to Fix It: If you're going to ask, make sure there's something in it for your audience. (Check in at our event for 10% off)

3. Not Addressing Mentions

Leaving direct mentions unanswered is a big problem. It can escalate to negativity pretty quickly. Imagine someone comes to your event information desk, they ask a question and you ignore them altogether. That would just never happen, right? Events are time sensitive and not addressing mentions quickly will almost inevitably have a negative impact.

How to Fix it: Just respond! (See Mistake #1)

4. Denial (Only Addressing Positive Comments)

Research shows that negative comments actually come from those who care the most about your event. So when you don't respond to negative comments, you're actually alienating some of your biggest supporters who actually cared enough to let you know there was a problem. Plus, like wildfire, if not extinguished early, negative comments will spread quickly.

How To Fix It: Just respond...quickly! (See Mistake #1) Also, having FAQs available to attendees with answers to common problems will help to avoid issues in the first place.

5. Asking for Actions on Different Social Networks

This refers to asking users on Instagram to share on Twitter, Facebook fans to share on Instagram, etc. You need to respect each social network's rules, etiquette and users.

How to Fix It: The objective of every social media program is to provide value to prospective and existing attendees. 100 happy attendees that come back to your event are worth much more than 1 million likes from disengaged 'friends'. Concentrate on how you can provide value on social media and make sure your measurement of success goes beyond likes.



10 Social Media Mistakes (cont)



A CRN Resource

6. Bulk Invites

Are you selecting all your contacts and sending invites on Facebook or Google+? Have you ever gotten one of these bulk invites? Exactly. Keep in mind that along with being rather annoying, Google directly adds events to someone's calendar and opting out is very painful.

How To Fix It: Convene a list of those who you've identified to be legitimately interested and invite only them, but also leave the event open to the public. As the event naturally spreads through mentions and comments, others can opt-in, resulting in a more authentic and engaged group of attendees. Also, social media should be just one tool in the box of what you use to promote your event. You wouldn't build a house with just a hammer.

7. The Auto Direct Message

This is an automated message you receive immediately after you follow someone on Twitter or Facebook. Auto direct messages usually are filled with useless information, are impersonal and show you are not actually interested in who followed you.

How To Fix It: (See Mistake #1) Try to learn more about who just followed you. Give it a week to read what they are up to and then engage if you have a valid reason to and by means of public mentions. A Re-tweet or a Like speaks a thousand words. Remember, social media is all about relationships, which take time and effort to cultivate.

8. Common Dashboards for Personal and Professional Accounts

Some of the worst disasters originated from this oversight. This has nothing to do with skill, just organization. The last thing you want is someone's personal post or tweet going out under your organization or event's profile.

How To Fix It: You gotta keep 'em separated. Make sure those who have administrative access do not sync their personal accounts with your organization or event's social media dashboard.

9. #WrongPlatform

Social media dashboards are great tools to help manage your posts across all social networks at once. The danger is in becoming lazy and not checking your posts for accuracy. Usernames are typically not the same across all platforms. So using the @usernames from LinkedIn on your Facebook post ends up making no sense. The same applies to #hashtags. Hashtags are used much differently on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, while LinkedIn doesn't even recognize them.

How To Fix It: Carefully pick the social networks you engage in and take the time to learn the language they use. Then make sure to use dashboards only if the language is the same.

10. Radio Silence

One of the simplest mistakes to make with events is abandoning the accounts for the year and resuming them a couple of months before the event. While the frequency of your posts may fall off slightly, keeping your attendees engaged in between events is essential to building your community of supporters a.k.a. event attendees. Don't be the friend who shows up only when they need money.

How to Fix It: Create a year-long content strategy. Setting up a calendar of posts at least a month in advance relieves the stress of curating content at the last minute and allows your social media coordinator to focus on responding to comments, questions and new followers.

There's an App for That



A CRN Resource

Today, everyone wants to be an “event planner”. What could be more fun than planning events right? If you're an actual event planner, you know there's so much more to event planning than a great theme and a dynamic speaker. Budgets, schedules, registration, speakers, marketing, floor plans, presentations, social media...the list goes on and on. The good news is, in today's market, no matter what your challenge, “There's an app for that!” Here's a few:



1. Super Planner

Super Planner provides a variety of planning tools, including calculators for venue capacity, staffing, catering, staging, projection and dance floor, as well as useful tips in several areas. The design is very clean and easy to use and well worth the \$9.99 price tag if it means keeping your entire event on budget. Super Planner is available in both Apple and Android formats.



2. Eventbrite

So you've created an amazing event, but now you need to get people to register. Event Registration is one area of your event that can be extremely time consuming and frustrating, especially if you only see your potential registrants once a week. This doesn't have to be the case! Let Eventbrite handle the registration process for you. Not only will you reduce your stress level, but you have the opportunity to reach more people by allowing your registrants to share their registration on social media. The wider the net you cast, the more successful your event will be.



3. Prezi

Rethink presentations. There's no possible way to explain what Prezi can do for your presentations, you just have to see it. Even the Prezi website uses a video to show you how their free tool can revolutionize how you communicate with your participants.



4. Storify

Leverage social media during your event. Storify lets you use what your participants are saying on social networks to build a live feed or “story” for your event. Share your story online and run the livefeed during your event to encourage participation.



5. Google+ Hangout

Wish you could have a whole panel of speakers to add depth and insight to your event, but lack the budget to afford their time, travel, lodging and meals? Why not try a free Google+ Hangout?! Not only can you have up to 10 different locations participate on the hangout, you can also livestream your hangout and open it up for comments!

Video Content



A CRN Resource

After months of preparation, your event has drawn to a close. Turnout was high, the speakers captivating, and – most importantly – the attendees left satisfied. Great! Time for a vacation. Uh, not so fast. Right now is the time to build off the momentum from this event to get people thinking about the next one.

Video is one of, if not the most effective way to reach your audience on social media. Especially now that Facebook has adopted a practice similar to Vine where videos automatically play, catching people's attention with a well-edited video could very well be the key to the growth of your event.

When it comes time to start marketing your video content, there are three groups of people you need to target.

1. Attendees – A satisfied guest is your best marketer. Send a direct message or email to all attendees thanking them for their participation and include links to share the video with them. Also, thank your supporters in a social media post that include the video. This way, if they haven't already shared the video, it will show up on their wall giving them the opportunity to "like" it, thus sharing it on their friends' newsfeed.

2. No-shows – Reach out to those who signed up but didn't make it. Give them a look at what they missed. FOMO (fear of missing out) is real and you want them to think twice before missing out again.

3. Everyone else – Who do you know that might benefit from your content? Be discerning – the last thing you want to do is spam people who won't find it relevant. Quality always wins over quantity.

We have found that speakers are great advocates of your event and its content (as they are in it) so why not ask them to tweet and share their talks with their network and community as well? The potential for viewers is endless.

Snap Story



Looking for a different type of video? Try a Snap Story, a compilation of Snapchat videos and pictures that are categorized by theme. All participants are given the themes. Then they take creative snaps that match each one (kind of like a digital scavenger hunt). All snaps are sent to one person who sorts them by theme. The final product is one video composed of many small clips.

Now that we know what a Snap Story is, let's talk about how to make one.

- First things first, you must decide what themes you want to use and let all the participants know.
- Decide to whom all the snaps will be sent. In order to put them all together, they must be on one device.
- Tell participants to whom/how to send their snaps. Note: Snaps must be saved to the device before being sent, because sending them through Snapchat makes them disappear. Therefore, they must be sent via text or email. (Snaps can be saved by pressing the down arrow button in the bottom left corner.)
- Once the snaps are in, you will need a video editing program. My suggestion would be to use an app on a smart phone. There are multiple free apps available. The one I used is Cyber Link. Clips can be added, then dragged to the appropriate order by simply using a finger. This can also be done using computer programs. (The best thing about all of the footage coming from the same app is that there should be no need for editing, which means you don't have to be a computer whiz. The clips just have to be put in order.)
- Add theme titles to separate each group. That way, viewers know how it all ties together. Theme titles can be made in the app, using another Snapchat picture, or in Photoshop.
- Save and share the video.

This is a great way to get guests involved in creating the video without too much work.

Event Evaluation



A CRN Resource

Your event was a success! Now what? Your attendees will be hungry for what is next. Why not let them know what events are coming up with your organization? A special event can be a spring board for regular activities in your church, as well as the next special event. In order to plan an event that exceeds expectations again next year, it is important to evaluate how your attendees felt about this event.

Know how your audience felt about the event.

Asking about their favorite meal and favorite activity is helpful, but feelings will give you a much clearer picture of the overall event. For example, "Did you feel the activities were boring (1) or fun (10)?" "Were the activities childish (1) just right for the age range (5) or too adult (10)?" You could drill into some deeper topics: "Did you feel the guest speaker brushed the surface on matters of faith (1) or challenged your faith (10)?" "Did you feel the band was entertainment (1) or worship leaders (10)?"

Nothing beats an interview.

The results might be hard to statistically tabulate, but a few specific questions during a candid conversation will reveal a lot of areas for improvement. For example, during recreation time, as you chat with one of the other counselors, ask him how his students are responding to the small group questions.

Ask enough people.

You need critical mass to draw some statistics. You'll have some people who loved it and say everything was GREAT, and other people who hated it. Knowing where the majority lies will help you focus your efforts appropriately.

What if people don't like the event?

It's never easy to take criticism, but you need that it to optimize future events.

Find out if you have met the need.

Before planning next year's events and activities, the church needs to assess if the same need still exists or whether it's changed. Doing the same thing over and over because that's the way we've always done it is crazy. Do the same thing over again because it works, and because it's making your church a strong Christian community, not because you're set in your ways.

Feed the Feedback

Groups that have a successful event tend to plan more in the future. So how do you know you had a successful event? Is it because everyone showed up? Is it because the weather was perfect for your outdoor recreation? Is it because no one got hurt? The real answer is because the attendees had a beneficial experience. The only way to know that is by asking them.

Surveys sent immediately after an event, while it's still fresh in guests' minds, can greatly help planners get started on their next event. Participants may have preferred one activity over another or may have suggestions for a different activity to do instead. Whether good or bad, planning becomes a lot easier when the planner knows what members want. A great thing about this kind of feedback is that it allows everyone to be heard, which can otherwise be a problem in large groups.



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The Christian Retreats Network helps churches plan, promote, and host off-site ministry events at our seven retreat locations in Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, Michigan, West Virginia, and Virginia.

We are professional planners, helping your church every step of the way. Our planning team will help you focus on mission critical aspects of your off-site ministry, like worship, workshops, and small groups. Our Conference and Guest Service teams will help you plan logistics and coordinate hospitality so you can minister to attendees.