

Reimagining Events

Event Merchandising

SUMMARY

Merchandising can be a great way for an event to both generate income and raise brand awareness. It can also present challenges for those unused to the practicalities involved.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

There are a few key reasons why you should undertake event merchandising:

- #1 Brand Building - event merchandise extends your event's brand value
- #2 Targeted marketing – you are selling direct to your target market
- #3 Dynamic brand promotion – it promotes your brand and event 'out and about'
- #4 Gaining loyal customers – you build loyalty amongst your audience
- #5 Building a community - merchandise is a valuable way to engage more with your audience
- #6 Uniform for volunteers – your onsite team can wear the merchandise (if it's clothing)
- #7 Income source – Merchandise can also be a significant source of extra revenue.

CHECKLIST

1. Does your event meet the criteria to be able to sustain merchandising sales?

- Does it bring together a significant number of participants?
- Or does it have potential to attract a significant number of spectators?
- Is it of sufficient duration to allow for sales of merchandising during the event?
- Can it sustain an online presence?
- Is it unique in some way and worth commemorating?

2. Do you understand your event brand identity?

- Make sure to undertake a brand/ID brainstorm.
- Decide what your event brand values are.
- Think about how to align the merchandising with the brand values of the event?

3. Do you have an event merchandising plan?

This should include:

- How to select and source product
- Negotiating with suppliers
- Receiving and ensuring security of stock, including where it will be stored
- Recruiting and training a sales team
- Setting up a sales stand
- Online sales and fulfilment
- Payment of suppliers
- Cash management and producing financial reports.

4. Have you researched suppliers? It can be challenging to find the right supplier.

- Research what products you might sell.
- Contact potential suppliers.
- Ask for samples.
- Choose a supplier to trial run an order.
- Evaluate a suppliers and ensure your contract terms are clear.
- Keep other supplier options open e.g. wholesale lots on eBay or major B2B marketplaces!
- Consider lead times – they can be slow.

5. How will you sell your merchandise – in person or online?

- Are you going to sell your merchandise or offer some items for free?
- You need to consider all the following when setting pricing: shipping, card payment costs, returns.
- If planning on selling on-site, think about both cash and card sales, including mobile and terminal set-up.
- If selling on-line, consider things like customer service, post-sales and returns. People are used to high levels of customer service in online sales, and compare you to Amazon or a big retailer.
- Look at add-ons in your online ticket selling platforms and in your social media. These can also be good channels for merchandise sales

6. What else do you need to consider with online sales?

- People are used to nice looking websites – consider the design of your site/online shop.
- Make sure you have nice imagery of the products (use a professional photographer) to sell and as much detail as possible re sizing etc.
- Make sure to integrate your online sales site with your social media, SEO and any PPC advertising you are doing.
- Make your returns policy clear.

7. Use social media to your advantage

- Are there any people with a large social media following who are fans of your event to whom you could send a gift of merchandising?
- Look at using Facebook and Instagram ads as a sales tool.
- Social contests are a great way to increase engagement, reach, followers and leads – you could run a competition to win a piece of merchandise, as a way of promoting merchandise sales.

8. Integrate your merchandising into your event promotion and PR.

- Merchandising is a great way to spread your brand message – make sure to integrate it into your PR plan!
- Send the media on your PR list an item of merchandising.
- Ensure any ambassadors and influencers that your event works with has your merchandise.
- If you have event sponsors you should work with them to integrate their sponsorship objectives into the merchandising plan (e.g. will their name be on a t-shirt? Will they pay for x amount of merchandise? etc)

9. Beware of the challenges.

There can be pitfalls as well with merchandising, such as:

- Purchasing items that do not sell.
- Ensuring you have enough cashflow to fund the purchase before sales.
- Lead-times and ensuring you order your merchandise in time.
- Storage can be a problem – where will you store the merchandise?

10. Look for opportunities.

- What does the modern customer expect with regards to environmental considerations etc – how about eco and sustainable products?
- Why not produce kids' items, even if your event isn't for children, as parents are always looking for little gifts to take home?

USEFUL LINKS

<https://www.eventbrite.ie/blog/event-marketing-strategy-timeline-template-tactics/>

<https://www.eventbrite.ie/blog/event-merchandise-teespring-ds00/>

<https://www.shopify.com/retail/topics/selling-online-offline>

Sign up to Tourism NI industry news and events at <https://tourismni.com>

Keep abreast of Tourism NI Insights and Intelligence at <https://www.tourismni.com/industry-insights>

Check out TNI support resources including links to events-specific webinars at:

<https://www.tourismni.com/build-your-business/events-webinars>

Events Unit contact email: EventsUnit@tourismni.com